



The Ambassadors Series: Former Israeli Ambassador Dore Gold Discusses the Evolving U.S.- Israel Relationship

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 1201 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W., Suite 400
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 November 27, 2018

Please note: This transcript is based off a recording and mistranslations may appear in text. The names of participants in the Audience Q&A have been removed. A video of the event is available: <https://www.hudson.org/events/1633-the-ambassadors-series-former-israeli-ambassador-discusses-the-evolving-u-s-israel-relationship112018>

Michael Doran: Good morning. I'm Michael Doran, a senior fellow here at Hudson. And it's my honor to welcome you to the Stern Policy Center and to the Hudson Institute for a discussion on the current state of U.S.-Israeli relations with Ambassador Dore Gold. Ambassador Gold has had a very distinguished career. He's currently the president of the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, which he has led - which he's led since 2000, except for, however, for a stint as the director general of the Israeli Foreign Ministry. That's a job he took at the personal request of Prime Minister Netanyahu. He has served President - Prime Minister Netanyahu and the Israeli state in a variety of roles over the years - too many to mention. But of course, I can't not mention the fact that he was the U.S. - the Israeli ambassador to the United Nations from 1997 to 1999. He's a prolific author of many books and articles - books that include "The Rise of Nuclear Iran: How Tehran Defies the West," which came out in 2009. His articles appear in prestigious publications across the globe, including, of course, in The New York Times, The Washington Post and The Wall Street Journal.

This conversation will be moderated by Hudson's own Ravenel B. Curry III Distinguished Fellow in Strategy and Statesmanship, Walter Russell Mead. Walter is, of course, the unofficial dean of foreign policy analysts here at Hudson. He is also the Global View columnist at The Wall Street Journal. And from that perch, I think he's now the most widely read commentator on international relations in the country. He's certainly, in my view, the wisest. He's also the James Clarke Chace Professor of Foreign Affairs and Humanities at Bard College in New York. He, too, has authored numerous books and articles on foreign policy, and I must note here my favorite of those books is "Special Providence: American Foreign Policy and How It Changed The World." If you haven't read that, it's an absolute must. His next book is going to be entitled "The Arc of A Covenant: The United States, Israel And The Fate Of The Jewish People." As you can see from their bios, it's hard to imagine two people that you would want to hear from more on the subject of U.S.-Israeli relations. Without further ado, please join me in welcoming Walter Russell Mead and Ambassador Dore Gold.

(APPLAUSE)

Walter Russell Mead: Thanks, Mike, great introduction. And I just like to remind folks that this conversation is part of our Ambassadors Series, where current and, in particularly distinguished cases, former ambassadors talk to us here at Hudson and share their insights and views on a wide variety of issues. We've had, this fall, ambassadors of Britain - yesterday, actually - Germany, France. We hope to continue and expand with more. And this represents part of Hudson's core commitment to alliances as a major component of American foreign policy, of American leadership and American security. That is not always the most popular position in Washington, but it - but a concern for and serious attention about American alliances - it's kind of in Hudson's DNA. So Ambassador Gold, what would you like to be called - Mr. Ambassador, Mr. President, I guess, at the Jerusalem Center?

Dore Gold: Dore will do.

Walter Russell Mead: Dore. OK. Well, I think this is probably one of the most interesting moments in modern Middle Eastern history and in Israeli diplomacy. I've rarely seen so many things - so many consequential things changing so quickly. And you have a ringside seat. It looks to me, as an outsider, that we're seeing sort of almost the collapse of some of the traditional centers of Arab power. And we're seeing the rise in the Middle East of non-Arab powers - Iran, Turkey, Israel - all of whom, I think, in many ways, have become stronger in recent years. But Turkey and Iran pose - are of concern not only to Israel, but also to the Arab world. Can you share some thoughts on that?

Dore Gold: Well, you don't need a Ph.D. in history to recall that much of the Arab world - the Levant was, at one time, part of the Ottoman Empire. And Turkish diplomats, particularly the former foreign minister, used to always move around in areas that were previously Ottoman and remind audiences that that was the case. So it certainly could make some people nervous among my neighbors. Beyond that, certainly, Iran's involvement in the region has been something which scares the hell out of Israel's neighbors. I mean, there's stuff that's known, that's obvious, such as their involvement in Iraq, their involvement in Syria and Lebanon. You know, the Lebanese involvement goes back to 1982, '83, when they parked a unit of the Revolutionary Guards in the Beqaa Valley. And then, since that time, they've spread all over.

I - it was called to my attention that in - basically from Moroccan sources, that the Iranians decided this year to begin to funnel assistance and training to the Polisario in the Western Sahara. And that's a whole new field. I mean, it's a

little far away from Tehran, but they decided to do that. And as a consequence, Morocco cut diplomatic relations with Iran. That's a development of 2018. And what its - the reason I tell that story is because it shows Iran is not only in Bahrain, it's not only in Lebanon and Syria, as I said, it's not only in Yemen, it's not only firing missiles through various organizations that it supports at Saudi Arabia's capital and in northern Israel in the past, it's sticking itself into the Maghreb. So Iran is a very troubling country. And it's, again, a non-Arab player that is deeply upsetting the Arab world. Let me just close with the Arab world doesn't have to be worried about Israel because Israel's disengaging from some areas, but it's not about to, you know, send the IDF in. And the way we handled Syria, I think, showed that - that we didn't want to get engaged in that war. We were willing to provide humanitarian help. We have a field hospital in the Golan Heights, and later hospitalizing wounded Sunnis in Haifa and in Safed. But we didn't want to get pulled into a war that wasn't ours.

Walter Russell Mead: You know, I look at relations between Israel and some Arab countries, and particularly in the Gulf, and I'm a little shocked because I've been hearing from years - I'm a faithful reader of the American media, as I hope everyone here is. And I've been hearing for years that Bibi Netanyahu's confrontational policies and Israel's hard-line policies were going to mean that, you know, there could be no cooperation between Israel and the Arab countries. So I read that Prime Minister Netanyahu has been received in Oman - so many stories. What's going on? Why this unprecedented thaw, not in just relations with one or two countries, as we've seen in the past, but it's been kind of across the board? There's a new spirit.

Dore Gold: Well, if you listen to the so-longs in Europe, I imagine in some places here, you could get the impression that the hard-line could - has two left feet and will not be able to advance Israel's diplomatic interests. Of course, that isn't true because these countries that we're working with are countries that believe first and foremost in realpolitik and protecting their security. And that's a language which we speak. Again, we don't want to take advantage of it for, you know, narrow Israeli interests. We want to see a stabilized Middle East. And the people we talk to have a similar interest.

Walter Russell Mead: Well, this is - I mean, you've been involved, I think, in some of the conversations between Israelis and Saudis. Can you shed some light for the group here on how that relationship has developed and what you've seen?

Dore Gold: Well, the contacts that I will speak about are my own contacts, and they're contacts between myself and, let's say, well-connected Saudis.

Walter Russell Mead: And I think we can say - we should just remind people you're not here speaking for the Israeli government.

Dore Gold: I'm not speaking for the government.

Walter Russell Mead: You're here in a private capacity.

Dore Gold: Private capacity. That's it. But nonetheless, you learn a great deal. I'm a big advocate of going to conferences and talking to people who come from think tanks. And I have to sometimes explain that to my Israeli colleagues. You can learn a lot more from those contacts than you, many times, can from official contacts. But in any event, I learned - I had a dialogue, which I initiated back in 2015, with a Saudi major general, Anwar Eshki. And we met repeatedly in Rome with his team and with my team. And we found enormous common language. They were very curious about Iranian intervention that we had experienced and how it works with Hezbollah and what Hezbollah can do and what they are doing. For example, there's a concept of Iranian encirclement, which we, of course, saw in our relations with some of our neighbors, where the Iranians were deep involved with Hezbollah in Lebanon and, at the same time, getting increasingly involved in the Gaza Strip, not just with Hamas but with the Islamic Jihad, chiefly. And this kind of encirclement was what they were experiencing. They had the Iranians in Yemen. They had Iranian efforts - encroachments in Bahrain. And, of course, you have the Shia militia operating in Iraq. So we compare notes - how they do things and what can be expected. And, you know, this gave us a great deal of common ground in terms of our concerns and how we might neutralize those concerns.

Walter Russell Mead: Well, if you sort of put this in kind of realpolitik terms, what you would see is that both Iran and Turkey - Turkey, perhaps potentially Iran - currently have the ability to sort of become regional superpowers and

overshadow in particular Arab states at a time of intra-Arab conflict and division. And the shared interest of Israel with the Arab states in preventing that - because from an Israeli perspective, an Iranian-dominated Middle East would be a very dangerous place to live, and ditto, perhaps, for Turkish-dominated relationship under - Middle East under current leadership - Ottoman-type leadership. So the connection between Israeli and Arab security interests begins to look strategic and not simply occasional. Is that a perspective you think is shared in the region?

Dore Gold: I'll give you another example that I was somewhat surprised at but I found very interesting from one of my other Saudi contacts. I asked about, well, what do you think about an independent Kurdistan? And an independent Kurdistan works against the hegemonial governments because, obviously, Iran has a Kurdish region. It was independent in 1946. The Turks have a huge Kurdish population, and they are in, you know, semi-warfare with the Kurds of Syria. So it was interesting to me that the - my counterparts spoke positively about Kurdish independence. You know, I'm always still the diplomat - very careful about how I phrase things. So again, it is the fear of the hegemonialism coming from the non-Arab powers in the Middle East. And that gives us and the Arabs a certain common ground to speak about.

Walter Russell Mead: Do you think we're going to see more diplomatic breakthroughs, or more - you know, we've seen some interesting things in the UAE and Oman. Your conversations with the Saudis attracted widespread attention. Do you think there are more developments on the way?

Dore Gold: Look; Israel, in the last five years, could have contacts with any Arab state. You could send a high-level person from our security establishment, and he could talk to virtually any Arab leader. What was new, and what really changes the situation in the region, is the willingness to do that in public. That's the new reality. And if our counterparts feel it's necessary and it's important, we, obviously, have no problem with the public posture of contacts. But as long, also, as people don't get the wrong idea, wherein these contacts are not directed against anybody, if we can be of help, we will be of help. But we're not seeking to, you know, create a Hebrew empire, although I think our non-Arab neighbors do have broad ambitions that you have to keep your eye on.

Walter Russell Mead: And that does seem to be - actually, a feature of this relationship is that Israeli goals in the region are necessarily limited by the small size of the Jewish population. It's, you know, it sort of can't have huge territorial ambitions in the way an Iran could or others so that it becomes a safer bet for Arab states looking for allies. Is that right?

Dore Gold: Well, I'm not sure it's just a question of population. If all of a sudden, you know, 2 million Jews came into Israel, it wouldn't mean we would get a policy change. I think those are our goals. Our goals are not to gain control of the area and to have, you know, Israeli colonies going down the Red Sea. That's not where we're at. We see our security in much more limited terms. And I think our neighbors get that.

Walter Russell Mead: The Palestinians, obviously, are - this is kind of - a pillar of Palestinian political logic has been to call on the Arab states as a sort of balance against Israel. How is that strategy being affected by what we see today, because it can't be the best, the happiest reading in the world in Ramallah or in Gaza to read about all of this Israeli-Arab reconciliation, in a sense, over their heads or behind their backs?

Dore Gold: Well, as a former Israeli ambassador to the United Nations, I can tell you that it's obvious that the Palestinian strategy's been based on the diplomatic isolation of Israel. And frankly, you have to draw a big distinction between bilateral relations of countries and multilateral diplomacy of the countries involved in it. So on the bilateral side, things are improving. To convert that into new multilateral voting patterns may take a longer period of time. But definitely we have bilateral breakthroughs. And you see them all the time.

Walter Russell Mead: Is there a sense in Israel that progress on relations with the Palestinians is still necessary to develop these Arab relations, or is there a sense that the common interest between Israelis and Arabs are enough now that the Palestinian issue is of lesser importance in regional diplomacy?

Dore Gold: That's an excellent question because I get asked by my countrymen, does Abu Mazen want peace - or Mahmoud Abbas as you call him here - does Mahmoud Abbas want peace? And frankly, anyone who follows his behavior over the last period of time has to reach the conclusion there's a big problem there. I mean, just think of the last time there was an initiative by the Obama administration. Secretary Kerry was spending an amazing amount of

time running between Ramallah and Jerusalem. And when the moment of truth came - I believe it was April 27. Correct me if I'm wrong, David (ph) - April - what? March 17 - I knew there was a seven in there. March 17 in the Oval Office, there had been a proposal on the table that the administration had worked out. And that proposal was based on working rules that you could accept the American proposal, but you had the right to have reservations about certain parts. It was interesting diplomatic approach. So you could say, I accept your proposal, but I don't like clause seven and clause 13. All right, it gets you further than you are now.

So Israel gave a positive answer with its reservations. So President Obama turns to Mahmoud Abbas in the Oval Office and says, well, so what's your answer? And the famous words that still stick with those who follow the Middle East peacemaking - he said, I'll get back to you. And guess what? He never did. And so that raised the question about, well, does he really want a deal? And he's going to have to do a lot of work to convince people that he is in the deal-making business because his last encounter with us was very negative. And by the way, that isn't much different than what Olmert went through and what Ehud Barak went through in the past. So we sort of get these reruns every couple of years when somebody gets inspired to enter the Arab-Israeli peacemaking.

Walter Russell Mead: Well, to move on a bit, Russia's involvement in the Middle East - Russia's increasing involvement in the Middle East is certainly one of the big developments we've seen in recent years. And Israeli-Russian relations seem to be very complex with elements of mutual interest and support and elements of disagreement. How would you - to just sort of educate a American audience, what is the state of Israeli-Russian relations? And where do you see the strengths and weaknesses of that relationship?

Dore Gold: Well, my reading of the interests of President Putin is his goals in the Middle East are not completely expansive. They are limited to certain areas where he hopes to resurrect what the Soviet Union used to have. Obviously that's along the coast of Syria. A dangerous power in Syria today is Iran. The country that has expansive goals in Syria is Iran. And unfortunately - and this is where we disagree with the Russians - they don't fully digest, understand what Iran's dangerous role is in the Middle East. It could be that it comes to a simplistic analysis in some cases that - well, who is causing us problems in the Transcaucasus? Sunni governments - Saudi Arabia, Pakistan - they're the ones who support the Mujahedeen, who are causing terror against the Russian people.

But Iranians - Shia - they don't cause any trouble. That's a big mistake if anyone really believes that. I've gone to Moscow, and I have said that face-to-face to a whole assortment of Russian leaders. And, you know, the proof is everywhere. Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi, the founder of al-Qaida in Iraq, where did he go? Once the U.S. invaded Afghanistan after 9/11, he went to Iran who took care of him - the Revolutionary Guards. And from Iran, he went into Kurdistan and Iraq and formed al-Qaida in Iraq. But his base was in Iran. And there are many other cases like that. So hopefully those who are suggesting to the Russians what their policy should be take that negative role of Iran fully into account.

Walter Russell Mead: And I don't want to play the devil's advocate here more than I have to. But it does seem that the Russians might logically say, well, maybe the Iranians are permissive about Sunni terrorism in other places, but they're not - they're actually not sending them against us. And that's what our concern is. I mean, al-Zarqawi isn't attacking Russia.

Dore Gold: Well, just you wait. In other words, that's a development from Sunni terrorism growing in the Middle East or in parts of Central Asia and converting that to something anti-Russian - that could happen. And the Iranians themselves may decide to employ terror, you know, with a little distance against Russia. I think terror is terror. And the doctrines of the jihadists are very comparable - not the same but they're comparable. And if I was a Russian security analyst, I would take that into account.

Walter Russell Mead: The Russians may also think they've got some leverage with current Iranian Kurds and even Azerbaijanis where Iran - the Russians may feel they can they can control their relationship with Iran.

Dore Gold: Again, the history shows that Iran has no problem working with Sunni Mujahedeen. You know, we have that in terms of the Iranian relationship with Palestinian-Islamic Jihad, the Iranian relationship with Hamas. All over the Middle East, the Iranians are fully capable of working with these type of organizations.

Walter Russell Mead: As a practical matter, when it comes to Israeli red lines in Syria and Russian positions, has Israel been successful in getting Russia to accept those red lines?

Dore Gold: Not completely - in other words, the fact that Israel acts to prevent Hezbollah from obtaining advanced weaponry that could alter the military balance in the Levant (ph) should be a strong enough statement to the Russians that not everything is permissible. I mean, the fact that there were at one point Russian shore-to-ship cruise missiles, with the range of about 200 kilometers, being contemplated for transfer because Bowa (ph) was something we couldn't live with - that could hit all our - many of our not all of our - many of our new gas fields and create a real disaster. And so before those very cruise missiles arrived to Hezbollah, they evaporated. So you know, that's a case where you can't play around. But eventually the Russians understand certain things. They have a defense relationship with Syria. But other things are simply unacceptable. And hopefully that will lead to a change in behavior over time.

Walter Russell Mead: Is - are there - is there cooperation on natural gas and other kinds of issues between Russia and Israel?

Dore Gold: Well, you know, the Israeli - the quantity of gas that Israel can actually produce and export is relatively small. So it's not as though there's this new boy on the block who's going to put the Russians out of business. But if you look at Europe's interest, Europe is interested in diversifying the sources of its energy, particularly in the area of natural gas. And Israel could become a very important player once its huge gas field Leviathan comes online. There were rumors in the Israeli press that Israel, Greece, Cyprus and Italy were about to sign an agreement for the export of Israeli gas through a pipeline, along that route in the Mediterranean to Italy, for basically distribution in Europe. It's a very tough project. It will be a very costly project. But the European Union is getting behind a feasibility study of that pipeline. And so it shows that it's a serious, serious effort. And it's being looked at by the countries that will be most affected.

Walter Russell Mead: Let's turn our attention to Europe and Israel - Israeli-European relations these days. One gets the sense - in fact, one can see statements from the Israeli government in past years that Israel is trying to sort of shift its economic and its diplomatic relations away from Europe toward other parts of the world - economically China, India - diplomatically in other places. Does this reflect a pessimism about the future of Israeli-EU relations?

Dore Gold: I think you'd have to draw a distinction between Israeli-EU relations and Israeli-European relations because the EU itself can many times adopt very hostile positions in Brussels. And this is a big problem for us. Right now, there have been efforts by the European Union to help the Palestinians build various construction projects in Area C, particularly along highways that are - I would call them strategic thoroughfares where we can't afford to have any construction of that sort. Now, the Oslo Agreements - though, fact, the second Oslo - the Interim Agreement from 1995, puts responsibility for these civilian affairs in the hands of Israel in those areas, not in the hands of the Palestinians. And it was done for a very good reason. If in the future there's a war from the east, Israel will have to move forces down to the Jordan Valley, which will constitute the frontline for Israel's defense. Where are those axes of movement? There are axes of movement that go through the Judean desert, past Ma'ale Adumim, down to this area.

But what if Palestinians start building, without any building permit, new projects - it could be a small town; it could be housing - without the permission of the Israeli military in that area? I always said to Palestinians - so go, you know, a hundred meters away from the road and build what you want. But don't do it on the road. Our experience, for example, in the Second Intifada in an area called Somit Ayosh (ph) was that snipers would sit on these buildings and snipe at traffic. So that's why we take a very strong position on this. But does the European Union understand this? No. Do they want to be conflictual with us? Yes. And that has to change. I think that individual European countries understand this. I personally was in Berlin speaking to the German minister who deals with development projects in the West Bank. I explained this. He understood it. But if he goes to Brussels and speaks with Ambassador Mogherini's team, I think the results would be very different.

Walter Russell Mead: The sort of new alignment or emerging alignment between Israel and the Gulf states - we look at countries like France and Britain that have traditionally had very strong ties with some of the Arab states that are now changing their relationship with Israel. Do you have a sense that some of that Arab influence might be used to

modify the stances - or do you see any signs that it's happening, that some of these countries are thinking now that it's not an either-or choice between Israelis and Arabs but maybe it's both-and?

Dore Gold: I can tell you this. You know, I can't say for the Arab states - although there are important changes I want to note first and then I'll answer your question. Early on when I was director-general of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, I went to an Arab state. And I brought my foreign ministry team. And when you have a dialogue of directors-general, your team has to prepare for your talking points: A, B, C - what are you going to talk to these guys about? So there I was. I won't say which state it was. And I went through - we sat together, sat opposite sides of the table in their capitol. And they said to me - Dore, why don't you go first? You read your talking points. So I started going through - A, B, C, D - I had 13 points. And my Arab counterpart, who is extremely articulate, started smiling. I thought, what'd I do? Did I offend him? Did I say something wrong? Did I step on somebody's toes? And I said, so what's the story? And he says to me, well, it turns out your talking points are identical to my talking points. In other words, we're having a certain kind of strategic alignment where we start seeing things in a very similar way. And that certainly can affect how countries look at us. And one of my trips into Sahel, the best way to go there - I'm not a travel agent but - is through Paris.

So we went to Paris with a whole foreign ministry team. I said, you know, we got to really stop in the French foreign ministry. You can't just use their airfields for going to various countries in Africa. So we set up meetings. We went to the French foreign ministry, and we described what we were doing in Africa. And the reaction wasn't like - what are you doing getting into my backyard, francophone Africa? The reaction was, how can we work together? So I think Israel has a great deal it can offer. Sometimes you hear comments like that, and they're just rhetorical. But I think, in many cases, when they see Israeli success, they want to work with us. And we're ready to work with them.

Walter Russell Mead: Let's - I know you've been involved in Israel's outreach to sub-Saharan Africa. And that has - again, I think some of that has flown under the radar in the U.S. and maybe in other parts of the world. But there has been a remarkable shift in the level of Israeli activity in sub-Saharan Africa and in the public receptivity of many of these countries to an Israeli presence. Can you tell us a little bit about what's going on?

Dore Gold: Well, we do see receptivity across Africa. One African foreign minister came to me and said, there are two hard nuts for you to crack. I said, oh, really? That sounds tempting. And they said, Algeria and South Africa. In South Africa, we have diplomatic relations. We have an embassy. Algeria, of course, is a different type of fish. And - but we - we've made efforts with South Africa. We had Israeli diplomatic missions from the Foreign Ministry to South Africa. And we try to always find common ground, not just coming with, you know, oh, we have a new water desalination system, which we'll give you a bargain price on. You know, that's not the way to change attitudes. I can tell you this, that at one point in my South African efforts - I feel that it's important to give people an ideological basis for talking to you, for building a new relationship.

So I discovered in one of my trips that Nelson Mandela during the apartheid regime was hiding out in an area just outside of Johannesburg. And it was a farm that was largely Jewish-owned, and he stayed in a Jewish house, which had a great library. And one of the books he read was a book that's familiar to a good number of you. It was called "The Revolt." It was written by Menachem Begin. So I heard, for example, the foreign minister of South Africa has a kind of built-in hostility towards Israel. I said, did you know that the head of your national movement read the - an important book by the head of my national movement of how to resist colonialism? And, you know, you suddenly put your discussion on a different frame and a different framework. And so good diplomacy should offer desalination, should offer agricultural projects - and we do that - but should also offer the ability of two sides to see - to establish common ground. That's something I try to do in Africa, and I think there's a lot of that that we can do with the African countries.

Walter Russell Mead: What are some of the African countries where - I think attitudes in South Africa haven't changed so very much - maybe I'm wrong about that - but in other countries in Africa where Israel actually was very active before, really, the oil embargoes of the '70s, there has been a tremendous revival of Israeli presence?

Dore Gold: Well, let me first of all say something about South Africa. Maybe it's because I invested a lot of time there. But South Africa still has enormous potential. The real problem we have there is the ANC, the African National Congress, the party. The party has a strong anti-Israeli, pro-Palestinian ideological perspective. But there are other

elites in South Africa beside the ANC. You know, if you meet somebody from South Africa who is black, he probably comes from one of the major tribes in South Africa, like the Zulu. I had a partner in South Africa - a partner sounds like a business arrangement - it wasn't business, though - who asked me to come to Johannesburg, where he was having a meeting of major tribal leaders. And he asked me to speak about Israel. And one of the gentlemen sitting in the front row was the head of the Zion Church in South Africa.

So I started my speech by saying, I come to you from Zion in Jerusalem. But that wasn't the most interesting. The most interesting is one of the biggest tribes is the Zulu tribe. And the king of the Zulu was - also sat in the front row and expressed enormous sympathy for the state of Israel, wants to come to Israel, was complaining why he hadn't gone - hadn't had a chance to come. So I think there is a real potential. If we can use - if we can reach out to alternative elites, maybe the ANC will come along. Don't rule anybody out. But go with your friends. And then maybe you'll get new friends.

Walter Russell Mead: One of the fascinating developments in Africa after the end of colonialism has been this sort of surge in Christian conversions. And many of the people, many of the theological trends are very pro-Christian Zionist. I actually was shocked myself. I visited the Anglican Cathedral in Nairobi some years ago, and they had a book table outside. I was first shocked because there was an Anglican cathedral that was full. That's not something you see very much, say, in the U.K. But the book table outside was filled with books by John Hagee, the head of Christians United for Israel here, a very strong pro-Israel group. So there was clearly some sort of connection there. Are you finding that Christians - the rise of Christianity in sub-Saharan Africa is contributing to this kind of thaw?

Dore Gold: I think it could potentially be an important contribution. You have to understand why people reach out to you. You know, it's not just because, oh, maybe they'll sell us some weapons. It's because of values. You have to talk about values when you're in diplomacy. You can't ignore them. By the way, look at the revolution in the relations between Israel and Brazil. Where did that come from? Well, you'll find your cathedrals and your interests - I think Brazil even has a replica of the Second Temple, which people go to see. So it's part of their faith. We are a country that is trying to attract people of faith from all over, including Muslims. And it's important for Israelis to understand, what are the motivating factors of different countries in the world? And they may be surprised.

Walter Russell Mead: You know, we haven't really talked much about U.S.-Israel relations. And maybe it's time to shift to that subject. Obviously, the Trump administration has taken a number of steps that Israelis have wanted to see - some Israelis have wanted to see for some time. But I would think somebody - from Jerusalem's perspective, the polarization of American politics and the tendency for some in the Democratic Party, in particular, to see more distance between U.S. and Israeli interests has to be of concern. How, from an Israeli standpoint - and you were born in the U.S. and are now an Israeli citizen. So you have, I think, an interesting perspective on this. How does Israel try to keep Middle East - or Israel policy from becoming a purely partisan issue in the United States?

Dore Gold: That is a huge challenge. I can tell you - in 1998, I was ambassador of Israel to the United Nations. And I always worked with Democrats and Republicans. That was a clear rule. I got a strange request to come down to Austin, Texas, to meet with Governor George W. Bush. And so I went down there. I think we came up with some excuse like, you know, having Sunday morning breakfast with the Jewish community. I don't know how many people there were there. But I then went over to the governor's office - wasn't a Sunday, then; it must have been a Monday - and I met with Governor Bush. We had great conversation. And from there, I went back to New York to my office. I said to myself, I can't just meet with the leading candidate for president of the United States in Austin, Texas, and not balance that out. So I got on the phone to Senator Lieberman from Connecticut, who was still a Democrat - was not an independent. I told him, listen. I just did this. I just went down to Austin, Texas, but I believe in a bipartisan policy. Help me here.

So we got the Democratic Leadership Council, a week later, to sponsor a conversation with an Israeli diplomat in Washington. And I think we had two U.S. senators, Democrats. And a few others came as well. But it was an important principle that I felt in my own diplomacy to always balance things out. And - but it's becoming harder. Frankly, it is becoming harder. And I think it's a mistake - Israel's not making a mistake. Israel knows that. And the man knows that more than anybody is Prime Minister Netanyahu. But you know, it takes two to tango. And you need to have - you need to build those relationships as much as you can. So again, you reach out to Democrats, and you reach out to Republicans. And you don't get caught playing partisan politics in the United States.

Walter Russell Mead: We're looking at a situation - I hesitate to say just given how long Jewish history is - but maybe a situation that's new in Jewish history, where the world's Jewish population is divided largely into two groups, one of Israelis and one of Americans. There are some others, but both of these constitute very large percentages of the world's Jewish community. And in some ways, they seem to be drifting apart. The majority of American Jews, I think, if they were Israeli citizens, would be voting well to the left in Israeli politics. And a majority of Israeli Jews seem to be more on the right. And the sense that one hears more and more from American Jews - not all, of course, but many - a kind of an ethical concern, a political concern about where Israel is going and whether this reflects Jewish values. How does that - you know, what can one do from an Israeli perspective to narrow that gap? Is this an issue of real concern for Israelis?

Dore Gold: I think it is a concern for Israelis. But again, many times we're charged with things we didn't do. One of the - a lot of my diplomatic work has been undertaken at times when I wasn't an official. For example, right after the first of the Gaza wars we had, I got a call from Brandeis University. They said, you know, Ambassador Gold, we are inviting for a speech here Justice Goldstone to speak about the Goldstone Report. Would you be willing to basically debate him? I used to take courses at Columbia Law School, but I'm not a lawyer. I did not study international law, although I had to use international law when I was at the U.N. So I thought for a minute. I said, look. I'm not going to win this debate against a giant in international law. I'm going to have to win it not in terms of law but in terms of the facts of the case. So I think I called Ron Dermer at the time, who was the foreign policy adviser to the prime minister. He pulled me over the other side of the corridor in the prime minister's office. And I met with the legal - the military secretary of the prime minister who called the chief of staff. And I, basically, had a tutorial in an Israeli-Hamas war from the Israeli side. And I was prepared with material that I didn't have access to, normally. And I, in fact, went into this debate, you know, showing the warnings that we give to Palestinian civilians prior to a military strike in Arabic. The first three rows at Brandeis were mostly Arab students.

So all of a sudden, you know, they were sort of shocked to hear a voice come on in Arabic. This is the Israeli army. You have seven minutes to clear your house. We have definite information that you have Iranian missiles in your living room. And I used this kind of material to make my case. The Boston Globe said I won the debate. But, you know, I went up against a real giant. Now, why am I telling you this? Because you have to make a case to American Jews. You have to show that the same values they have are the values that we have. When we go to Africa and we try and improve people's lives, that's a Jewish value. We go as Jewish diplomats not just as Israeli diplomats. When we try and protect innocent civilians in war, probably in a way that no other army does - and that isn't just me speaking. You can ask Colonel Richard Kemp who said the Israeli army is the most moral army in the world. So others have - others who have expose themselves to the details have reached that conclusion. But part of our problem with our American Jewish brothers is they may not be fully informed about what Israel does. And if they are, I don't expect them to agree with us on everything. But at least they'll understand that we're made of the same material. And that would certainly help the next time we're forced into conflict. I would just tell you about one case that I'm very worried about.

After the last Lebanon war in 2006, a U.N. Security Council resolution was adopted - 1701. 1701 prohibits armed groups in Lebanon from having any presence and military equipment south of the Litani River. That's the first of the Lebanese rivers that cross Lebanon. They're not supposed to be there. And what our intelligence has found is there are about 200 Shiite villages in Southern Lebanon. And they're full of weaponry that is outlawed by resolution 1701. Have you seen a resolution in the Security Council condemning anybody for putting that weaponry there? And where is that weaponry? That weaponry is in Lebanese civilian homes. Either the people are being paid or they're scared for their lives, and they agree to the presence of those weapons. Now, you're a military commander on the Israeli side. War has broken out. You have two choices. Choice number one - send in the Air Force and destroy all the weapons in the houses that you know already - that you can prove have Iranian weapons in them. But if you do that, civilians may lose their lives. So what you have to try and do is minimize that using the early warning. In seven minutes, we're coming in. Get out of the house. You do what you can. Another alternative - don't do anything. And then your side, your civilians, Israelis living in northern Israel will die. That's the choice you have to make. That's a moral choice that most of our critics never had to make in all their lives. And I hope they never do. Those are the choices Israel has to make. That's called having a Jewish state and having responsibility. I would prefer that the Security Council give UNIFIL a mandate to clean out all that illegal weaponry. It's not going to happen. But you should know the dilemmas we face. And hopefully, our future critics will understand those dilemmas when they inevitably come.

Walter Russell Mead: All right. Well, thank you. I see our time is up. This ambassador series is really intended to give ambassadors from different countries an opportunity to present a viewpoint. And I think we've - you've succeeded. You may not be an official ambassador, but you succeeded very well. It's a fascinating time in the Middle East and in U.S.-Israeli relations. We thank you for sharing some time with us this morning. I know you're on a busy schedule, so I appreciate your giving us this much time. And thank you all to the audience for showing up on this day. I hope you found it an interesting presentation. Thank you.

Dore Gold: Thank you for having me.