



A conversation between
Ambassadors Itamar Rabinovich and Michael Oren
with
Dr. Robert Satloff, moderator
on the occasion of
**The Washington Institute for Near East Policy
Scholar-Statesman Award Dinner**
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ROBERT SATLOFF: Tonight is like being a kid in a candy store: I have admired Itamar Rabinovich my entire professional career; I owe him an enormous debt of thanks, not least for ushering my doctoral dissertation into book form in a series that Itamar edited at Oxford University Press back when I was six feet tall and Itamar didn't have gray hair. So, Itamar, in front of four hundred people, thank you.

And to Michael Oren, I pay a huge compliment: Every time I turned a page in *Power, Faith, and Fantasy*, I kept saying to myself, "I wish I had written this book." But of course, I didn't, Michael did, and so to you, congratulations. And to share a stage with both of you is really a great honor. So, first, I just want to say thank you for being here. Itamar...

ITAMAR RABINOVICH: Thank you for having me. You know that there are many things to congratulate The Washington Institute for; one of them is that you managed to find two former Israeli diplomats and academics who actually respect and like each other. I would like to begin by mentioning a few individuals and a few institutions; I'll do it briefly. It says "Statesman-Scholar," so, for the statesman part, my hero is the late Yitzhak Rabin, my statesman. We are fortunate to have Dalia [Rabin's daughter] here with us—maybe Dalia can stand up [applause], and I'm honored to say that I was commissioned to write Yitzhak Rabin's biography—my current academic project. For the scholarly part of the award, Michelle Ajami here, she has already been recognized, and Fouad [Ajami] was my hero as a courageous, original, creative academic. The institutions with which I have been and am connected are all represented here: Tel Aviv University, of course, has been mentioned amply; NYU, where I teach now, is represented by some of my colleagues there; Brookings is represented by Tamara Wittes, and my current project has been mentioned by Lynn [Schusterman], my partner in crime. The Israel Institute is what takes most of my time now, with pleasure, and working with Lynn, with her foundation, and with my colleagues from the Israel Institute who are all here is a sheer pleasure. And Efrat has been mentioned all too briefly. She has put up with me for fifty years, and nothing would have happened without her. And as you have said, I have been present at the creation of The Washington Institute; I have followed, admired, and anticipated your work, and it is really a supreme privilege to be recognized by The Washington Institute in this fashion. Thank you so much.

MICHAEL OREN: Good evening. Thank you, everybody. What's even stranger than having two Israeli diplomats who like and respect each other is that Itamar was my professor. So you imagine what the *kavod* [privilege]

is here. When you were a visiting professor at Princeton back in 1983, and I was your student—I think I still owe you work. He has not held that against me. In addition to my great admiration for your late husband, I remember every moment of reading every one of his books and saying, “Oh, my god, Oh, my god.” You could hear that reverberating around the various libraries I was visiting. It was Bernard Lewis, who was [also] my professor, [who] taught me that scholarship can be engaging, that a narrative can drag you in, and to Professor Lewis I am infinitely grateful. To Rob: you don’t know this, but I used to point you out to my kids at Addis Israel in Washington and say to them: “You see that guy over there with the semi-beard? He’s the smartest guy in Washington, that guy.” My daughter Leah used to point him out all the time, and Rob, and the Institute generally, was a tremendous help to me in Washington. Whenever I was knocking my head against the wall—not that this ever happened—I knew I could call up you or David, or other people at the Institute, and get insights I couldn’t get anywhere else around the city. And it was always very, very special for me.

I am very honored to have my family with me tonight: my parents, my sister in law, my sister, my brother in law, my daughter— I’m not going to go around the whole table in case they give me hell later—my wife Sally, who was the muse for the Jefferson Airplane. I wrote three or four songs about her but nobody listens to them. You won’t know them. A special thank you to Roger [Hertog]. That was deeply touching, Roger, even though you didn’t say you loved me at the end. [Laughter]

Indeed, thank you very much, all. I’m deeply honored. Good night.

SATLOFF: I had prepared two and a half pages of fascinating questions, but then I decided to bring down the Israeli government today so that we’d have something very topical to talk about. So it would be improper if I didn’t begin with the headline of the day, which is the apparent collapse of the government of Israel, but asking you this question: Your government collapses; you are the ambassador of Israel to Washington; you have just welcomed and hosted this or that minister in Washington. You have just vouched for them at the White House, brought them into the Oval Office, said that they represent the word of the prime minister.

The next day you turn on your television set. You see the prime minister call them the worst possible names, say that they are horrible people, liars, cheaters, thieves. What do you do? How do you explain—you know, this isn’t such a crazy scenario—

OREN: “It’s a daily scenario.”

SATLOFF: —how do you explain your government to the president of the United States, to the secretary of state, and to the U.S. administration? Itamar?

RABINOVICH: You say: Mr. President, you have the White House Correspondents Dinner once a year; we have it year round.

OREN: I say, ‘*Ma nishtana, Ma nishtana.*’ [What’s new?] I would have a situation that would have one minister come into town and say that Israel will never redivide Jerusalem. The next day, another minister would come into town and say that Israel will divide Jerusalem and give half of it to the Palestinians. You get the same phone call, “So what’s your government’s position?” And I have to say that we have a collegial form of government that the prime minister is not commander in chief, that we have to work by consensus, and that the government’s position is the government’s position—which sounds vaguely tautological because it’s vaguely tautological. Your answer is that this is par for the course. It’s par for the course. Every day is like this.

RABINOVICH: On a little more serious note, a great friend of The Washington Institute, the late Sam Lewis, when he arrived at his post as U.S. ambassador to Israel in 1977, the only member of the U.S. Embassy staff who knew Menachem Begin was the public affairs officer. No one in the political section of the U.S. Embassy in the mid-1970s bothered to get to know Menachem Begin. And so it was Mr. Moss, the public affairs officer, who arranged for the first meeting between the new American ambassador and the Israeli prime minister. So the United States has learned a lesson since then: You are getting to know every minor, median figure in Israeli politics. I think there is a much higher level of understanding and there is still more to learn, as we found out. The change may not be as dramatic at the end of the day, though the task of the ambassador may not be as tough as it seems.

SATLOFF: Let me ask you, if I can gentlemen, a broader question. There is, of course, this old Jewish joke: “How are you?” “In one word, good, in two words, not good.” If you followed the opinion pages of Israel just this past week, you saw a version of this playing out with leaders of the Israeli national security establishment. One former head of Mossad, Shabtai Shavit, wrote an op-ed saying that these are the darkest days for Zionists. Then a few days later the former head of military intelligence, Amos Yadlin, wrote an op-ed saying that these are the best days for Israel and for Zionists. Which is it, and can both be true? Michael, do you want to start?

OREN: In 1953 Moshe Dayan’s made his first trip to the Pentagon as Israel’s chief of staff. And they asked him, what’s your geostrategic situation? How is the IDF going to fare? So he says, Israel is on the verge of annihilation. Any minute the Arab armies can descend on us and wipe us off the map.” Then he paused and took a breath and said, “In two weeks the IDF can be in downtown Damascus.” [Laughter] So this is not new: “Good, not good.” And if I had a half hour I would say that the national security advisor to the president once asked me to categorize Israel’s geostrategic political situation the same way, and I said that in the best of cases we are in May 1967, in the worst of cases we are in May 1948. He looked at me in shock and asked, “How can that be?” I said, “Well, like in ’67, certainly in ’48, we were surrounded by turmoil. Israeli leaders get up in the morning and face the broadest possible spectrum of monumental threats, everything from nuclearizing Iran to Egypt unraveling to Syrian civil war to 100,000 rockets in Lebanon, Jordan tottering. Palestinians won’t negotiate. It’s quite a challenge, and we haven’t even talked about Gaza. On the other hand, you could step on the brakes and say Israel is in the best possible geostrategic situation it’s ever been in its entire sixty-six and a half years of existence. We have peace with Egypt and Jordan, which was unthinkable when I was a student, we have relations with the former Soviet bloc countries that once wanted to knock us off too, twenty-two years of relations with China, twenty years of relations with India, a thriving high-tech economy sector, and we have with the United States of America something we didn’t have in ’67 or ’48, we have the deepest and most multifaceted alliance which the United States has probably had with any country in the post-World War II period. All in the same breath. Moshe Dayan had it right. In 1953.

SATLOFF: Are you an optimist about this, Itamar?

RABINOVICH: I put it this way: it is a very complex situation. On the one hand let me cite two very positive developments. Israel is not threatened by any conventional Arab army at this time. Second, Israel now has gas offshore. The first three customers of Israeli gas are going to be the Palestinian Authority, Jordan, and Egypt.

OREN: Unbelievable.

RABINOVICH: Incredible. At the same time we face a potentially nuclear Iran. More than 100,000 rockets and missiles facing us, Hamas in Gaza, Hezbollah in Lebanon, and so forth and so forth. What does it all amount to?

It amounts to the need for statesmanship, the first part of this award. What it takes is Israeli statesmanship to take this complex situation, to make the most of it, and to minimize the risks. So I cannot think of a more important time for leadership to arise; we are now going to face a very ugly period of about 1,900 days. I can only wish, all of us, that the net result would be a statesperson at the head of the government and a more workable coalition in the government. [Applause]

SATLOFF: I want to go back in time for a minute, and ask you, Itamar, about your experience with Syria. Syria is now for the first time in a generation on the front pages of American newspapers. And almost all Americans now know that there is this place that is collapsing, that there is this horrible conflict, that there are terrorist groups, this horrible group that is severing heads. It wasn't too many years ago that you came very close to negotiating peace with the father of the current ruler. Do you ever look at that experience and say, "Whew... Thank God we didn't actually reach it, because otherwise ISIS would not be on the other side of the Golan but right overlooking Tiberias?" Or, if you had reached it, would the Middle East look very different today?

RABINOVICH: I think the latter... We were negotiating with Syria but Syria was negotiating primarily with Washington, and then with us. And had peace been made, it would have been peace with Washington and peace with Israel, which would have entailed a total transformation of life in Syria. Syria would have had to open up, and Lebanon would have joined Syria. It could have been a different Middle East, and I think that one of the reasons the deal was not made was that Assad's generals would come to him and say that this would be tantamount to a suicide. If we make peace with Israel and there is no enemy, then who needs us? Who can justify this huge army and security apparatus and so forth and so forth? In other words, if Syria made peace with Israel, there would be no Syrian revolt in 2011 and therefore the question would not have arisen. So, I can look back and not feel any great relief that peace was not made.

SATLOFF: Now, let's look forward.

OREN: I was going to say that, fortunately, ... we never came close to making peace with anybody.

SATLOFF: During your term, so I was not going to ask the question. Let me move forward with this issue, because so far Israel has essentially succeeded in staying out of the Syrian conflict, and it isn't first on the list of targets, at least yet, for ISIS and for all the nastiness that is on your border. When you gentlemen look in the future, do you see Israel succeeding in staying out of this conflict? Do you see Israel playing a role in this conflict? What do you think Israel ought to do vis-à-vis its north? Michael, do you want to start?

OREN: The problem is not Syria. The problem is the post-World War I framework for the Middle East, the Sykes-Picot framework, which is unraveling. But Europeans came around at the end of World War I and said, "Okay, tomorrow you're a Syrian, tomorrow you're an Iraqi, tomorrow you're a Palestinian, here are your borders, now go live with them. We'll empower some big family, some big clan, give them a big army, hold it together in case we go home." And they eventually went home. They went home, the power in the center unraveled, and then the entire order began to come apart. So the problem of Syria is the problem of Iraq. And frankly, the problem of Syria and Iraq is the problem of the Palestinians. The question is which of these societies can sustain a state structure? And in the absence of ability of these societies to maintain a state structure, what is Israel going to do? And I don't think there's a cookie-cutter policy that fits all. If the Syrian civil war starts to seep across our northern border, we'll respond to it. If ISIS starts to undermine the stability of Jordan, we'll respond to it. Would the Palestinians—I don't think we have to wait around for another round for the Palestinians to prove to us that

they are incapable of supporting a state structure because they hold the record of a people that have been offered a state most frequently in history and they have turned it down almost entirely with violence.

So I think we should get the message and say that if we want to preserve ourselves as a Jewish and democratic state, if we want to guard our population the best we can, then we have to make decisions by ourselves. Itamar talked earlier about statesmanship and leadership; I think the leadership has to be that we don't outsource our fundamental security and destiny to Palestinian decisionmakers, because the only decision they can make is to try to isolate and sanction us in the UN. And so the response to Syria is the response to everything that is happening in the Middle East: Is Israel taking responsibility for itself?

SATLOFF: Israel taking responsibility... Itamar?

RABINOVICH: You know that I have been in many respects a critic of this government, but it does get good grades for managing the Syrian conflict, the Egyptian relationship, very well. So, as long as it is up to us, I think we can maintain, keep ourselves out of the conflict, but it is not entirely up to us. One thing: If Iran decides that Hezbollah should start playing games with us, not through the Lebanese border, but through the Golan Heights, then we might not be able to stay out. The same with ISIS: Mr. [Abu Bakr] al-Baghdadi is very smart; he knows how to pick his enemies and he's not picked us, but he may change his mind. So, the bottom line is, as far as we are concerned, I think it would make sense for us and it is quite likely that we stay out. If the choice is in the hands of Hezbollah, Iran, or ISIS, then we may find ourselves deeply in the crisis.

SATLOFF: When you walked into the hotel tonight, I don't know how many of you noticed this, but you walked under a flag of the kingdom of Saudi Arabia about a big as Central Park. So given that we are honoring two Israeli ambassadors in a hotel with the Saudi flag out front, let me ask you this: There's a lot of talk these days about Israel having relationships with Sunni states, whether it's Saudi Arabia or the Emirates, certainly Jordan and Egypt. Is there the possibility, or is it a flight of fantasy, that Israel and the Sunnis could really work together against ISIS on one hand and Iran on the other? Itamar?

RABINOVICH: The answer is yes. If we begin with this very hotel, remember it was bought just a few years ago in a partnership by an Israeli tycoon and a Saudi prince. They worked together on this hotel, but in a larger way, yes, the Sunni countries are very keen on collaborating with Israel, but the entry ticket to this is movement on the Palestinian front. I'm saying movement; I'm not saying solution, because I don't think that solution or resolution is around the corner. It's not entirely in our hands, and it's not feasible for now. But between resolution and between staying with the status quo or exacerbating the status quo, there's a whole spectrum. And if we move, we need to move within that spectrum. I think Saudis and Qataris and others would be very happy to work with us.

SATLOFF: Was that your experiences, ambassador?

OREN: In Washington, most Arab ambassadors will talk to you. But they divide into three categories: those who will have lunch with you publicly, those who will have lunch with you privately, and those who won't have lunch with you. And the latter category was the smallest by far and the Saudis fell within it. I could be in an elevator with a Saudi ambassador and he would look right through me like I was glass, so you have to distinguish between what is going on at the ambassadorial level and what may be going on at other levels, I think there's a greater confluence of interest at this point between Israel and Sunni countries, particularly in the Gulf, than at any time in our national existence. Whether this can translate into open cooperation—having lunch publicly—remains to be seen. But discretely, implicitly, I think there is a tremendous amount of cooperation and understanding that

we face very, very similar threats in the form of ISIL, in the form of Iran, in the form of the Muslim Brotherhood, also, and that I agree with Itamar that the sine qua non for any type of open cooperation would be movement on the Palestinian issue, which I'm very skeptical about whether that's in the cards right now, but I think we can pursue it and work within the framework of what is eventually becoming not a two-state solution—because frankly, I've erased the word "solution" from my vocabulary—but [an] evolving a two-state situation in the West Bank.

SATLOFF: Well let me touch very briefly on this issue, because we have been now talking about his issue since before the founding of The Washington Institute. Will there be a resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict? Will there be in our collective lifetimes, peace between Israelis and Palestinians? Itamar?

RABINOVICH: I don't know. From the height of my age, I don't know, but I believe so. Let's look at Europe. The idea of the European community was conceived by Jean Monnet, a Frenchman, in the middle of World War II when France was occupied by Germany. And people must have thought that this man was out of his mind to speak about a united Europe led by France and Germany in the middle of World War II, and lo and behold, twenty, thirty years later, that vision became a reality. So, I think the Israeli-Palestinian problem, the Arab-Israeli problem, can be resolved over time. Not right now, but over time, hopefully in my lifetime. (Applause)

SATLOFF: You, Michael, have written about a wonkish idea called "coordinated unilateralism," a two-state situation. Is the conflict going to get resolved in your lifetime?

OREN: Again, I don't use the word "solution." I don't think there's resolution for any Middle East conflicts; I'm not sure there's a solution for life, at least one that we want to talk about. And what we can look at are ways we can better manage the situation, better ensure our security, our identity as a Jewish and democratic state, and ways that I think we can enhance the daily lives of Israelis and Palestinians on the ground. I think it's happening even now. In effect you have almost close to a two-state situation, because there are very few—a very limited—Israeli military presence in areas like Ramallah and Nablus and Jenin. And on the ground, they have a tremendous amount of cooperation, whether it be, as you mentioned, Itamar, in energy, in water, in trade—Palestinian exports through Israeli ports. We can build on that. And if someday—and I think it is very important that we maintain the vision of a two-state solution to keep the door open to it—if some Palestinian leader is either willing or able to go through that door, I think he's going to find an Israeli people that's still willing to make the necessary sacrifices. But in the interim, we can better manage the situation and we can better work to ameliorate daily lives for Palestinians and Israelis alike. (Applause)

SATLOFF: All right. Two former ambassadors from Israel to America: Who is the most impressive American policymaker with whom you ever worked? Itamar?

RABINOVICH: In the best bipartisan spirit, Bill Clinton and Jim Baker.

SATLOFF: Michael?

OREN: I've got to think...Whatever I say, this is an impossible question for an ambassador this close out of office. He's [Itamar] got the twenty years behind him. It's very easy to do that in retrospect. There were two great legislators whom I worked with—

SATLOFF: Avoid the administration altogether, I see!

OREN: —you said policymakers? Lindsey Graham in the Senate, a truly great legislator, truly great legislator. And in the House I want to say Elliot Engel here, from New York, was wonderful. And Nita Lowey, if I'm saying it in the same breath, Nita was special. They're great legislators.

SATLOFF: Itamar, you were here in Washington at a time of unusual closeness between our two presidents—president and prime minister—and Michael, you were in Washington at a time of, shall we say, less than unusual closeness between president and prime minister. When you look at the situation that confronts America and Israel today—and I know there's a lot of naysaying and *shrying* [complaining] about where this relationship is going—how much of it is in your view a clash of personalities? How much of it is something more fundamental? Demographic shifts, fundamental shifts of strategy, and policy, which do you put more weight on? Michael?

OREN: Look, in an aggregate way, you'll see that support for Israel among the American public today is close to an all-time high. Roughly three-quarters of the American populace will define themselves to one degree or another as being pro-Israel. That puts us in a category with Sweden and Canada. It's very, very rare. So it's nothing about what's going on in the American public. I think that this administration has a worldview; it's a very centralized administration, it's an ideological administration, and it has a worldview that does not always accord with the worldview of any Israeli government, not just this Israeli government. I don't think you're going to find any Israeli government that's going to define Gilo and French Hill as settlements, for example. Or an Israeli government that would be capable, even under Israeli law, of freezing building in those large Jewish neighborhoods of Jerusalem. It just couldn't happen, so you have an ideological difference...that spreads not just to Israel but to the Arab world. I think we always talk about it, Rob, going back to the foundational document of the Obama administration on the Middle East, which was the Cairo speech of June 2009. To understand so much of what has happened in the last five years, always go back to that document. Something that Professor Lewis taught me: always go back to the sources. There's the source. And that is going to be a difference. Israel, true, is heading in a different way politically, and the next elections—I'm not a prophet, I'm a historian and I have enough problems predicting the past. But if you look at the polls that came out today, Israel seems likely to have a more right-wing—more right of center—coalition as a result of the next coalition. America may be moving, working in a different way. And it has yet to be seen. So, the picture is not so black and white; on one hand you have governments that have moved far apart and it's not just personal, that's my point; on the other hand, you have an American population that even after the events of last summer and the very difficult pictures that the press made sure to come out of Gaza last summer...support for Israel in this country went up again.

SATLOFF: Itamar?

RABINOVICH: You know I mentioned my admiration for Rabin, and the love affair between Clinton and Rabin...was predicated also on directness, openness, and trust between the two of them, which is obviously lacking now. I would rather not look at the past six years, but at the next two years. And my advice to whoever becomes Israel's next prime minister would be, "Go to America, meet the president, and say that you have two years left to define a legacy. That legacy, in this or that way, is going to be determined also in the Middle East. And I want to work with you on that legacy. Here is what I can do; here is what I cannot do; I'm completely open with you, and let's identify the overlap of our interests in what I can do, and let's make the next two years much better than the past six years." [Applause]

SATLOFF: I want to take that theme and just ask you about Iran, ask both of you about Iran. I think it was about the time when you [Rabinovich] were ambassador that the first Israeli government officials came to Washington and warned the Clinton administration about the Iranian nuclear program. It's twenty years and Israelis

are still warning about the Iranian nuclear program. And Israelis are still threatening to take action, and Israelis aren't, and the Iranians still don't have a bomb. How do you see—Are we near crunch time when, after this twenty-year period, clearly the administration would like to reach an agreement with Iran, when push comes to shove, how do you think this or whatever government of Israel will react when an agreement is reached, one that is not a “made-in-Israel” agreement? How do you think this or any government would react? Michael?

OREN: I don't know how this government will react; I can only give you my personal view. I'm a private citizen now. Israel's margin for error on Iran is exactly zero. If you believe that President Rouhani is a moderate, and not just a facade, that there's actually a fundamental change in Iranian policy with regard to terror, with regard to undermining regimes in the Middle East and beyond....If you believe that what we see of the Iranian program is what there is, in the face of evidence over the past thirty-four years when what we saw was NOT what there was, if you believe that the Iranians not lying anymore, after they've systematically lied for thirty, forty years about their nuclear program, if you believe that the international community will be capable of identifying when Iran breaks or sneaks out and will react within ten months militarily to stop it, then support in full force an agreement on Iran. If your children's life depends on it—and my kids' and my grandkids' lives depend on it—you may reach a different conclusion. Israel is a Jewish state with a particularly tragic history, and we have not come back after 2000 years of exile to disappear in this way. Israel has the right, Israel has the duty, Israel has the capability of defending itself. And, as a historian, not just as a citizen and former ambassador, in 1948, in 1967, in 1956, under different prime ministers, folks came to us and said, “Give us more time for diplomacy. Let us work it out.” And in each case, Ben Gurion and Levi Eshkol reached a conclusion that Israel's existence was at stake, and Israel had to exercise its sovereign rights. I'm not saying when, how, if, but, but that is the situation and one that I dearly hope will not change from our perspective. [Applause]

SATLOFF: Itamar?

RABINOVICH: So if you ask me what is your one-line summary of four years of negotiations with Syria, I would say that the story about buying the carpets in the bazaar is true. Haggling in the Middle East is a major component of life, and rule number one in buying a carpet in a bazaar is “Don't seem to be too eager.” And my problem with the negotiations now being held is that the United States in a way seems too eager; the Iranians know that they can tinker with the price. So in that imaginary conversation between Israel and a new prime minister and the president, this needs to be reiterated. I think the danger is not so much to Israel's existence as such; the Iranians know very well the Israelis have second- and third-strike capability. The danger to the world is that if Iran goes nuclear, so will Saudi Arabia: the Saudi bomb is somewhere in Pakistan on a shelf, Turkey, Egypt, there will be a nuclear Middle East; the whole nonproliferation treaty regime will collapse; the world is going to be a mess. It's not just our problem. And this needs to be reiterated time and again. And also, the implied threat that Michael mentioned before could be used by the president, say to the Iranians at some point, “Hey, here I am, but who knows about the Israelis?” So, coordination between Israel and the United States on this can be restored, the game can be divided between the bad cop and the mad cop, and we can jointly deal with that issue much more effectively.

SATLOFF: “The bad cop and the mad cop...” [Applause]. All right, gentlemen, let me close by asking one last question, and it's something that you hinted at earlier, Itamar, when you offered a small piece of advice about how to deal with the next two years. But I'd like to ask both of you to expand on this, because these are two critical years, given how much chaos there is in the Middle East, given that against his preference, Middle East issues and fighting in the Middle East is now near the top of the president's agenda. If you were advising if not the prime minister, but certainly Israel's ambassador in Washington, or let's say you're advising the prime minister

who emerges from the next election, what advice do you give him on how best to work with Washington over the balance of this administration, so that when 2017 comes around, a new president comes into office, Israel and the United States are already on a better glide path for their relationship. Itamar?

RABINOVICH: Well...to top off everything we said before, you just say to your interlocutor in Washington, "Look at the Middle East, look at the one place that is an island of stability, that is reliable, that is a world-class military power, that is a world-class locus of technology and is a loyal friend of the United States, and when you count your chips, you know what chip we are, and here we are to work with you." That, I think, would be a good starting point.

OREN: I couldn't agree more. We really have no choice but to be allies with one another. It's not as if Israel has a wide choice of allies to select, and we just happen to be fortunate enough to live in a miraculous day when the greatest military power on earth also happens to be the greatest democracy, and happens to be our closest ally. And the United States, as Itamar mentioned, doesn't have a great choice of militarily, scientifically, technologically, robust democratic states that never host an anti-American demonstration and American flags aren't burned out on the streets, and the presidents can still come there and give a speech in front of students and be applauded in the Middle East. There is only one place like that: that is the State of Israel. If I were to give advice to whoever is going to be elected in our upcoming contests, the advice would be the same advice that I gave to the prime minister during my entire tenure, which was: We have to think of Israel's relationship with the United States in terms of a bank account. You have to make deposits into the bank account. In the year 2002, the IDF launched an operation against the second intifada, Operation Defensive Shield. We were able to write a check to do that operation because we had made a down payment, a deposit, into our diplomatic account at Camp David in 2000. In 2006 we were able to fight against Lebanon, against Hezbollah in Lebanon, because of the disengagement from Gaza, which was a deposit in our diplomatic bank account. In 2008, we were able to fight against Hamas in the Gaza Strip because of the deposit made by the offer of a state to Mahmoud Abbas that he turned down. Last summer we went into a military conflict pretty much with an empty bank account, kind of with an overdraft. And we have to think about the neighborhood in which we live, in which we may have to once again resort to defending ourselves by military means; we're going to require space, we're going to require time, we have fateful challenges in the form of the Iranian nuclear program. We haven't really talked about what the Palestinians intend to do with the UN, but what they intend to do is declare a state there and use that state as a base for taking us down economically through sanctions. It is a strategic threat, not a tactical threat. We have to make deposits in our diplomatic bank account that will give us leeway that will give us what to draw a check on when we have to draw that check...may it never happen.

SATLOFF: Friends, please join me in a thank you to our 2014 Scholar-Statesman honorees, Itamar Rabinovich and Michael Oren.