

Conference Reports

Israel and America at Sixty: The Strategic Partnership at a Crossroads

[*Natan Sharansky*](#), [*Itamar Rabinovich*](#), and [*Dennis Ross*](#)

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On May 30, 2008, Natan Sharansky, Itamar Rabinovich, James Woolsey, and Dennis Ross addressed The Washington Institute's 2008 Soref Symposium. Natan Sharansky is a former Israeli minister and human rights advocate. Itamar Rabinovich is a former Israeli ambassador to the United States and former chief Israeli negotiator with Syria. James Woolsey is the former director of central intelligence. Dennis Ross is counselor and Zeigler distinguished fellow at the Institute. The following is a rapporteur's summary of their discussion.

Institute executive director Robert Satloff asked the panel to elaborate on whether common interests or shared values are more important in sustaining the U.S.-Israeli relationship. Itamar Rabinovich cited three recent books, John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt's *The Israel Lobby*, Jimmy Carter's *Palestine: Peace not Apartheid*, and Michael Scheuer's *Marching Toward Hell: America and Islam after Iraq*, as just a few examples of the attempt to delegitimize both aspects of the partnership.

To counter that vision, Rabinovich proposed reaching out to young Americans who might be ignorant of the moral values common to the United States and Israel. Regarding shared interests, he stressed the need for an American-led allied coalition against an increasingly dangerous and bellicose Iran. James Woolsey emphasized that both the United States and Israel face two fundamentalist ideologies bent on their total destruction: Ahmadinezhad's apocalypticism and extreme Wahhabism. He said that in order to ensure the safety of both countries, dependence on oil and fossil fuels must be eliminated.

Natan Sharansky addressed Israel's moral and strategic value by asserting that any compromise to "evil" will ensure failure, making strategy and morality inextricably linked. Morally, Israel shares beliefs in democracy and national identity with the United States, and is strategically at the forefront of the war against fundamentalism. Dennis Ross seconded Sharansky's view that strategic and moral values are intertwined, proposing that a historical analysis of U.S. foreign policy reveals that values sustain policy, and that policies at odds with American sense of morality will be abandoned quickly. Furthermore, since Israel faces the same enemy as the United States, a weakened Israel does not help those opposed to fundamentalism.