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## Perhaps It Is Time For The U.S. To Reconsider Its Partnership With Israel

By Scott Ritter

12/17/07 " **Antiwar**" -- --- I have for some time now publicly articulated my sympathy and support for the state of Israel, even while criticizing those cases that I believed constituted poor judgment and bad policy. My stance was based upon my past experiences with Israel, which began indirectly in 1990-1991 when I was involved in counter-SCUD activities during Operation Desert Shield/Desert Storm, and continued in a much more direct fashion as a weapons inspector with the United Nations Special Commission (UNSCOM), charged with disarming Iraqi weapons of mass destruction.

As a weapons inspector I made numerous visits to Israel for the purpose of coordinating with the Israeli intelligence community on matters pertaining to Iraqi WMD. I was greatly impressed not only with the professionalism of the Israeli intelligence services, but also with the Israeli people and society. During my time in Israel, I was witness to numerous horrific events, including several terrorist bombings and the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin. The resilience of the people of Israel in absorbing these blows yet continuing to live life to its fullest was remarkable, and worthy of admiration.

As a firsthand witness to the remarkable vigor of the Israeli state and its people, and as someone who considers himself to be their friend, it saddens me to see just

how poorly the current Israeli government returns this friendship, not to me personally, but to my country, the United States of America. The government of Prime Minister Ehud Olmert has embarked on policies that are questionable at best when one examines them from a purely Israeli standpoint; they are nothing less than a betrayal of the United States when examined from a broader perspective.

The insidious manner in which the current Israeli government has manipulated the domestic political machinery of the United States to produce support for its policies constitutes nothing less than direct interference in the governance of a sovereign state. The degree to which the current Israeli government has succeeded in this regard can be tracked not only by the words and actions of the administration of President George W. Bush and the American Congress, but also by the extent to which a pro-Israel lexicon has taken hold within the mainstream media of the United States. Witness the pro-Israel bias displayed when discussing the situation in southern Lebanon, the air strike in Syria, or the Iranian situation, and the retarding of any effort toward a responsible discussion of anything dealing with Israel becomes apparent.

One would expect such efforts to shape the domestic public opinion of a state deemed hostile, but when the target of these Israeli actions is its ostensible best friend, one must begin to question whether or not the friendship is a one-way street. And if this is indeed the case, then perhaps it is time for the United States to reconsider its decades-old policy of strategic partnership with Israel.

It must be understood that the government of Ehud Olmert is acting in a post-9/11 environment, with considerable facilitators in the administration of President Bush, including the vice president. These two factors combine to create a cycle of enablement that allows a purely Israeli point of view to dominate American policy. If the Israeli point of view were built on logic, compassion, and the rule of law, then this tilt would not constitute a problem. But the Israeli point of view is increasingly constructed on a foundation of intolerance and irresponsible unilateralism that divorces the country from global norms. In this day and age of nuclear nonproliferation, the undeclared nuclear arsenal of Israel stands as perhaps the most egregious example of how an Israel-only standard destabilizes the Middle East. It is the Israeli nuclear weapons program, including its strategic delivery systems, that is the core of instability for this very volatile region.

The statements by Israeli officials concerning the recent National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) on Iran and its nuclear program are perhaps the best manifestation of this reality. Avi Dichter, Israel's public security minister, has condemned the NIE as a flawed document, and in terms that link the American analysis to a cause-and-effect cycle that could lead the Middle East down the path of regional war. Like many Israelis, including the prime minister, Dichter disagrees with the

American NIE on Iran, in particular the finding that Iran ceased its nuclear weapons program in 2003. The Israelis hold that this program is still active, despite the fact that the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has reached a conclusion similar to the NIE's based upon its own exhaustive inspection activities inside Iran over the past five years.

In threatening the world with war because America opted for once to embrace fact instead of fiction, Israel, sadly, has become like a cornered beast, lashing out at any and all it perceives to threaten its security interests. The current Israeli definition of what constitutes its security interests is so broad as to preclude any difference of opinion. Israel's shameless invocations of the Holocaust to defend its actions not only shames the memory of those murdered over 60 years ago, but ironically dilutes the impact of that memory by linking it with current policies that are cruel and intolerant. The message of Holocaust remembrance should be "never again," not just in terms of the persecution of Jews, but in terms of man's inhumanity to man. The birth of the Israeli state, as imperfect and controversial as it was, served as a foundation for the pursuit of tolerance. However, Israel's current policies, rooted in ethnic and religious hatred, are the antithesis of tolerance.

Israel at present can have no friends, because Israel does not know how to be a friend. Driven by xenophobic paranoia and historical grievances, Israel is embarked on a path that can only lead to death and destruction. This is a path the United States should not tread. I have always taken the position that Israel is a friend of the United States, and that friends should always stand up for one another, even in difficult times. I have also noted that, to quote a phrase well known in America, friends don't let friends drive drunk, and that for some time now Israel has been drunk on arrogance and power. As a friend, I have believed the best course of action for the United States to take would be that which helped remove the keys from the ignition of the policy vehicle Israel is steering toward the edge of the abyss. Now it seems our old friend is holding a pistol to our head, demanding that we stop interfering with the vehicle's operation and preventing us from getting out of the car. This is not the action of a friend, and it can no longer be tolerated.

It is time for what those who are familiar with dependency issues would term an intervention. Like a child too long spoiled by an inattentive parent, Israel has grown accustomed to American largess, to the point that it is addicted to an American aid package that is largely responsible for keeping the Israeli economy afloat. This aid must be reconsidered in its entirety. The day of the free ride must come to an end. The United States must redefine its national security priorities in the Middle East and position Israel accordingly. At the very least, American aid must be linked to Israeli behavior modification. The standards America applies to

other nations around the world when it comes to receiving aid must likewise apply to Israel.

Let there be no doubt: Israel and its considerable lobby of supporters here in America will scream bloody murder if their aid is trimmed in any fashion. But in the greater interest of what will best benefit the security interests of the United States, and indeed the Middle East and the entire world, the grip Israel has on American policymaking must come to an end. It is up to the American people to make this change, first and foremost by recognizing that a real problem exists in American-Israeli relations, then by electing officials to Congress who will deal responsibly with these problems based not on the behind-the-scenes lobbying of Israel and its proxies, but rather the legitimate interests of the United States.

If Israel decides it wants to be our friend, then it will change its behavior accordingly. Absent this, America has no choice but to declare its independence from a relationship that has destroyed our credibility around the world and drags us dangerously down the path toward another irresponsible military misadventure in the Middle East. If, in the future, Israel desires to reestablish a relationship with the United States built upon the principles of mutual trust and benefit, then so be it. Such a relationship is something I could embrace without hesitation. But one thing is certain: no such friendship can truly exist under the conditions and terms that are in place today, and for that reason the entirety of the American-Israeli relationship must be reexamined.