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The United States and Israel:
Tradition and Transcendence

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1 **[Begin Michael Oren]**

2 Thank you so much for that warm introduction Bob and thank you for assuring
3 me before I got up here--don't be nervous because a billion Chinese won't care how I
4 speak tonight. What you don't know is my father is out there somewhere.

5 Good evening everyone; what a great privilege and honor it is to be addressing the
6 plenary of this cutting edge and courageous organization. A year ago--thank you--a year
7 ago today, hard to imagine, two of America's preeminent scholars, Stephen Walt of
8 Harvard and John Mearsheimer of the University of Chicago published an 80-page paper
9 entitled *The Israel Lobby*. And in this paper Walt and Mearsheimer alleged that since
10 1948 the cornerstone, the centerpiece of American foreign policy in the Middle East has
11 been unequivocal support for the State of Israel, and that the support for the State of
12 Israel has led to a great diversion in America's search for interest in the Middle East and
13 has led America away from its inherent interest in supporting the regimes of Iran and of
14 Syria, of organizations like Hezbollah and Hamas which of course bear no inherent
15 animus toward the United States and its people.

16 Support for Israel, Walt and Mearsheimer allege is the handiwork of an Israel
17 lobby of which this organization AIPAC is only a small component. The *Israel Lobby* in
18 the description of Walt and Mearsheimer embraces virtually the entire American media
19 including the *Wall Street Journal* and the *New York Times*. All of the research institutes
20 in Washington from the right of center, American Enterprise Institute to the Brookings
21 Institute, left of center. The *Israel Lobby* includes virtually all evangelical Christians in
22 this country, almost all Orthodox Jews, any American Jew who has ever had a role in

23 foreign policy making toward the Middle East irrespective of his or her political
24 affiliation or orientation.

25 Now 40-pages of this paper are dedicated to footnotes and I'll tell you as a
26 scholar, 40-pages is an inordinate amount of footnotes. What is truly extraordinary is that
27 in all of these footnotes there are many, many references to august works of Middle
28 Eastern scholarship by Noam Chomsky and Norman Finklestein. But there is not one,
29 and I stress not one reference to a declassified document of American foreign policy and
30 not far from here at the United States National Archives you will find hundreds of
31 thousands of declassified documents that will attest to the true centerpiece of American
32 foreign policy in the Middle East since 1948 and it is not unequivocal support for the
33 State of Israel. It is of course--oil.

34 But Walt and Mearsheimer's piece overlooked an even more essential source for
35 understanding America's policy toward the Middle East and that is the opinions of the
36 people of the United States. And if you go to one of the most recent polls taken by the
37 Gallop Organization which is not included in the *Israel Lobby* according to Walt and
38 Mearsheimer you will see that upwards of 70-percent of the people of the United States
39 admire the State of Israel and support a continued and robust alliance between Israel and
40 the United States.

41 Now how can you possibly explain this overriding support for this alliance
42 between Israel and the United States? Well according to Walt and Mearsheimer this must
43 be the influence of evangelical Christians and it must be the influence of American Jews,
44 but the fact of the matter is about one-fifth of the population of this country can be
45 defined as evangelical Christians, woefully less than three-percent are American Jews;

46 how then can you account for the remaining 50-percent? And to understand that deep-
47 seated support one has to go beyond the documents of the National Archives, beyond the
48 pages of the *Wall Street Journal* and even the *New York Times*. One has to go back 400
49 years nearly to that day when the first buckled shoe alighted on a rock off the
50 Massachusetts shore and the owner of that shoe, a gentleman by the name of William
51 Bradford made an extraordinary declaration--*come let us declare the word of the Lord in*
52 *Zion* he declared. What did Bradford mean by that? This was Plymouth; this wasn't Zion.
53 To understand what he means you have to understand that he was a Puritan; he had come
54 with 101 of his followers from England where the Puritans had endured just unspeakable
55 oppression at the hands of the State Church. And in an effort to find a model to help them
56 overcome their suffering the Puritans looked back into their Bible; they looked first at the
57 New Testament and didn't find it and then they looked further back into the books of
58 what they called the Old Testament. And there they found something extraordinary; they
59 found a God who spoke directly to his people in their language and he made them a
60 promise. He promised to rescue them from exile and to restore them to their Holy Land
61 and to their statehood. And the Puritans loved this story and they embraced it; they began
62 to look at themselves as the new Israel, the new Jews. England became the New England-
63 -new Egypt. The Atlantic Ocean became the new Sinai Desert and they escaped bondage
64 in this Egypt and they crossed that expanse and they landed in a new world which was to
65 them the new Promised Land. And they proceeded to give 1,000 Biblical names to their
66 cities and towns; they gave Biblical names to their sons and daughters--the David(s) and
67 the Isaac(s) and the Rebeccah(s) and the Sarah(s) and the Benjamin(s). They made
68 Hebrew a mandatory language at all of their universities. Do you know that James

69 Madison was a Hebrew major at Princeton? They put--they put Hebrew in the logo of
70 Yale, Hebrew in the logo of Dartmouth and Columbia and so deep was the identification
71 of the new Jews with the old Jews of the Old Testament and with the old Promised Land
72 that the conclusion of the American Revolution when there was a debate over what was
73 to be the great seal of this new nation, one group proposed that the seal show an
74 American Eagle clutching 13 arrows in his talons, one for each State. But another
75 important group of American policy makers suggested that the seal should show Moses
76 leading the children of Israel out of bondage and into the Promised Land. And it was a
77 hotly contested vote in Congress; America came this close [*Gestures*] from having Moses
78 as its national symbol. That seal designed--that seal of Moses leading the children of
79 Israel out of Egypt into the Promised Land was designed by Thomas Jefferson and by
80 Benjamin Franklin.

81 Now many of these Puritans and their descendants--descendants in feeling that
82 they were the new Jews, they felt a sense of kinship with the old Jews. Essentially the old
83 Jews were [Inaudible] and they felt a strong attachment to the old Promised Land then
84 known as Palestine, part of the Ottoman Empire, and many of these Puritans and their
85 descendants concluded that as good Christians and as good Americans it was their duty to
86 help God fulfill his Biblical promises to the Jews to rescue them from exile and restore
87 them to sovereignty in their Holy Land. Thus was born the notion of restorationism,
88 which became a remarkably prominent idea in late 18th Century and 19th Century
89 America. Elias Boudinot, the President of the Continental Congress wrote a book in
90 which he predicted that when the Jews returned to their Holy Land they would make their
91 desert bloom like a rose, a hundred years before Ben Gurion said that. John Adams, the

92 second President to the United States said that it was his most ardent wish that 100,000
93 Jewish soldiers as well disciplined as the French Army--that is the French Army back
94 then--would march back into Palestine and reclaim it as a Judean kingdom. Perhaps the
95 most--the most extraordinary expression of the restorationist idea appeared in a book
96 published in 1844 called *The Valley of The Visions* and *Valley of the Visions* called on the
97 United States government to spearhead an international effort to detach Palestine from
98 the Ottoman Empire and to give it back to the Jews as a State.

99 *The Valley of the Visions* became an antebellum bestseller; it sold about 1,000,000
100 copies and the author of that book was the Chairman of the Hebrew Department of New
101 York University and his name was Professor George Bush, who was a direct descendant
102 of two--direct forebear rather of two later American Presidents by the exact same name.
103 Asked in 1863--asked in 1863 what he thought of the idea of restoring their--the Jews to
104 their ancient land, Abraham Lincoln said *the idea of restorationism he recognized was*
105 *cherished by a great many Americans* and he, Abraham Lincoln, personally hoped to help
106 realize that dream once America restored its unity after the Civil War.

107 For some Americans though merely dreaming of the restored Jewish State was
108 insufficient and starting in the 1830s groups of American Christians left the United States
109 and moved to Palestine including a great number of American women by the way,
110 Clarinda Minor from Philadelphia, Harriet Livermore from here in Washington, DC--they
111 moved to Palestine all with the same remarkable goal of teaching the Jews how to farm.
112 These are good Jeffersonian Americans; Jefferson believed that the basis of any viable
113 modern State is an agrarian economy and these Americans understood that the Jews had
114 been exiled for 2,000 years and had forgotten how to farm. And they felt it was their duty

115 to reacquaint the Jews with agricultural life so the Jews could then form a modern State.
116 And so these Americans moved in and they created agricultural colonies in Palestine in
117 1855. Philip Dixon from Groton, Massachusetts with his wife and twin daughters moved
118 to an abandoned hillside outside of Jaffa that they christened Mount Hope and the Dixon
119 daughters married two Lutheran German teachers, also brothers named Frederick and
120 Johan Rostenbach and together they sought to teach the Jews how to farm to make this
121 colony thrive and they suffered terribly from starvation and deprivation and disease. In
122 the December of 1856 the Dixon colony received a rather august visitor in the form of
123 Herman Melville who had come to Palestine because his previous book *Moby Dick* had
124 sold a mere 3,000 copies and he was looking for a new source of inspiration for his next
125 novel and Melville visited this colony and he was overwhelmed by the depth of these
126 commitments of these American Christians to try to teach the Jews how to farm. And a
127 month after he visited this colony the Dixon colony was attacked by Arab bandits and
128 Philip Dixon was knocked mortally on the head. His wife and two daughters were
129 brutally and repeatedly raped. Frederick Rostenbach was shot in the groin and died an
130 agonizing and slow death and the only person to emerge unscathed from this attack was
131 Johan Rostenbach whom according to inaudible records at this point left Palestine to
132 move to California to prospect for gold and there he Americanized his name. Melville
133 would write about the rape of the Dixon colony in his 24,000 line [inaudible] but so too
134 would Johan Rostenbach's grandson who alluded to it in his Biblical and ethic novel *East
135 of Eden* and he alluded to it again in his other ethnic Biblical novel *Grapes of Wrath*.
136 John Steinbach's grandfather had--had lunch with Herman Melville in Palestine in 1856
137 in a colony dedicated to recreating the Jewish State and still the Americans came. In 1866

138 George Adams from Indian River, Maine left Maine with 156 of his followers to create
139 another colony outside of Jaffa, dedicated to the recreation of a Jewish State and they too
140 suffered from disease; they died by the dozens. A year later, 1867 the 47 survivors of the
141 Adams colony were evacuated from Palestine aboard a steamship called the Quaker City
142 that was carrying another aspiring American author then too to be known as Mark Twain.
143 And he writes about the plight of these dedicated Americans in the last chapter of his
144 famous book *Innocence Abroad*.

145 So moved was Mark Twain by his experience in Palestine that later in the century
146 when he visited Vienna Mark Twain made a point of making a lunch engagement with
147 the founder of the newly declared Zionist Movement. His name was Theodore Herzl.
148 Mark Twain had lunch with Theodore Herzl in Vienna and Mark Twain was so taken
149 with Theodore Herzl that he offered to translate Herzl's Zionist play *The New Ghetto* for
150 production on the Broadway stage.

151 Meanwhile back in America restorationism remained just as an immensely
152 popular movement. Again one of the great expressions of the restorationist idea occurred
153 in 1891 in a petition filed with the White House of Benjamin Franklin by a--by a
154 Midwestern mogul named William Blackstone and Blackstone called on the US
155 government to spearhead an international conference with Queen Victoria of England and
156 the Czar of Russia to present the Ottoman Empire with a fait accompli--give up Palestine
157 and give it back to the Jews and this petition was signed by 400 Americans--not people
158 from the periphery. It was signed by John D. Rockefeller; it was signed by Charles
159 Scribner, the head of the Publishing House; it was signed by Jay Pierpont Morgan and it

160 was signed by a Congressman named William McKinley, later to become President of the
161 United States.

162 Conspicuously missing from the signatories are large numbers of American Jews.
163 American Jewish population grew from 1865 to 1914 to about 3,000,000 people; very
164 few of them were involved or even interested in Zionism. They were interested
165 acclimating into their new homeland. In fact, a rare exception--in 1884 was Emma
166 Lazarus, the poetess, the Jewish poetess who had inscribed that new colossus poem on
167 the pedestal of the Statute of Liberty. Emma Lazarus created the first American Jewish
168 Zionist Organization and attracted very few followers. She really died quite frustrated
169 with that experience. And by 1912 out of these 3,000,000 Jews only 12,000 are members
170 of the American Zionist Federation.

171 But the American Zionist Federation was extraordinarily fortunate in having a
172 President by the name of Louis Brandeis. You all know Louis Brandeis; he came from a
173 very assimilated background in Kentucky; didn't know much about his Jewish heritage
174 but he was an extraordinarily--immensely popular and successful lawyer and--but in a
175 chance meeting with the Zionist editor in 1908 converted Brandeis overnight to Zionism
176 and four years later he is the head of this Zionist Federation and Zion--and Brandeis was
177 also very involved in the Democratic Party and among the people he met while he was in
178 the Democratic Party was an aspiring Princeton Professor who later became the Governor
179 of New Jersey and in the same year as that--that Brandeis became the President of the
180 Zionist Federation he became the President of the United States and his name was
181 Woodrow Wilson.

182 Now Wilson was the grandson, the son, and the nephew of a Presbyterian
183 minister. He had imbibed this restoration idea literally with his first milk and that
184 ingestion became crucial in 1917 when American joined World War I and Britain sent its
185 Foreign Minister for talks in Washington and his name was Arthur Balfour, the last of the
186 great British restorationists. And Balfour had tried to convince the British government to
187 issue a statement in which--that--that said that once the British forces had defeated the
188 Turks in Palestine the British government would view with favor the creation of a Jewish
189 national home in Palestine. And he met with almost universal opposition in the British
190 government; they said why do we need this statement like this for? We have hundreds of
191 millions of Muslims in our Empire. If we come out and favor the Jews they'll all revolt.
192 And Balfour hoped that if he could convince Wilson to support this statement the British
193 government would follow suit. And Balfour came to Washington and he was woefully
194 disappointed. He met with American officials and they all said the same thing; we do not
195 want to alienate the Arabs. We have burgeoning oil interests in this area; we're not going
196 to support this Zionist Proclamation. And in frustration Balfour turned to Brandeis, the
197 good friend of Woodrow Wilson and Brandeis said do not worry; leave it to me and on
198 May 10th 1917 Brandeis went into the Oval Office for a 40-minute meeting with Wilson
199 and emerged with Wilson's approval for this statement. And as a result the British
200 government was convinced and in November they indeed issued what became known as
201 the Balfour Declaration expressing the British Empire's support for the creation of a
202 Jewish national home in Palestine, which in turn became the basis of the British mandate
203 in Palestine, which in turn became the basis of the 1947 UN Partition Resolution creating
204 the Jewish State in Palestine--all because going back to the approval of Woodrow

205 Wilson. And asked why he went against the advice of his Senior Counselors and gave
206 this approval, Wilson had a one-word--one-line response. He said *to think that I the son*
207 *of the manse would have the opportunity of restoring the Jewish people to this Holy*
208 *Land--Woodrow Wilson.*

209 The Holocaust, the Partition Resolution, the Jewish State was set to come into
210 being on May 14th 1948; it was the greatest single test of the restorationist idea in
211 America. Prior to that date the entire American foreign policy establishment, the State
212 Department, the Defense Department, the Pentagon--to a man--came to the White House
213 and warned that if the United States recognized this Jewish State it would affect a global
214 catastrophe. The Arabs would go over to the Soviet side in the Cold War; there would be
215 a cut-off of oil to the West; Europe would fall to the communists. All of these warnings
216 were presented to the President Harry Truman on May 12th 1948; the most [inaudible]
217 man of his generation, Secretary of State George Marshall said *Mr. President if you*
218 *recognize this Jewish State, I, George Marshall, will not vote for you in the 1948*
219 *Presidential Election.* Harry Truman who had a strict Baptist upbringing who had
220 memorized the Bible by age 14, had--had a best friend is a Jew--Eddie Jacobson and had
221 been a member of a restorationist committee; he listened to these warnings and then
222 closed himself into the White House for 48 hours--uncharacteristically. He wrote nothing
223 in his diary; all we know is that on May 14th 6:11 p.m. Harry Truman came out 11-
224 minutes after Israel declared its independence and made the United States the first nation
225 on earth to recognize the recreated Jewish State.

226 Why would he do this? We don't know; all we know is that several weeks later he
227 was introduced to a group of visiting American dignitaries as the President who helped

228 create the State of Israel and Harry Truman got very insulted. He said *helped create the*
229 *State of Israel? Helped--create the State of Israel? I'm Cyrus he said--I'm Cyrus--Cyrus*
230 of course being the Persian King who restored the Jewish people in the Bible to their
231 ancient homeland. *I'm Cyrus*. Since 1948 we have had Presidents in the White House
232 who have been very warm in their relationships with the State of Israel, some less so; but
233 what has been consistent throughout as you saw in this film this evening--what has been
234 consistent throughout is the fundamental support for Israel's right to defend itself and
235 even more basic than that--the right of the Jewish people to have this sovereign State, to
236 maintain it and defend it in their ancient and Biblical homeland. And we know that faith
237 plays a role in that--that America, the most faithful nation on earth, more people attend
238 the House of Worship in this country than any other modernized State; we know faith
239 plays a role. We know that Lyndon Johnson's grandfather told him that if he ever
240 abandons the State of Israel the world would come to an end and we know that Bill
241 Clinton's Pastor who was the surrogate father told him on his deathbed never to abandon
242 the State of Israel. He made him promise; it was his dying wish. We know too that faith is
243 only one component in the American Israel alliance that the fact that Israel is a
244 democracy struggling to survive in this profoundly undemocratic environment also plays
245 a paramount role in the affection and admiration which Americans harbor for the State of
246 Israel.

247 Now all of this means nothing to Walt and Mearsheimer--nothing at all but alas
248 Walt and Mearsheimer's insidious thesis is not confined even to academia; it is spread
249 throughout the media; now a leading American publishing house, Farrar, Straus, and
250 Giroux has offered them a three-quarter of a million dollar contract to a [inaudible] 80-

251 page paper to a full-length book and is expected to sell 1,000,000 copies following on the
252 immense success of Jimmy Carter's book which basically has the same thesis and which I
253 had the privilege frankly of knocking off the *New York Times Bestseller List* last week.
254 Thank you.

255 Be that as it may it is insufficient. All of us supporters of this crucial alliance
256 between Israel and the United States must bind together Jews and non-Jews alike and
257 remind Americans at all times of the words of a John Adams, the words of Abraham
258 Lincoln, of Woodrow Wilson and Harry Truman--to explain to them that this brave
259 organization AIPAC is not merely a lobby for Israel; it is first and foremost an advocate
260 for America and it is an--it is an expression of a nearly 400-year long tradition in which
261 the idea of a United States is virtually indivisible and inseparable from the idea of a
262 recreated Jewish State. It is the embodiment of a conviction as old as this nation itself
263 that belief in the Jewish State is tantamount to belief in these United States. Thank you.
264 **[End Michael Oren]**