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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

'America's ultimate ally'

WASHINGTON (Feb. 26) -- Michael Oren, Israel's ambassador to the United States, says that support for Israel among the American public is at the highest it's been since the first Gulf War. But the reasons that the relationship between the two countries has always been special are simple, Oren told The American Legion during the organization's Washington Conference Monday.

Similarities between the two countries in four key areas – spirituality, government, military and commercial – are what have brought the two countries together for decades and what keeps the relationship as strong as it is, Oren said.

"Since 1948, the spiritual connection between Israel and America has been very deep," said Oren, who was born in the United States to a career military officer and later served as an officer in the Israel Defense Forces. "This is the most religiously observant country in the industrialized world. More Americans attend a church every week, or a mosque or a synagogue than in any other industrialized country, and spirituality plays a big role in the formation of American foreign policy. (Religion) has been instrumental in the background of many American presidents who come from faith-backed backgrounds to have a very strong connection to (Israel). That's true for a great chunk of the American people as well."

The fact that Israel is a democracy also solidifies the bond. "(Israel) is the only functioning democracy in the entire Middle East," Oren said. "We have assured rights. We have a representative government. We have a separate judiciary. We have a declaration of independence which draws its language directly from the (U.S.) Declaration of Independence. We have a country where nobody is above the law.

"Israel is the only country in the Middle East that has a memorial for 9/11. It's the only country in the Middle East that has a memorial for John F. Kennedy. We have a memorial for Martin Luther King in Jerusalem, and we actually commemorate Martin Luther King Day in Israel. We have not one, but two exact replicas of the Liberty Bell."

A military alliance that took shape in the 1960s is, "greater and deeper than any military alliance America has had with any foreign nation in this post-World War II period," Oren said. That includes the selling of U.S. arms to Israel, as well as a strong working relationship between the intelligence communities in both countries.

The final piece to the relationship puzzle, Oren said, involves the commercial side of things.

"Israel is America's 20th-largest customer in the world," he said. "We've surpassed Argentina, Russia, Spain (and) Ireland. We're the 12th-largest export destination. We're a high-tech giant. We have more start-up companies than any country in the world except the United States. Israel is a major commercial partner of the United States.

"Does this mean we agree all the time? Guess what – we don't. All the disagreements notwithstanding... our positions are far closer today than any time in the past."

That relationship will continue into the future, Oren pledged.

"We are in a profoundly unstable period in the Middle East," he said. "There is turmoil

throughout our entire region. In the face of all of this chaos, there's one country that is stable, that is secure, that has a citizens' army... that's larger than the British and French armies combined. We have a robust economy. We have a democracy that has never known a second of non-democratic rule.

"And we are a country that is unequivocally, unreservedly, unabashedly pro-American. You will never see an anti-American demonstration in the streets of Israel. Israel is not just America's ally. Israel is America's ultimate ally, and we're going to stay that way."

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