



Relations between Israel and its staunchest ally, the US, have suffered a "tectonic rift", according to Israel's ambassador to Washington. Michael Oren briefed Israeli diplomats on the sharp deterioration between the countries ahead of Israeli prime minister Binyamin Netanyahu's visit to the White House early next month.

According to those present, Oren said the situation had moved beyond a crisis that eventually passes. "There is no crisis in Israel-US relations because in a crisis there are ups and downs," he told the diplomats in Jerusalem. "Relations are in the state of a tectonic rift in which continents are drifting apart."

His analysis will alarm Israel's political establishment, which is feeling isolated internationally and under intense pressure to take concrete steps over the blockade of Gaza and settlement building in the West Bank.

Oren said President Barack Obama made judgments about Israel on the basis of cold calculation in contrast to predecessors George W Bush and Bill Clinton, who were motivated by historical and ideological factors. He suggested that Obama was less likely to be influenced by pro-Israel supporters inside or outside the White House. "This is a one-man show," he was quoted as saying.

Netanyahu and Obama are due to meet in Washington on 6 July after earlier talks were postponed following Israel's lethal assault on the flotilla of ships attempting to break the blockade of Gaza.

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