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## Let's be partners, Israel's ambassador urges governor

Lots in common: He seeks economic mission from the state; Huntsman will think about it

**By Matt Canham**  
**The Salt Lake Tribune**

You have to start somewhere.

They've got desert. We've got desert.

They were founded by people persecuted for their religion. We were founded by people persecuted for their religion.

And we both have a River Jordan.

Daniel Ayalon, Israeli ambassador to the United States, says such similarities can be the starting point of a vital and lucrative relationship between Israel and Utah.

At the end of his first trip to the Wasatch Front, Ayalon formally invited Gov. Jon Huntsman Jr. to lead a political and economic mission to Jerusalem.

Huntsman said he appreciated the offer but wasn't prepared to immediately accept.

"We are going to give this serious consideration," Huntsman said. "We are going to give some creative thought to a mission that makes sense."

Any such mission would focus on economic ties, particularly in the tourism and high-tech areas. But it would also include discussions about water conservation, culture and education, Huntsman said.

Ayalon believes Israeli and Utah firms should create joint ventures in the fields of cyberoptics, nanotechnology and bioengineering. He believes the states could work together on water conservation issues as well.

"The best platform to encourage this is a mission," Ayalon said at a Capitol Hill news conference Thursday after his meeting with Huntsman and Attorney General Mark Shurtleff.

Shurtleff is a founding member of Utah's new chapter of the American-Israel Friendship League, a nonpartisan, nonsectarian organization that works to strengthen ties between Israel and the United States. Ayalon spoke at the chapter's

### News

[Contents](#)  
[Past Content](#)  
[Photos](#)  
[Obituaries](#)  
[Archives](#)  
[Utah Politics](#)  
[Education](#)  
[RSS Feeds](#)

### Tribune in Iraq

### Closeup

### Columnists

### TribTalk Forums

### Weather

### Sports

[Utah Jazz](#)  
[Real Salt Lake](#)  
[Prep Sports](#)  
[BYU Cougars](#)  
[Utah Utes](#)

### Opinion

[Bagley Cartoons](#)  
[Editorials](#)  
[Commentary](#)  
[Public Forum](#)

### Features

[Film Finder](#)  
[Blogs](#)  
[Arts](#)  
[Travel](#)  
[Home & Family](#)  
[Health & Science](#)  
[Food](#)  
[Dining Out](#)  
[Outdoors](#)  
[The Mix](#)  
[Faith](#)

### Entertainment

### Lifestyle

### Shopping

[Classifieds](#)

Retail Ads  
Cars/RVs  
Real Estate  
Jobs  
Gas Guide  
Education Guide  
Bride Guide  
Utah City Guide  
Hotel Rooms  
Grocery Guru  
Fantasy Sports  
Advertising Info  
Utah Journal of  
Commerce  
Utah Community  
News  
[Utah Holiday Guide](#)

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fundraiser on Wednesday.

Shurtleff, who studied in Israel, said he will push the governor to sign off on a mission.

"I'm very confident it will happen," Shurtleff said.

Ayalon also visited Brigham Young University to urge campus leaders to restart

\_\_\_\_\_ a study abroad program, which stopped sending students to its

Advertisement Jerusalem Campus in 2000 as violence spread throughout the area.

\_\_\_\_\_ "I believe Brigham Young will come back soon," said Ayalon,  
who touted the decrease in suicide bombing and crime in

Jerusalem. "We value very much our relations with Mormons. They are seen as friends and brothers."

But BYU spokeswoman Carri Jenkins said: "We don't have any immediate plans to have students begin to study again at the center. We need to have confidence that the area is safe enough for students to travel in the region surrounding the center."

The center has never officially closed. It remains open to visitors and hosts a weekly concert series.

Shurtleff, along with Democratic state Sen. Patrice Arent, touted the safety in Jerusalem, saying they both visited recently and felt secure in the streets. Arent is the vice president of the National Association of Jewish Legislators.

Ayalon said he never talked to leaders of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints about the church's practice of posthumously baptizing people, which had previously upset some Jewish groups.

He said: "It is not a bone of contention whatsoever."

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 [RETURN TO TOP](#)