

**AIPAC Executive Director Howard Kohr**  
**AIPAC Policy Conference 2008**  
**June 3, 2008**

Listen; listen says the reporter witness to the horror that was Bergen-Belsen and so today together here we listen down the decades. We listen and marvel at what we hear; at a moment of darkness, moment of despair, with people breathing their last even as their liberators came to deliver them, we hear a song of hope, literally Hatikva, a song of yearning for a free people in a free land. Eyes turned from the smoke and suffering, darkness and death, of eyes turned to the east, toward the dream of Zion.

My friends, at this Conference in this year we celebrate the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of that land of hope we now know as Israel.

We date that birth to May 14, 1948, but the hope that gave shape to a new nation--that hope dates to an earlier time; as we've heard again this morning, even at the darkest moments that hope found--found its home in heart and soul. My friends, as we have seen so many times in Israel's first 60 years, our time of celebration is also a time of testing. All of us are being tested today by circumstances that mark any celebration of Israel's existence with questions about Israel's fate and future. Threats from the Hamas, Hezbollah, and Syria, global terrorism and radical Islam, complex negotiations with the Palestinians and the Arab States and Iran; its support for terrorist organizations, its declarations calling for the destruction of Israel, its progress towards the possession of a nuclear weapon--the issues that demand attention as we gather at this Conference are among the most difficult and dangerous we have faced.

And we must face all of these challenges in the midst of the uncertainty that comes with our own elections for a new President and a new Congress. As this Conference makes clear, in this Election year each candidate for President is open to being our friend. Each one has demonstrated his or her commitment to a strong US Israel relationship. And that fact is critical to all of us who together are AIPAC. We are not a debate society or a protest movement; AIPAC works to build friendships with leaders and help them understand the importance of their decisions on issues critical to America and Israel. Our goal is to have a friend in the White House; there is no question on that. But it is equally true that there will be issues and challenges in the coming years. That's a given. The next Administration no matter who is elected, Republican or Democrat will be buffeted by events and pressures that we cannot possibly see today. One thing we can be sure

of, there will be those in the international community and here at home as well who will call for a distancing of America from Israel. That is why it is equally important to remember in this Election year that Congress is our bedrock. The place in the American political spectrum where we have friends who know very well the special relationship that links Israel and America, friends who know the history, friends we can count on and who can count on us. It is our task to build on those bedrock relationships through the elections in November and through our lobbying tomorrow.

We need to make our voices heard on a series of critical issues. First, foreign aid--foreign aid is now moving into budget mode in the first year of a new 10-year commitment to provide Israel with \$30 billion in vital security assistance. In a region where the threats to Israel are growing this is America's commitment to maintaining Israel's qualitative military edge over her adversaries. Israel has many friends who make strong statements about the importance about the US Israel relationship but foreign aid is where rhetoric meets reality.

It is the tangible commitment of the United States to strengthen Israel's security. Tomorrow each of us will be asking our friends in Congress to support this vital assistance and final passage of the entire Foreign Aid Bill. In year one, we need to send a message and set a marker. Israel's security is vital to America's security.

Second, we need to make our voices heard on the issue of Israeli Palestinian negotiations. We support US efforts to help Israelis and Palestinians reach a secure peace, and we need to signal clearly there can be no meaningful peace unless we insure the end of the terror and the dismantling of the terror infrastructure. To do this we must recognize clearly who among the Palestinians are the radicals and who are the moderates? The government of Israel is trying to find a path forward with Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas and Prime Minister Salam Fayyad, two Palestinian leaders who have committed themselves to a negotiated settlement of the conflict. Our policy makers must continue to send a message to the leaders of the Palestinian Authority. Actions not words will be necessary to build the trust on which true peace rests.

That expectation must extend beyond the Palestinians to their supporters in the region. At some time all of those interested in the peace process must hold the Arab States accountable. They, the Arab States, shoulder the responsibility of supporting moderates in the Palestinian camps and urge Palestinian leaders to compromise because this we know is true. Without Arab State support no Palestinian leader, no Palestinian leader will be strong enough to reach an agreement with Israel. Of course there are radical elements who are attempting to undermine those who seek peace. We know the radicals; we know

their names. The Hamas, the Islamic Jihad, al-Aqsa Brigades and others; they do not hide their ultimate goal. They say clearly they are committed to Israel's destruction. Look at the Israeli city of Sderot whose citizens suffer daily through unbearable terror. Our hearts go out to the people of Sderot, but our sympathy is not sufficient. What Israel needs, what the people of Sderot need--is for Americans and for the world to understand and support Israel's right to defend herself.

When Israel fights the Hamas or Islamic Jihad or Hezbollah for that matter, they're working to weaken the radicals and they're helping to create the conditions for a diplomatic process to go forward. Tomorrow we will ask our friends on Capitol Hill to support two letters, one sponsored by House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer and Minority Whip Roy Blunt and the second in the Senate authored by Senators Mary Landrieu and Susan Collins that call on the President to stand with Israel in its right to defend her self.

The letter also calls upon the Arab States to be held accountable; it is time for all Arab States to normalize relations with Israel.

If Egypt and Jordan can be at peace with Israel why can't Qatar and Kuwait?

Finally, there is the issue of Iran. Here we must strengthen the voices who understand that meeting the Iranian challenge requires robust options, options ranging all along the continuum from prevention to deterrence to defense. Hereto we must overcome a misplaced sense in some circles that we are wrong about Iran's ability to act on its nefarious intentions. Too often in Washington complex realities are flattened into a simple story, one that misleads more than it illuminates. Take the national intelligence estimate--banned on front-page stories in November of last year, all the care and all the caveats in the portions of that document eventually put into the public press were reduced to a simple false story that Iran was no longer a danger. My friends, national security policy must be based on more than wish projection; Iran is a growing danger.

To that end we must educate everyone about the very real evidence that Iran has in no way abandoned it--or even moderated its nuclear ambitions and we need to re-instill a sense of urgency that in a world where intelligence assessments will always be imperfect we cannot afford to wake up one morning to a nuclear Iran. So how do we translate this sense of urgency into action? In your meetings tomorrow in the House and in the Senate we will ask members of Congress to support House Concurrent Resolution 362 sponsored by Congressman Ackerman and Congressman Pentz and Senate Concurrent Resolution 580 sponsored by Senators Evan Bayh and John Thune which demands that the Administration use its authority to take three key actions now.

Number one, sanction and sanction now the Central Bank of Iran and the other international banks dealing with prohibited Iranian banks. The progress we have made thus far on financial sanctions have made Iran more dependent on their Central Bank and now that we've come so close to the choke point we need to close off this last avenue of funds that fuel the support for terror in Iran's nuclear ambitions.

Number two, sanction and sanction now foreign energy companies investing in Iran and companies doing business with the Iranian Revolutionary Guard. And number three, the Resolution urges the President to immediately lead an international effort to prevent the export into Iran of refined petroleum products. Gasoline for their cars and trucks--here's the background. Iran may be an oil exporter, but because it lacks refining capability it is a gasoline importer. It depends on imports for around 40-percent of their present refined petroleum needs. How do we know that? Because Iran says so; not long ago Iran's Oil Minister declared that Iran needs to attract \$160 billion in foreign investments to build refineries over the next seven years. Because of our pressure to cut economic ties with Iran they've only attracted a fraction of their needed investment.

Iran's economic dependence gives us huge potential leverage over the Iranian economy to pressure the regime to change its behavior. That is why it is time for new sanctions with more teeth, sanctions with enough bite to create a situation in which we and our allies present Iran with a direct choice. You can have a robust economy for the benefit of your people or you can abandon economic security in your rush to acquire a nuclear weapon. Denying Iran gasoline imports would add real bite to the sanctions already in place.

Now I have spoken to many of you and I know you have a real sense of frustration, of impatience; you have asked me from New York or Los Angeles what more can we do? You wonder is there still more time for our efforts to work. My friends, I understand your concern. But I want to make the case to you today that the path of political and economic sanctions is still the best immediate option. There's still time and this is the key; there is still time to persuade Iran through sanctions that its leader cannot vow to wipe Israel off the map; it cannot promise to visit destruction on Israel and escape the consequences of its actions. Iran has been on its present path for more than 20 years and those of you who are AIPAC veterans know that well. But Iran has encountered problems because of America's leadership; because of America's determination and will their dreams, our nightmares have not yet been realized. But the fact remains, Iran is closer today than ever before to having the power to carry out its name--its aims, so even as we work to build sharper sanctions we

must understand that sanctions are a means to an end and never an end in themselves.

We must communicate forcefully to the Congress, to every Presidential candidate, to international allies and to the outlaw regimes of the world that we are for sanctions that lead to changes in Iran's behavior.

We know we can make a difference. You've proven it in just the last year. A campaign was launched to divest America's pension funds from energy companies doing business with the regime in Tehran and the result--nine out of the twelve States with the largest pension funds have passed laws or policies to divest themselves of close to \$15 billion , a direct result of your efforts and the specific actions of leaders we will hear from shortly.

My friends, we must not lose our determination to stay on this path. Together we must make it clear that we will not rest until Iran changes its behavior. That is our mission and this is our moment--to make the commitment to this cause. It is the mission we must make here our own today as we celebrate Israel's 60<sup>th</sup> year of existence, as we look forward to a future where Israel is free, safe, and secure and when the United States and all our allies no longer face the threat of a nuclear Iran.

With that great goal in mind I just want to take a moment to express our profound gratitude to Congress and to President Bush. President Bush has been a steadfast friend; he has stood by Israel in difficult times and has sent the message that no matter what the United States stands with her ally Israel.

It was a beautiful spring day. A group of us from AIPAC happened to be in Paris. Coincidentally during the State visit of Israel's President Shimon Perez; we came out of a meeting and turned down the street and as we turned the corner onto the Champs Elysees, down the length of that grand boulevard all the way to the Arc de Triomphe I saw something I thought I would never see in my lifetime. There snapping in the spring sun flew the flag of Israel. What seemed like hundreds of them as far as the eye could see that--that image still blows me away. As I took in that scene I realized that those flags stood in sharp counterpoint to the time almost 68 years to the day when darkness descended on Paris. And that same grand boulevard was lined with a different symbol; the hooked cross--Paris like other capitals of other countries had fallen. The Nazis were sure of victory--certain of it; their triumphal march was meant to show the world that the reign of a new Reich had begun. But they underestimated the will of the West, the will to fight for freedom, the freedoms we hold dear. Led by America, the West prevailed. And because of that, today--today there is an Israel.

This is not ancient history. There are people in this room who remember those events because they lived those events. They know in ways the younger among us cannot. What a miracle it was to see Israel born, what a miracle it was to see light emerge from such darkness, what a miracle it was and is to forge from such a past, a future; then as now it was America, through its will and its ideals that came to the defense of people seeking deliverance from terror and a chance to build a destiny of her own. It was America that gave freedom to hope. My friends, remember the Hatikva, the hope. In the voices we heard when I began today, their voices were heard; let us be certain our voices are heard in defense of the ties that bind America and Israel, in defense of faith and freedom, in defense of that most precious gift of all, our future. Thank you very much.