

Senator Joseph Lieberman
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Thank you so much. Thank you, Lonny, for that kind introduction. It's a pleasure to be here among so many friends.

I don't know if I can ever sufficiently thank Lonny and so many of you who stood with me throughout the long journey that was my 2006 re-election campaign.

But trust me. I will try—for as long as God gives me life, and the good people of Connecticut give me the privilege of service.

And besides, now AIPAC can say it not only has bipartisan support. It has tripartisan support.

In the great policy discussions in Washington, I've learned, there are opponents on the one side, and on the other, there are allies, and friends, and then, there is family.

For me and many others, AIPAC is family—united in our shared history, our shared values, and our shared vision for the future. As family, we can talk frankly with each other, and that is what I would like to do with you today.

The fact is we can't afford anything less than honesty at a time like this—a time when, as citizens of America and supporters of Israel, we confront grave and growing dangers to the nations we care so much about.

The threats I am referring to are directed not just against the security of our societies, but against the values that define who we are and who we hope to be.

They are threats to the universal principles of freedom, of democracy, of the rule of law—threats to the fundamental human rights that we believe are not just cherished by, but endowed to everyone on earth.

I do not need to tell you about the nature of these threats. I do not need to tell you about the regime in Iran—about its determination to acquire nuclear weapons, about its sponsorship of terrorism, about its repression of its own citizens.

I do not need to tell you about Al Qaeda and Hezbollah and Hamas—about their addiction to violence, about their pathological hatred of America and Israel, about their ambitions for conquest.

And I do not need to tell you about the fanatical ideology that links these different groups—the ideology of Islamist extremism, a totalitarian ideology as violent and vicious as the fascism and communism we Americans and our allies fought and defeated in the last century.

I do not need to tell you about these threats because you in AIPAC already understand them. That is why you work so hard and so well not just to preserve a strong U.S.-Israeli relationship but to uphold the cause of freedom.

Unfortunately, many in our country today do not seem to share that critical understanding of the threats we face.

Increasingly, the debate over our foreign policy is becoming so polarized, so partisan, so bound up in the battles we are having here in Washington, that it seems blind to the real battle outside of America, the challenge of our time from the Islamist extremists who want to destroy us all, who attacked America on September 11, 2001, and intend to do so again.

In this regard, if I may have a point of personal privilege, as we say in the Senate, I'd like to talk with you about my own experience over the past year.

First, let me again say thank you. Your support helped me win an election, and even more importantly, to continue the fight for the principles and policies we believe in.

I don't think it's any secret that much of my fight for reelection was about the war in Iraq.

Given all the mistakes made in Iraq, all of the setbacks and disappointments, I understand how well-intentioned people have come to disagree about the war.

I also understand the frustration and exhaustion that so many people feel about Iraq, the desire just to throw up our hands and say, "Enough."

But I continue to believe that a withdrawal from Iraq, as many are now urging, would be a victory for Iran and Al Qaeda and the cause of Islamist extremism, and a catastrophic defeat for the United States and all who desire peace and security and freedom in the Middle East and here at home.

We are now implementing a new plan for success in Iraq, with new troops under a new commander. That is why I have called for a six-month truce in the political wars in Washington to give that new plan, those new troops, and that new commander a chance to succeed. And

I call on all who care about security and peace in the Middle East, and security from terrorism here at home, to do the same.

Our fate is now inextricably linked to Iraq's. And our divisions cannot be allowed to become so deep that we cannot find unity in the face of Islamist extremism. Suicide bombers who kill civilians to make a political statement should not be allowed to triumph—in New York or Tel Aviv or Samarra. We must stand strong and united against barbarism—and, with your help, we will.

I understand the anger about Iraq, but I am deeply troubled by how this anger, and the feelings of animosity that many people have for President Bush, have begun to affect the way we talk and think about what is happening in the world beyond Iraq and America's role in it.

There is something profoundly wrong when opposition to the war in Iraq seems to inspire greater passion than opposition to Islamist extremism.

There is something profoundly wrong when there is so much distrust of our intelligence community that some Americans doubt the plain and ominous facts about the threat to us posed by Iran.

And there is something profoundly wrong when, in the face of attacks by radical Islam, we think we can find safety and stability by pulling back, by talking to and accommodating our enemies, and abandoning our friends and allies.

Some of this wrong-headed thinking about the world is happening because we're in a political climate where, for many people, when George Bush says "yes," their reflex reaction is to say "no."

That is unacceptable.

It's time to step back and start thinking together about our national interest again, to say "yes" when we agree and "no" when we don't, and to find ways to disagree without dividing ourselves from one another.

It's time to step back and remember that there is a real enemy out there—an enemy violently opposed to human rights and women's rights and gay rights and the basic political rights of each one of us.

It's time to step back and see that America's interests lie with the interests of free people everywhere, and that the response to radical Islam is not to abandon them but to stand with them—whether they are in Baghdad or Teheran or Jerusalem.

And that is precisely why I believe AIPAC's mission is more important today than ever before. Your organization embodies an ideal that in

the struggle for the defense of freedom, we are not Democrats or Republicans—we are Americans, we are citizens of the same world.

I know some people do not appreciate just how deeply American your organization is. They attack AIPAC as if it were an external force in our body politic—an "Israel lobby."

These people are outrageously wrong. AIPAC is an American lobby, fighting for the best ideals, values, and interests that the United States of America and Israel share.

In supporting the U.S.-Israeli relationship, AIPAC has been internationalist, strong, and nonpartisan. That is precisely what America's foreign policy—and our domestic political debates about it—desperately needs to be right now: internationalist, strong, and nonpartisan—not isolationist, weak, and partisan.

You have an opportunity and an imperative here in Washington this week—to combat the partisanship that threatens to elevate party interests over the national interest—to fight the fallacy that we can withdraw from the fight against radical Islam and make peace by sweet-talking people who shout "Death to America" and call for the destruction of Israel. That has never worked, and it will never work.

I want each of you here today to recognize that you are on the frontlines of this war. It is a war for security but also a war about ideas. In your meetings on Capitol Hill, in your discussions when you return home to your communities across America, I ask you to be proud of what you stand for, of what you are doing, and of the ideas and the organization you represent.

And when you are challenged about your beliefs, do not let the charges go unanswered. Do not shy from this fight. Do not retreat from the battlefield of ideas.

You know that the struggle for freedom is indivisible. You know that freedom itself is indivisible.

That is why we stand united—as Americans, as Israelis, as children of God, as children of freedom.

The esteemed historian of the Middle East, Bernard Lewis, was in Washington this past week. He said that, when he looks at the world today and the threats we face, it reminds him of the 1930s—and that he hears far more voices that sound like Chamberlain than like Churchill.

And so I challenge each of you to find the voice of Churchill inside yourself, and let it be heard this week on Capitol Hill and throughout the nation in the days and years ahead.

Stand up for your arguments. Stand up for your principles. Stand up for your values.

Stand up for America. Stand up for Israel. Stand up for freedom. And have confidence that in the end, our cause will, with God's help, prevail.

Thank you so much.