

**Israeli Vice Prime Minister and Minister of
Foreign Affairs Tzipi Livni
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Ladies and gentlemen, dear friends, it is a great honor for me to be here today. I believe that we are defined – as individuals, as leaders and as nations – by our values and by the choices we make to defend them.

The American-Israeli strategic alliance is a partnership built on common values and not just common interests. In a world where so much is based on narrow interest, an alliance that is founded on shared ideals is unique. This alliance transcends politics. Here, in the U.S., it enjoys bipartisan support. And in Israel – where we love to argue about almost everything – I can assure you that on the American-Israeli relationship you will hear only one voice.

We, the people of Israel, cherish this friendship. Our governments are partners; our peoples are friends - in good times and in bad. We must never take this for granted and – because of that – we will never take AIPAC for granted. Let me say loudly and clearly on behalf of the government and people of Israel: Thank you AIPAC.

The U.S.-Israel relationship is of utmost importance, especially now. We are in the midst of a struggle for the future of the free world. The outcome of this struggle will shape this century and the kind of world we - Americans and Israelis - pass on to our children. The cost has already been painful and our hearts go out to those families who lost their loved ones in this struggle.

Dear friends, there are moments in history where the threats are clear and prevention is possible, but only if we work together. In order to confront threats, we must first identify and understand them. Our world is changing and being divided between moderates and extremists.

Extremist forces seek to transform national conflicts, which are resolvable, into an endless religious war. The extremists are not fighting for their own rights – they are fighting to deprive others of their rights. The extremists use mass media, like Al Jazeera and the Internet, not to promote co-existence but to spread hate. The extremists want to exploit our values – our desire to resolve conflicts peacefully and our tolerance for others.

The Middle East is also changing. Yes, there are threats. We can see the extremists headed by Iran, with its proxy Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in the Palestinian Authority. But there are also

new opportunities. We can see the old divisions of the Middle East being replaced. Israelis, moderate Palestinians, and pragmatic Arab and Muslim leaders are moving into the same camp – sharing the same interests for a peaceful and stable Middle East. We need a dual strategy that empowers the moderates while, at the same time, weakening the extremists.

Ladies and gentlemen, to address extremism is to address Iran. This is a regime which calls for the destruction of a State, a member of the United Nations, Israel - my home. This alone should deny it a place in the community of nations. It is a regime which denies the Holocaust, while threatening the world with a new one. It is a regime driven by a radical religious ideology with the goal of dominating the region, exporting terror, and preventing peace. The Iranian threat is clear not just to Israel and the Western world. Many Arab and Gulf States feel it too. They also cannot afford a nuclear Iran and, believe me, love for Israel has nothing to do with it.

They know, as we do, that even if the Israeli-Palestinian conflict magically disappeared, Iran's radical ideology would remain. And they know, as we do, that there is no path to a stable world, or a peaceful Middle East, that does not involve addressing this threat. The international community must not close its eyes. It must defeat this danger not for Israel's sake, but for its own – for the sake of its own security and for the sake of the values it claims to hold dear. We know that there is much more that needs to be done and time is of the essence.

The initial sanctions on Tehran have had an impact and, as part of our collective effort, they must be strengthened and expanded without delay. And to those States, who know the threat, but still hesitate because of narrow economic or political interests let me say this: History will remember. The free world is being watched. The Middle East is a tough neighborhood. And when there is a bully in this neighborhood there are only two choices, to beat it or to join it.

If states in the region feel that the world will not stop Iran, they may feel the need to appease it. We live in a region where images matter, and where the perception of weakness can have far-reaching consequences. If we appease the extremists – if they feel that we are backing down - they will sense victory and become more dangerous not only to the region, but to the world. This applies to the decisions made on Iran, it is true for Iraq; and it is true across the Middle East. And it is why it is so important for the international community, with American leadership, to project strength, to demonstrate absolute determination in achieving its objectives and absolute commitment to its values.

The international community is also being tested in Lebanon. The goals are clear: to establish an independent Lebanon, which exercises sovereignty over its territory, dismantles militias and enjoys peaceful relations with its neighbors. But Syria, Iran and Hezbollah are determined to prevent this.

Security Council resolutions are clear on the actions that need to be taken. The international forces in Lebanon have brought changes on the ground – but other parts of these resolutions must be implemented fully. The immediate task is to enforce the arms embargo and prevent the ongoing efforts of Syria and Iran to rearm Hezbollah. These illegal weapons destabilize Lebanon, endanger UNIFIL, and threaten Israel. They must not and will not be tolerated.

Most painful for every Israeli is that the hostages Eldad Regev and Ehud Goldwasser remain in captivity. Israel is one family. Eldad and Udi are our sons, and we will do everything, but everything, in our power to bring them home. Our enemies see this desire as our weakness. They are wrong. It is our greatest strength.

Dear friends, when it comes to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, our vision for peace is drawn from the ultimate goal of Israel, the reason for its existence – to be a Jewish and democratic State, secure in our ancient homeland.

We want to live in peace. We have no desire to control Palestinian lives. We deserve security. Our children deserve a future, free of hate and full of hope.

Based on these core principles, the vision of peace is clear: Two States, two homelands, for two peoples – Israel, homeland for the Jewish people wherever they may be. And Palestine, the homeland, the national answer for the Palestinian people, wherever they may be, including the refugees. Two States living in peace and security – the meaning of this is also clear. The future State of Palestine cannot be a terror State. And that is why President Bush's vision and the Roadmap insist that the road to statehood goes through the elimination of terrorism. This is not a zero sum-game. This vision is not pro-Israeli or pro-Palestinian. It is pro-peace.

Israel has made its choice. Across Israeli society we have embraced this vision, and accepted the sacrifices that come with it. The disengagement plan proved this. With great pain, we uprooted families from their homes in order to create an opportunity for peace. Sadly, we received terror in return. And yet, we have not stopped hoping that the Palestinians will make their choice for peace. Unfortunately, in the last elections they chose Hamas, a terrorist organization driven by an extreme religious ideology. Hamas's goal is not to create a Palestinian State, but to destroy the Jewish one.

The international community, through the Quartet, has repeatedly insisted that any Palestinian government must fully commit to three core principles: renunciation of terror, recognition of Israel, and acceptance of previous agreements. These requirements are not obstacles to peace, but fundamental principles for peace.

I believe in dialogue – but there are some things that are not up for negotiation. We cannot and we will not negotiate our right to exist. No-one has the right to do so in our name. We cannot and we will not negotiate about the need to accept former agreements. They are the outcome of tough negotiations and mutual concessions – they are not a menu to choose from. And, of course, we will never negotiate over terror. Israeli lives are not bargaining chips.

This is the test for the Palestinian government as a whole, regardless of its members. We expect the international community to defend the requirements for peace. We expect it to stand against terror, not compromise with it.

Ladies and gentleman, stagnation is not in our interest and is not our policy. This is the reason that despite our disappointment from the Mecca agreement, we have not closed the door to dialogue with the moderates. Just yesterday, Prime Minister Olmert met with Chairman Abbas. But we must understand that the chance for peace depends on a clear distinction between the moderates and the extremists. Being a moderate is a title that has to be earned. A moderate is someone who is ready to confront terror; someone who believes in the two State vision and accepts its true meaning. Israel remains willing to work with the moderates, if they are willing to empower themselves and distinguish themselves from the enemies of peace. This includes undertaking genuine efforts to release of Gilad Shalit – who is in our prayers every day. It includes bringing an end to daily attacks on Israeli homes and the smuggling of weapons across the Gaza-Egypt border. And it includes preparing the Palestinian people for the compromises and historic reconciliation that any true peace will require from both sides.

Dear friends, all of us are eager to see peace in the Middle East. Nobody wants it more than Israel. This is about our lives and the future of our children. Lasting peace is possible if it is built on solid foundations and shared values.

Despite all the challenges, I am optimistic – I can see new opportunities emerging. Moderate and pragmatic leaders are beginning to see Israel not as an enemy of the violent past, but as a partner in a common and peaceful future. The challenge we all face, as leaders in the Middle East, is to say this publicly to our people and to teach it to our children. We are ready to do our part, and we hope our neighbors are ready to do theirs.

And today – from this podium – I call on Arab and Muslim States – those who condition their relations with Israel on the end of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict – not to wait any more. You have the power to change reality, and to encourage Palestinians to embrace co-existence. Do not wait for peace to come before you normalize relations with us – normalize now and peace will come.

Ladies and gentleman, as we say in Hebrew " אין לי ארץ אחרת " – [Ain li eretz acheret] we have no other homeland. We also have no other values. For 60 years we have fought for our existence without compromising our principles, our vision, or our dream for peace. We are moderates by definition - we are not threatening to turn into extremists.

I believe in Israel and am proud to represent it. I am proud of the strength and vitality of our economy. I believe in the courage and innovation of our people. And I believe in the U.S.-Israeli partnership and the values on which it is founded. I know that you feel the same. And the future depends on us.

Thank you.