

Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell
AIPAC Policy Conference 2007
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Well thank you Bubba for that wonderful warm introduction. As Bubba indicated we've been friends for a long time and Israel certainly has no better friend than Bubba Mitchell.

Bubba actually – Bubba and I were both born in Alabama and we – we take – we take more than a mild interest in college football. My Cardinals beat his Crimson Tide in a Bowl Game 16 years ago and I doubt if I'll ever get tired of reminding him of it. We share a mild interest in politics too; they don't come any better than Bubba Mitchell.

For more than half a century the American Israel Public Affairs Committee has worked hard to promote the security and welfare of Israel. It represents Israel's interest with energy and intelligence and always with a deep appreciation for the strong bonds that connect the US with our closest ally in the Middle East. Lawmakers depend on AIPAC for good, honest information and that's exactly what we've gotten.

We admire and share your devotion to the Jewish people and we appreciate the vital role you play in protecting and advancing their rights. In recent years AIPAC has played another important role; it helped America deal effectively with a constant threat of terror and we're grateful for the counsel and friendship and we face this new and difficult challenge. The last time I spoke at this Conference was back in 1988; it was easy for me to remember the year because it was only three years later that my Cardinals beat Bubba's Crimson Tide in the Fiesta Bowl.

That was a joke, Bubba. No; I remember the year and the speech very well because my friend and former law partner, Barney Barnett had just passed away and I remember asking myself what he would have told me to say if he were alive. Barney was Jewish and he was a member of AIPAC and he was a proud son of Kentucky – so proud I once heard him say there's only one race greater than the Jews and that's the Derby.

Now Barney was a plain-spoken guy and his advice would have been blunt, so I figured he would have said something like they don't know you; they'll be suspicious of you; don't go up there and be another politician looking for applause. I took that imagined advice and told him of how this Southern Baptist became so interested in Israel. I talked about growing up in Alabama and how the only Jewish

man in town was Mr. Jaffe and how looking back it was clear to me that Mr. Jaffe was in the same category as the local Republican – singular; unlike most Southern towns back then we actually had a Republican Party but he died when I was eight.

I talked about back in 1988 why – why I would want to speak to AIPAC in the first place; after all there weren't many Jewish voters in Kentucky. I had been to Israel twice – the first time back in '79 – 1979 before I came to the Senate. It was significant because at that point in my life a trip to Nashville seemed like international travel. But as a child I never witnessed bigotry against Jews; I didn't know any. I didn't even know Mr. Jaffe, but the fact is the more I got engaged in politics the better acquainted I became with the issues related to Israel and somewhere along the line I came to understand what people call the Jewish experience. I came to appreciate the pain of being rootless, of being as Chaim Weizmann put it – *a minority everywhere; a majority nowhere*. I came to understand that what Weizmann meant when he said the Jewish people had carried Palestine around in their heads and their hearts – wherever they went.

The whole idea was brought home to me many years ago when someone handed me a newspaper article written by an American Jew. He said something very powerful that stuck with me; he said that at some point no matter how close he was to his non-Jewish friends he couldn't help but wonder would they hide me in the attic. It was a revealing comment and it was unsettling to read. No American should ever have to ask themselves that question. But the fact that Jewish Americans were still asking it – but the fact that the Jewish Americans were still asking it reflected just how painful their history has been.

I knew then that I'd always be an ally of Israel and over the next 24 years – and over the next 24 years I would try to show it in the policies I supported and for more than a dozen years in my work either as Chairman or Ranking Member of the Senate Appropriation Subcommittee on Foreign Operations. It was largely because of the work of that Subcommittee that the Weizmann Institute of Science gave me an honorary doctorate a few years ago; it was a great honor especially for a guy who didn't do all that well in science. And it was a great pleasure to visit Israel again – this time with my great friend and AIPAC stalwart Bob Asher of Chicago.

I remember a real sense of optimism on that trip. Yasser Arafat had just passed away and a lot of us were hopeful that the Palestinian people would embrace a new direction. I was always of the view that Arafat was no friend to America or to Israel and that – and that he was really never interested in peace. Unfortunately last year's Palestinian elections proved that my hopes were misplaced. Hamas emerged as the leading voice in Palestinian affairs and sobered peace-loving people

everywhere. Congress has responded to the new political reality; I was pleased to help lead the charge in the Senate to put pressure on Hamas, to block US aid for Hamas led Palestinian Authority unless it acknowledged Israel's right to exist, committed itself – committed itself to prior agreements, instituted financial transparency and began to dismantle its terrorist infrastructure.

As a result of the Palestinian Anti-Terrorism Act which – which holds the Palestinian-led, the Hamas-led Palestinian Authority to these standards at the condition of US aid so far the Hamas led government has met none of those conditions. It's given no indication that it plans to. Direct foreign aid is not an entitlement and unless the Hamas-led Palestinian Authority meets these basic demands it will not get a dime from us.

And while you're on your feet the so-called Unity Government has to meet the same standards. Our hopes for progress were frustrated again last summer by the Iranian backed aggressions of Hezbollah. The existence of extra governmental groups like Hezbollah and Hamas only make diplomacy between Israel and the countries that border it more difficult. Hezbollah is camped on the border to antagonize Israel. Lebanon has shown neither the will nor the ability to control it and no one should question Israel's right to defend itself from so close and deadly a threat.

Anyone who has been to Israel – and most of you have – knows the danger. I remember visiting an Israeli business on my last trip; you could see right into Lebanon from the roof, but what struck me wasn't the view. What struck me were the armed soldiers keeping watch at lookout posts across the way; they were standing not under the flag of Lebanon but under the flag of Hezbollah. Right there along the border in force was a terrorist group that claimed hundreds of American and Israeli lives. For decades Americans were sympathetic but distant observers of Israel's experience with terror. We were shocked when we visited and saw terrorists lined up along its borders or metal detectors at malls. We shared its grief from a distance when we heard of terrorists slaughtering children in markets and on buses. We were moved when Prime Minister Rabin came to Washington to tell of us the land where parents bury their children. We grew accustomed to the notion that terrorism was distant, accustomed in a way that Israel never could be from the War of Independence to the Suez War from the Six-Day War to the Yom Kippur War from the first Lebanon War to the first and second Intifada, up until the second Lebanon War Israel's history was a period of war interrupted by flashes of peace. Its back was to the wall through all of this and it's shown remarkable resilience against a parade of enemies who seem motivated not so much by a desire for riches or lands as by hatred of the race. We

observed all this from over here and we were astonished and proud to see Israel thrive. The Jewish people have earned the admiration of the world by turning the – their age-old admonition to repair the world on themselves by reclaiming a narrow stretch of arid land that Mark Twain once described as a silent mournful expanse and transforming it in mere decades into a vibrant verdant place through the faith, hard work, and brilliance of its people. Today Israel exports tulips to Holland. And to think that it started from scratch surrounded by enemies, no country has ever come farther faster.

Israel has shown the world that open and democratic people who are sensitive to human losses can defeat fanatical militias with no allegiance to state and no appreciation for life – not even their own and it is in this challenge new to America that our two nations are once again joined. This alliance goes back to the beginning but it's stronger now than ever. America was the first nation to recognize Israel, sealing a bond that grew out of a common form of government, a pioneering spirit, and a shared commitment to religious freedom. That bond deepened as Israel became an open democracy in the heart of a region that had never known one. It deepened further in the Cold War as Israel stood with us and against the Soviet Union and the nationalist regimes that sympathized with it and it deepened further still on 09/11. An alliance once based on shared political and moral values was now cemented by a shared commitment to confront a global movement of Islamic extremists that targeted us both for destruction. Suddenly America found itself asking the same question the Jewish people have asked themselves for a millennia. It's the question of the second psalm, *why do nations conspire against us and the people plot in vain?* We turn to Israel for advice and we've gotten it; Israel's successful efforts to learn from its enemies to infiltrate their networks and learn their languages are a model for us. If done correctly this work will take years but the effects will be worthwhile. As Sun Tzu wrote, *know your enemies and know yourself and you will not be defeated in 100 battles.*

The War on Terror continues and the central front is Iraq. This is what the terrorists themselves have said. Al Qaeda's hope is to force a withdrawal of US troops so as to claim victory just as Hezbollah did last summer after last summer's war with Israel and leaving Iraq to the terrorists would have grave consequences for Iraq, for the region, for Israel and for the world. For the sake of the Iraqi people and their neighbors we must not retreat from this fight.

Iran's support for terrorists in Iraq is well known and the anti-American and anti-Semitic rhetoric of its President is only the latest convergence of interest between America and Israel. Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has made no secret of his plans for regional dominance

and for Israel – its destruction. He closed his recent State sponsored Holocaust denial conference by declaring that the Zionist regime will be wiped out and humanity will be liberated. Anyone who calls the Holocaust a fairy-tale does not intend to recognize the State of Israel and anyone who is sitting on the world's second largest oil and natural gas reserves is not pursuing nuclear technology to heat homes.

He will weaponize it. Churchill said facts are better than dreams. These are the facts; those are his dreams. The last time I spoke to AIPAC Israel was closer to Camp David Accords than America was to September 11th. There was good reason to think peace was possible, maybe even right around the corner, but when Arafat walked away from the Two-State Solution offered him in 2000, after 09/11 we came to see that the antagonists of Israel and the US want more than territory. Those of us who were on Capitol Hill last week were reminded that Israel is not alone among its neighbors in the desire for peace. King Abdullah's speech before a Joint Session of Congress reminded us that there are other constructive voices in the region. Like many of you I admire King Abdullah and I was encouraged by his passionate and urgent appeal for peace. So we remain hopeful and we've become more clear-eyed about the obstacles and mistakes. That 1988 speech was in one way right on target. I pointed out a number of threats to Israel that have only increased with time. But I was wrong about one thing; I was wrong to suggest that the enemies of Israel threaten to sap its strength. The Israelis are nothing if not resilient and in this there is another lesson for America.

And the lesson for America is this; the War on Terror will not be quick. To some it already seems too long. We can learn from the Israelis what it means to be determined in the fight and as we do my hope is that the alliance that has bound us together will become a sign to others that freedom and hope are the greatest weapons against oppression and fear.

Now some see – some see the strong relationship between America and Israel as evidence of a plot. They don't appreciate the bond that connects us. Most Americans support Israel because the qualities they admire in Israel are the qualities they admire in themselves. Openness, courage, resolve – some of the conspiracy theorists go so far as to equate the terrorists with the struggles of Americans during the colonial period. They call terrorism resistance and seek to admire it. But women and children are not slaughtered for a noble cause and people who seek freedom do not rejoice at the death of their own.

George Washington once offered this prayer for the Jewish people in a young America. May the children of the stock of Abraham who dwell in this land continue to merit and enjoy the goodwill of the

other inhabitants while everyone shall sit in safety under his own vine and fig tree and there shall be none to make him afraid. This is the prayer – this is the prayer of Americans still for the Jewish people here and everywhere else. And we feel a crushing sense of responsibility until that prayer is answered. Thank you very much.