

Senator Robert Menendez
AIPAC National Summit 2007
October 29, 2007

Well good afternoon; thank you Lonnie for that kind introduction. I want to thank you and Gail for your many years of service to AIPAC, your outstanding advocacy and your leadership, and that's true of so many fellow New Jersey(ans) I understand are here today and have been at the forefront of AIPAC's work for quite some time. I want to thank Howard Friedman for his strong leadership of the organization over this past time and I want to wish the best to President-elect David Victor as he takes over the mantle as well.

And of course our thoughts and prayers are with the family of Bubba Mitchell. I know we all wish he could still be with us today but we're glad his legacy is still very much alive.

For 15-years as a member first of the House of Representative and now in the United States Senate I have always asked what is in the national interest and security of the United States in determining what my views would be about US foreign policy wherever that policy might be in any part of the world? And when it has come to the Middle East I have always said, Israel--a democracy in a sea of autocracy; Israel--a major trading partner of the United States; Israel--a democracy that keeps all holy sites open to people of all different faiths; Israel--a major security ally in a very unsecure part of the world; Israel--our strategic ally, so yes it is in the national interest and the security of the United States to have a strong unwavering relationship with the State of Israel. And that is the way that I have voted for the last 15-years.

Today you've asked me to speak about the future of that US Israel alliance. When it comes to Israel some people always say that we are at a critical moment and they're right. We are--once again at a critical moment. I believe this very moment we are in is critical--not just because of events on the ground in Israel--because also of events around the world from Iraq to Iran to here at home in the United States of America, which is influencing the large debate about Israel. We all know how rich and diverse the relationship between our nations are--whether you define it in terms of politics, economics, or culture, but today the relationship that I want to talk about is in terms of global security.

First there has been a lot of talk about a renewed peace process; as the Administration begins to reengage in the Arab Israeli peace process I signed onto a letter to Secretary Rice to encourage her to press our moderate Arab allies to be full partners in the process. To that end the letter asks that our moderate Arab allies be thoughtful and committed participants in the Arab Israeli peace conference that is upcoming. But you know, autocratic rule in the Middle East offering no change in the dire economic life of young Arabs, turns the Arab street against Israel in its own shortcomings of its government and in the failures on behalf of its own people. And so part of our challenge

is to move to those countries in a different direction because without these nations acting in full partnership with the United States, the success of the Conference and the peace process itself will be in grave doubt.

Certainly we all want peace and certainly we appreciate the new efforts by the United States and others to encourage that process and I am by nature an optimist, but I am also not a fool. I am deeply concerned that there are those who are for skipping parts of the road map and going directly to final status negotiations or moving without holding the Palestinians accountable for their part of the agreement. I believe taking a detour on the road map is a recipe for disaster. Let's follow the road map and let's have verification accountability for the obligations encountered therein.

And speaking about accountability I believe that it must be a driving theme in all our dealings with the Middle East which brings me to Iran. Iran is far beyond--I say this all the time in any speech I make--Iran is far beyond Israel's problem; it is the world's security problem. And when it comes to Iran--and when it comes to Iran I believe that to achieve a peaceful solution, all options--all options must be on the table. For years Tehran has defied international treaties, broken promises and lied about its nuclear activities and last week was no exception. On Thursday, Iranian President Ahmadinejad dismissed any new UN sanctions resolution as something that was *a torn piece of paper* that would not stop Iran's nuclear work. That's why when Ahmadinejad came a few weeks ago to the United Nations even though I had been in the--invited to be at the UN I was not at the UN listening; I was on the street protesting. I was one of the many thousands--I was one of the many thousands, who said, those who deny the Holocaust, those who deny the right of the State of Israel to exist, those who threaten global security through nuclear confrontation, cannot do so unopposed and that is our obligation.

Our message--our message on Iran must be clear; simply put the United States cannot stand by and allow the regime to acquire a nuclear weapon. That has been my personal message for years going back to when almost a decade ago when Iran really wasn't on everybody else's radar. Then as a member of the House International Relations Committee I found out that the United States and all of us as taxpayers were sending money to the International Atomic Energy Administration in voluntary contributions whose voluntary contributions were going for what--to create operational capacity at the Bushehr Nuclear Facility in Iran. And I led a drive successfully to stop those voluntary contributions from going because it certainly isn't in the national interest and security of the United States to have a nuclear reactor in Iran. And it is not in our interest now for them to be able to achieve nuclear capability.

That was almost a decade ago and today we face a greater challenge than ever before. So I want to take a moment to discuss what we're currently doing and what the next steps of this continuous process must be. In the Senate I have been a strong supporter of the Iran Freedom Support Act which passed last year but I personally believe we can and must do more. There are still loopholes in the--in the law, some that I fought at the time as a member of the Banking Committee but we got the best that we could at that time. There are loopholes from foreign subsidiaries to divestiture which those of us

in Congress need to pursue. As a member of the Banking Committee and in my role as Chairman of the Foreign Relations Subcommittee on all of our international development and foreign assistance I'm going to continue to look closely at our sanctions program against Iran, at the role of Europeans, at the opportunities we have as we give other assistance in the world--what role are they going to play in this process on creating the type of pressure that we need on the Iranians? And that's why creating pressure is something I think we continuously need to do and we need to be forthright in that response. That's why in the Senate I joined with the vast majority of the Senate to name the Revolutionary Guard as a terrorist group. I thought it was important and I believe it is important today.

I know that high on AIPAC's legislative agenda this year were the Iran Counter-Proliferation Act of 2007 and the Iran Sanctions Enabling Act of this year as well; I'm proud to be a co-sponsor of both but here's some of the highlights that I think we need to actively pursue. The Counter-Proliferation Act increases political and economic pressure on Iran in order to persuade the regime to abandon its pursuit of nuclear weapons. It ends Iranian exports to the United States; it freezes Iranian assets and works to isolate Iran from the international banking system. And that part of it I think is incredibly important. I want any entity in the world to understand before they do business that dealing with Iranian banks smells to the high heavens here in the United States, which is the greatest capital market of the world, that there will be problems for those who seek to do so, problems for Iranian banks means a consequence in which the Iranian populous that is dealing with those banks will face and that means a consequence for the regime. We must be incredibly hard in this respect in order to achieve our goals.

And the Sanctions Enabling Act clears the way for divestment from Iran's energy sector. The Act authorizes States and local governments to divest from Iran, creates transparency by requiring the government to publish a list of companies who are large investors in Iran and urges the federal government's retirement savings plan to create a terror-free option. I certainly don't want my--my retirement savings to go to anything else but a terror-free option. So we've co-sponsored both pieces of legislation because we believe that sanctions can make a difference. We look at the recent rebuke by Ayatollah Khamenei and President Ahmadinejad or the recent resignation of Iran's Chief Nuclear Negotiator. Clearly there are internal differences within Iran and we need to exploit and make sure that whatever we can do to make sure the voices of moderation are the ones that come out on top. If we're going to succeed at that we must not only continue the pressure by enforcing our own sanctions program; we must also make sure that others are holding up their end of the bargain. You know we have a challenge in this regard with the Russians and the Chinese; the Russians have economic interests in Iran and they prefer instability in the Middle East because that drives up oil prices and certainly for the way in which Russia is headed with their autocratic rule and working more and more for their types of social programs they need higher oil prices. So they want instability in the Middle East.

The Chinese are insatiable consumers of oil and they obviously have a different set of interests in terms of those oil prices going higher and higher. How we exploit those

and other realities in our relationship especially with a huge trading deficit with China is incredibly important for the Congress to be looking at how do we legislatively respond in such a way and get the Administration to look at both Russia and China in such a way that we look at the differences of their interests as it relates to Iran, where those differences in fact ultimately are in conflict and how do we exploit that to try to achieve our ultimate goal.

My friends, the challenges facing Israel in the security realm are vast. Anyone who has visited Israel as I have on several occasions understands the enormous challenge that it has. I've often told my colleagues who have not traveled to Israel, I've often told many of my fellow brothers and sisters in the Hispanic community who often ask me--why do you support all of that money to the State of Israel and so little to Latin America and the Caribbean? And I've told them how important our relationship is and I've told them if you came to Israel you would understand that you could go from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem in 45-minutes--that its back is against the sea, that ultimately it stands as the only democracy in the sea of autocracy, and it is in our national interest to be supportive of it. These are enormous challenges that we have but we also have out of those challenges an opportunity, an opportunity to build a more peaceful world.

Every chance we get we must remember what these discussions are about; they are about a mother going for a walk with her child in a park in Tel Aviv. They are about musicians playing on Ben-Yehuda Street in Jerusalem. They are about a society confident enough in the future its children and grandchildren will inherit that they plant trees under whose shade they do not expect to sit. It is the same future and the same world we want for our children and for mankind.

I know that Elie Wiesel spoke yesterday and I couldn't help thinking of the teaching of his. He said--*quote--just as despair can come to one only from other human beings hope too can be given to one only by other human beings.* A security strengthened by the hope America can make real, a peace strengthened by the security that we can achieve together--that is what the future of the US Israel alliance must be. We must remember that yesterday is not ours to recover but tomorrow is ours to win or lose. Together we can win a tomorrow of hope and promise and peace. Shalom and thank you for having me with you.