

CONGRESSIONAL LEADERS COMMEMORATE ISRAEL'S 60TH ANNIVERSARY

Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL), Ranking Member, House Foreign Affairs Committee

Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to join with this House today in commemorating a milestone that few would have once thought possible, and in celebrating one of America's most special bilateral relationships.

When the State of Israel was declared on May 14, 1948, some worried whether it would survive for even 6 months in the face of ruthless and relentless war from much of the Arab world. Naysayers worldwide fought against the establishment of a state for the Jewish people, and urged the United States not to recognize any such Jewish state. To our Nation's credit, the United States recognized Israel 11 minutes after it declared independence, leading the way for other responsible nations to follow.

And despite predictions of gloom and doom, and the strongest efforts of its enemies, Israel did not perish. Indeed, Israel has flourished. Israel won three wars of self-defense on multiple fronts. It has survived not merely for 6 months but for 60 extraordinary years. Through it all, Israel has endured. And as the only democracy in the region, Israel continues to be a beacon of hope and a model for her neighbors.

It has been said that the strength of a nation is determined by the caliber of its people. There is perhaps no better example of this truth than the State of Israel and the Israeli people, vivid examples of conviction, of courage, of faith. Indeed, through the blood and the toil and the creativity of its citizens, Israel has grown accustomed to dispelling established wisdom and exceeding expectations.

Israel has proven that democracy, liberty, prosperity and innovation can indeed thrive in the Middle East. Today, Israel is a vibrant democracy where unfettered free speech fills the airwaves, and where Arabs serve in government, and have excelled in business and science.

Israel has demonstrated that desolate areas of the Holy Land can be redeemed, and that the "land of milk and honey" can once again bloom and bear fruit.

Israel has given the world a first-rate high-tech industry that pioneered wi-fi and instant messaging, and a medical industry that pioneered microscopic cameras that can be swallowed in a pill. And Israel has shown that a 2,000-year-old dream, the creation of a state for the Jewish people in their historic homeland, can indeed come true.

Time and time again, Mr. Speaker, Israel has made the impossible a reality. Yet today, Israel once again finds itself besieged in every direction by dangerous regimes like Iran and Syria and by the rapidly arming and violent Islamic groups that those regimes sponsor like Hamas and Hezbollah.

Today, Israelis live in fear, fear of the threat of their very existence represented by the pariah states of Iran and Syria. Innocent blood in Tel Aviv, in Jerusalem, and in other communities is shed regularly as a result of the jihadists from Hezbollah, from Hamas, and other such militant organizations.

Palestinian suicide bombers have struck at crowded bus stops, at hotels and cafes and other civilian targets. And in a little town called Sderot, children play indoors because of Palestinian rockets, and ordinary people face the draining pressure that at any moment a rocket could be launched at them, killing or maiming them or their loved ones.

Mr. Speaker, Israel's existence is indispensable to advancing America's most basic interests and values. For decades, our two nations have successfully collaborated on everything from science and business to defense and homeland security. As America goes forward, fighting for a free and prosperous world and against violent extremist groups who seek our ruin, Israel once again stands with us. And America will and must continue to stand with Israel for the next 60 years and beyond.

I strongly urge my colleagues to support this important resolution.