

Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi
AIPAC Policy Conference 2008
June 4, 2008

Good morning.

Thank you, Amy Friedkin, for that wonderful introduction. Thank you for your tremendous leadership of AIPAC over the years. Thank you for your friendship to me. I'm so proud that Amy is a Californian, and I know there are many Californians here this morning.

And some from San Francisco, too. I know the Lauder family (ph) is here in full force.

It is an honor to be here with Amy, with Howard Friedman from Baltimore, Maryland. Any Marylanders here today?

And I want to join in acknowledging your incoming president, David Victor. Good luck to you, David.

In particular, I want to join the more than 1,200 college students who are here today.

Where are they? We celebrate Israel's founding 60 years ago and pass the torch to all of you to ensure that Israel exists for our grandchildren, for your grandchildren, even further into it, and your grandchildren's grandchildren.

You know, members of Congress are afforded many honors and, as speaker of the House, even more so. But I can think of none that surpasses the honor of being able to lead a bipartisan delegation of members of the House of Representatives to extend on behalf of the Congress of the United States and the American people our greetings and congratulations to Israel on the 60th anniversary of the founding of the state of Israel.

You saw -- I see Jane Harman is here. I know Shelley Berkley is here. She wasn't on the trip, Jane and Sydney (ph), and Sydney (ph), as well.

As you saw in the film, the members who were on the trip, our new chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee, Howard Berman...

But what's important about the trip is that it was bipartisan. And I'm so happy that Leader Boehner mentioned that it was his intention to be on the trip, because he and I had planned it for a long time, but for health reasons he could not come at the last minute.

That is all to say that, in the Congress of the United States, the aisle that divides Democrats and Republicans disappears when it comes to policy that relates to our support for the security of the state of Israel.

As you saw in the film, we began our visit -- right off the plane, we went directly to Yad Vashem. It was a fitting beginning for the trip for us, where we could pay our respects to those who had lost their lives and their families in the Holocaust.

Then we took a moment of remembrance to acknowledge the exceptional leadership of our former colleague, Tom Lantos, the only Holocaust survivor to ever serve in the Congress of the United States.

This is the first meeting of AIPAC that Tom would not have been at since AIPAC 's existence. And I know how very, very proud he would be of all of you.

During the trip, we received a really very special welcome from President Peres, from Prime Minister Olmert, who mentioned it I think last night, Defense Minister Barak, Foreign Minister Livni, opposition leader Netanyahu, and Speaker Itzik.

Speaker Itzik, the first woman speaker of the Knesset, really...

She's spectacular. She made it possible for us to receive the greetings of Prime Minister Olmert and opposition leader Netanyahu directly at the Knesset.

In any event, it was a very special occasion for all of us. And in each of these meetings, what is important about it all is that we discuss the security of Israel. Israel is a democracy and our strong ally. Israel lives in a dangerous neighborhood.

For many reasons, it is important for us to support the security of Israel. It is in the national interest of the United States of America to support the security of Israel.

Much fuss has been made about the unanimous resolution, and I'll talk about it in a moment, observing the 60th anniversary of the establishment of the state of Israel that many of you advocated for, and that was important. It was important that it was unanimous.

But it was also important for us to be able to say that, on the very day that our delegation left for Israel, the House passed the Security Assistance and Arms Export Control Reform Act of 2008.

The bill underscores the U.S. commitment to Israel's security by ensuring that Israel is treated like NATO members, as well as Australia, New Zealand, and Japan, for purposes of expediting exports of essential military equipment. This represented real change.

In addition, the bill begins the implementation of the new 10-year memorandum of understanding on U.S. security assistance to Israel and requires that Israel's qualitative military edge be empirically assessed on an ongoing basis.

Howard Berman and Gary Ackerman were very instrumental in the -- as well as Ron Klein, from the state of Florida. Ron Klein, Gary Ackerman very important in all of this.

The bill recognizes what I already said, that Israel's national security is a priority for the United States and it recognizes the request for increased security assistance for Israel.

I don't know if Harry or John Boehner told you this earlier, but the first installment of this increase, \$170 million, will be in the supplemental appropriation bill the House will consider soon, in fact, that we are considering now, so we can expedite this.

Of course, one of the subjects of main concern when we were in Israel, as it is in our country, is the subject of Iran.

Ensuring the security of Israel and the entire world demands that we do more to convince Iran to give up its nuclear ambitions and cease its support for terrorist groups.

This isn't just about Israel, as important as it is to Israel, and is the existential that Iran presents to Israel. These two features are pillars of American foreign policy.

Stopping the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction is a pillar of our foreign policy. Fighting terrorism wherever it may exist is a pillar of our foreign policy.

So this is an issue where Israel is on the front line, fighting the fight, bearing the brunt of the threat. And in doing so, Israel makes that fight not just for Israel, but for the entire world, including the United States of America.

Therefore, it is essential that we tighten -- and by tighten, I mean tighten -- the sanctions as an essential component of this diplomatic effort. Last fall, under the leadership of Chairman Tom Lantos, the House voted to extend the provisions of the Iran Sanctions Act to the parent companies of foreign subsidiaries and to prohibit U.S. nuclear cooperation with countries that assist Iran's nuclear program or help Iran acquire advanced conventional weapons.

I know that many of you will come to the Hill later today or later in the week to lobby on behalf of bipartisan legislation introduced by Congressman Ackerman, once again, and Congressman Pence, bipartisan, that urges an even more robust sanctions regime. Thank you for doing that.

Sanctions that are far-reaching and tough demonstrate to Iranian leaders that their behavior is recognized as a threat, as I said, not just to their neighbors in the region, but by the world, and that the international community is prepared to confront that behavior with all of the diplomatic tools at its disposal.

For that reason, that and other reasons, Majority Leader Hoyer and Minority Whip Blunt have written a letter to the president urging his continuing support of the Israel-Palestinian peace process. We must bring peace to the region.

I know...

I know that you are urging other members to sign that letter. It is another bipartisan effort to demonstrate our support for Israel.

Just recently, as I mentioned earlier, many of you urged your representatives in Congress to pass a resolution expressing our support and enthusiasm for the 60th anniversary of the founding of the state of Israel. I'm proud to say that we were able to deliver this, as you saw in the film, and to say that it passed the Congress unanimously.

How much more bipartisan can you get than unanimously?

Think of it. Just think of the thrill that it was for all of us to stand there, as we went into the Knesset, to be able to present that resolution to Speaker Itzik and to the people of Israel on your behalf. Just each of you think of individually what a thrill it would be for you. It certainly was a thrill of a lifetime for each of us.

America and Israel, as we said that today and had said in the resolution, have a common history. We're both nations which are beacons of democracy to the world. Forged by pioneers, both of our countries, developed by immigrants, fulfilled by immigrants, we share a common future, as entrepreneurs and innovators, building the kind of world that we dream of for our children's children.

And we share a common cause: a safe and secure Israel, living in peace with her neighbors.

I love the theme of the AIPAC conference, U.S.-Israel, built to last. And since I've talked about -- let's hear it for the AIPAC theme today.

(APPLAUSE) The U.S.-Israel relationship, built to last. I've talked about children, starting with the 1,200 students and their children and grandchildren and their grandchildren, and ended talking about a dream for our children's children.

And there are three children that I want to close by mentioning today. Since I saw you last, I've been to Israel two times, one time we're talking about now...

... and shortly after our visit last year, I was there, had the honor of speaking in front of the beautiful Chagall mural to the members of the Knesset and friends of the Knesset there.

And at the same time we were on that trip, our members -- and Tom Lantos was on that trip -- we had the privilege of meeting with many of the families.

I say many, because we were set up to meet with three of the families, the Shalit family, the Goldwasser family, and the Regev family, but people found out we were going to be there. Other families came, too, to talk about loved ones who have been lost in war, kidnapped, whatever, not heard from for a very long time.

And I think you know -- I think I showed you this last year, but I want you to know that, in the course of that year, I have shown these dog tags to heads of state all over the world. I have shown them to people who visit my office.

Every opportunity...

Every opportunity this speaker of the House has, I will always impress upon our visitors that we will never rest, that we will be relentless in fighting for the release of Gilad Shalit, Ehud Goldwasser and Eldad Regev.

That is the thought that I want to leave with you. Good luck and congratulations on your deliberations here. I look forward to welcoming you to Capitol Hill. God bless the Israel-U.S. relationship. God bless all of you. God bless America.

Thank you all very much for the opportunity to be here.