

Rep. Eric Cantor (R-VA)

AIPAC Policy Conference 2009

May 4, 2009

Representative Eric Cantor (R-VA): Thank you, Carlynn. Good evening. AIPAC's work has always been important. But now more than ever, it is vital, not only to Israel but also to America, as both nations face similar adversaries and challenges. To all of you at AIPAC, for your years of service, we are all in your debt.

Lately the mission has become even more critical. My message to you tonight is simply this. We must answer our enemy's dangerous resurgence with renewed vigilance, lest we invite greater dangers for both Israel and the United States. To illustrate, allow me to share with you three short stories. The first is an observation by Claude Lanzmann, a gifted filmmaker whose documentary *Shoah* is a definitive film statement on the Holocaust. Interviewed on French television, Lanzmann was asked, almost contemptuously, what was the purpose to his film? Surely everything that could be said about the Holocaust had already been said.

"Well," he replied, "I discovered that for myself, at least, one question remained unasked. At what moment did it become too late?" Clearly it was too late when the shivering, naked victims were herded into the gas chambers. It was certainly too late when they were being stuffed into cattle cars. At what moment did we lose the chance to save the six and a half million souls. 1936? The Nuremberg Laws? The Versailles Treaty? When did it come too late?

My second anecdote is from Martin Gray, who wrote movingly of his escape from Treblinka in the film, *For Those I Love*. Making his way across Poland and into Germany in the hope of reaching Switzerland, unaware that Swiss border guards actually returned Jewish refugees to the Nazis, he came to edge of a forest. Peering out, he saw a work gang of some 200 German Jews, guarded only by two S.S. Certain that the Jews could overpower their captors, Gray was about to run from the woods and rally them when an S.S. truck arrived to take the two guards to lunch. Before leaving the slave workers, the S.S. commander threatened, "Work hard or there'll be severe punishment on his return," and off went the S.S., leaving the Jews unguarded.

Martin Gray ran from the words, shouting "Come. Come. You must leave now." The Jews in the work gang seemed puzzled, unwilling to upset their German captors. And Gray said, "You're doomed. They are killing the Jews of Europe. They're silencing us all."

And they laughed. "Don't be silly. We're nearly seven million. Impossible." Gray insisted, no, that it was true. He described Treblinka. The work gang was still unmoved. Finally one said, "Your accent is strange. Where are you from?"

"Poland," Gray answered.

"Oh," they said. "No wonder. We're German Jews. We'll be fine."

My third and final cautionary tale is from the esteemed author, Primo Levi. When asked what he learned from the Holocaust, he replied, "When a man with a gun says he's going to kill you, believe him."

Why these three stories? Because many men are pointing guns at Israel, indeed at Jews everywhere, promising to kill us. Too many American Jews have become desensitized to the fires that threaten the Jews of Israel and of Europe. "It can't happen to us," they think, as if the egregious, anti-Semitic vitriol surging across the internet or even spewing on American college campuses is of no meaning, and that somehow we'll be unarmed by the lies spread about Israel and the Jewish people.

But the key, is Mr. Lanzmann's plaintive question, when is it too late? When Hamas is welcomed, even celebrated in world capitals, and we avert our eyes and do not cry out, it may be too late. When the international community demands that Israel make even further compromises than the painful ones already giving for nothing in return, while at the same time -- while at the same time lavishing affection on those who support terrorists, and we do not cry out, it may be too late. When we allow ourselves to be lulled into silence when political correctness beckons, it may be too late.

How late is it when the United States asks to open discussions with Ahmadinejad, the man holding the gun with which he vows to kill Israel and the Jews. Have we not been down here, this road, before? Mr. Ahmadinejad dreams of finishing Hitler's work, and killing all the world's Jews. Each day that passes brings him closer to possession of a nuclear bomb, the ultimate weapon. When we dally and fret and wring our hands, but fail to do anything that will really stop him, how late are we then?

Where is our outrage at the world's growing acceptance of Hugo Chavez, who welcomes the Iranians to Caracas, then denounces Israel as an evil to be destroyed and simultaneously badgers and persecutes the Venezuelan Jewish community. Why are we silent? If we close our eyes to this, it is certainly too late. This is our challenge -- to remove the blinders from our eyes, to honor the great heritage of American freedom by protecting it.

And this is vital; the case I press before you now is not a Jewish cause or an Israeli issue. These are challenges to America. Israel's security is synonymous with our own. The people who point guns at her with murder in their eyes will next turn on us. Her enemies are our enemies, and polite silence amounts to complicity in our own demise. The urgency is to discard ideologies, to look at the real world and let that dictate policy. In Israel's tough neighborhood, only strength is admired, and weakness only despised. If we humble ourselves before autocrats, we invite not their favor but their scorn. We are Americans, first, foremost, and forever.

And our long history as Jews gives us a unique perspective. It is that we must remember, before it is too late for all we believe in. I salute our many Christian allies who have come forth bravely to stand with us in our defense of Israeli and American liberty. With your knowledge of the Bible, you understand the sacred, historical bond between the land of Israel and the Jewish people. You swell our numbers. Your commitment fortifies us. Your presence here tonight is truly the hand of providence.

In its 61st year, the state of Israel, until now supported by the nurturing hand of America and decent right-minded people everywhere, is in dire straits; mortal danger. Expedience has sadly turned certain old, reliable allies into fellow travelers of terrorists and extremists. The infection has so overwhelmed the so-called United Nations, and has even reached our universities and way too much of our media. We need new strategies to heal the sickness, to repair decency's immune system.

To the resounding voice of history, let us all lend an ear. Let us resist the complacency that comes with past success. AIPAC has always been in the forefront of our struggle, and you must continue the fight. I, and millions like us, of many faiths, cultures, and political persuasion, await your leadership before it is too late. Thank you.