

# Shimon Peres

## AIPAC Policy Conference 2009

### May 4, 2009

**Shimon Peres:** Dear friends, what an honor and a privilege to address AIPAC in these exciting and challenging times. I look around, I am not so sure that I'm the youngest person in this room. But being here with you, you make me feel young again.

Dear friends, I saw the Jewish state taking brave and historic decisions that paved the way to reconciliation. I witness the miracle of science reinventing Israel generation after generation. I believe it enables us to live up to the value of *tikkun olam*. It provided our people with life-saving medical solutions, innovative water technologies, solar energy, and scientific agriculture that became a marvel in the world. Yes, it's true. We have had a difficult journey in our young life as a state. But our national endeavor of 2000 years in diaspora was no different; not easier.

Yes, since the rebirth of Israel, one commitment remained firm, profound, unshakeable - the alliance between Israel and the United States of America. It has provided us with a moral and strategic strengths, both of them. For 61 years, America has been and still is more than just an ally. It is an unusual partner, a brave friend. I've have heard it say, I have heard it sung, today more than ever before: God bless America.

Dear friends, I came today from Jerusalem, which I know is an important part of your soul. I came here this morning to reiterate what you already know -- that brothers we are, and we need you, want you, and appreciate you from the depth of our heart. Thank you so much.

I am thanking you for the central role in strengthening the shared values of policy between the United States and Israel. My people are grateful to the thousands of AIPAC supporters, from students and the lay leaders to the leadership and provisional team on the Capitol Hill. You are a treasure.

For all that you have done, for all that you will do, the people of Israel salutes you. To your hard work, the bond between the greatest democracy in the world and the first democracy in the Middle East continues to strengthen and deepen. Thank you very much. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Each and every one of you helped build this house, and can claim a break in it. Both the United States and Israel can look at our construction with pride. It is a testimony to our joint commitment to a more strong, prosperous Jewish state.

Dear friends, a tsunami of hope is following across the entire globe. Its center is right here in America. Six months ago, you elected a new President of the United States. President Obama assumed his duty in a period of these crises in the world. I am convinced that he has the capacity

to turn a crisis into an opportunity. I think at my age, I have the right to say to President Obama, "President, you are young enough to offer hope to the world. You are strong enough -- bring it to life. On behalf of the State of Israel, and in my name, I want to wish you success. *Y'varekh'kha hashem v'yishmarekha* - Godspeed, Mr. President."

In his inaugural address, President Obama elegantly articulated what is needed when he called for an outstretched hand instead of a clenched fist. In the future, our time may be considered, because of him, as the age of outstretched hand. Israel stands with her arms outstretched, her hands held open to peace with all nations, with all Arab states, with all Arab people. To those holding a clenched fist, I have just one word to say: enough! Enough war, enough destruction, enough hatred.

It is a time for change, for change for the better, for all of us. Definition of success is not the military campaign. We have been forced, both to wage and win. But by peace, we have achieved together with some of our neighbors what we really wanted. Israel's strengths and capacity to take risks for peace are determined by the strengths of the Israeli defense forces. By its uncompromising technology advantage, dear friends, ours is an army for defense if necessary, and for peace when possible.

Israel strength relies on the allies, partners, friends that are here with us today, ensuring that our military and technological edge will always remain. As you know, I shall be meeting President Obama tomorrow. I shall deliver to him a strong message from a country yearning for peace, yearning for friendship with the United States. Later on, the President will meet with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

You may know, Benjamin Netanyahu was at one time my political opponent. Today, he is my Prime Minister. He knows history. He wants to make history. And in our tradition, making history is making peace. I am sure that peace is his real and profound priority.

The journey isn't over. In some ways, we are still at genesis. We still seek to build a home, to plant a tree, to celebrate strength. Yet at the same time, there is a dark and growing cloud; a reminder that threats to human life are real.

This cloud is the product of a militant extremist. Its fightings are made of weapons. The lightning are rockets, the thunder are bombs. It has spread over Israel, but also over the Arab world. It may be looming over the global community at large.

This year again, we're encountering the clenched fists in our region. We admittedly hoped that a time of tough talk was over. We made meaningful sacrifices -- painful ones -- hoping that the real peace is at our door. Unfortunately, the Middle East finds itself in the shadow of a nuclear threat. We shall not give up. We shall not surrender. We shall not lose our nerves and strengths and determination and courage.

Let me be clear. The fanatic rulers of Iran are on the wrong side of history. Actually, they are out of history. They're against history. We have respect for the Iranian people and its tradition. Historically, Iran sought to enrich mankind. Today, alas, Iran rulers want to enrich uranium.

What for? In addition to their nuclear option, they invest huge capital in long-range missiles. Iran is not threatened by anybody. What do they need it?

Iran funds and arms Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in Gaza to spread divisions in Lebanon and among the Palestinians; divisions, terror, trying to impose a foreign and violent ideology. Their agents target Americans, Europeans, Arabs, and other people. Historically, the concern was to separate, as we know, religion from state. Today, however, the challenge is to disconnect religion from terror. In the name of God, there should be no wars, no dead, no victims, no bloodshed. This is our God. This is our Lord. This is our stand. This is our position.

It is clear in our eyes that peace may require painful compromises, difficult concessions. Compromises require two conditions. First, peace must be real, lasting, mutually respected. We have to guarantee that our children -- actually, all children -- will be free from war, will breathe the fresh air of peace -- all children, from all nations, from all parties. And then, secondly, peace should enable Israel to protect its people, to realize the fundamental responsibility of a free government, namely to defend its people from harm, to enable them to meet opportunities.

The same is true for the future of the Palestinian people as well. I say it loudly, because I believe in it more fondly. The Palestinian people have the right to govern themselves. We don't want to be their masters. They have the right to invest their resources, to direct aid to civil high tech, not military rocket -- to books, not bombs -- to their people, so their people can be both free and prosperous, free from fear, free from hunger.

I have a simple question. Why wait? Israel is prepared today to bring peace closer. Today there is no difference between the American position and our position. We want to move ahead as swiftly, together, as it is needed -- as it is possible.

In my judgment, today there is a chance for real peace. History is on the side of peace. History is on our side, I'm sure. The Saudis gave birth to a peace initiative. The Arab League, which in 1967 adopted a policy of three nays: no to peace with Israel, not to recognize Israel, not to negotiate with Israel. Well, it took a time, but then in 2002, they declared a different policy: to negotiate with Israel, to recognize Israel, and even to make peace with Israel. This is their judgment, and it was our judgment a long time ago.

I have to admit, in a way, it is a serious U-turn. Israel wasn't a partner to the wording of their initiative. Therefore it doesn't have to agree to every word. Well, nevertheless, Israel respects the profound change. Israel hopes it will be translated in real action, the sooner the better.

Dear friends, let me make it clear. We trust the leadership of President Obama. We trust he may make a way to open both a regional agreement and a meaningful bilateral negotiations. It can be done, both, together, right away. It is a real change in the situation. In pursuing present government of Israel, let's make no mistake. The present government of Israel will abide to the commitments to the previous governments of Israel.

My experiences have taught me that peace is not necessarily the result of detailed negotiations with many lawyers -- my god -- with many map designers, my god. I know that peace bears from the soil, like a geyser. It is beautiful to behold. It is impossible to contain.

I can still see with my eyes and feel with my heart when President Sadat landed from Egypt. We thought he came from the moon. If Anwar Sadat had not courageously taken the one-hour flight between Cairo and Jerusalem, I doubt peace would be achieved. We were ready. He showed his readiness.

Something similar happened with a handshake between Mandela and de Klerk. Even a small ping-pong ball facilitated a dialogue between the great United States, in America, and the large land of China. Both events transformed the world. Ladies and gentlemen, it can happen again. It's not a photo opportunity. It creates a real historic opportunity.

I am sure a day will come, I am sure it's not far away, when the Jewish people will live on their land in real peace. After 2,000 years of exile, after Shoah, pogroms, transports, struggles, endless suffering, hatred, wars, bloodshed, the Jewish people will become a model and peaceful country. I believe, profound, in the vision of our prophets that Israel will become a beacon of light among nations, living the prophecy of Isaiah; beatings swords into plowshares, hoping nations will not take up swords against other nations.

So let us all ask ourselves, what must we do today to make a better tomorrow to our children, to our grandchildren. I was told that in this room there are over a thousand students. Would you mind rise so we shall see you? Can you please rise? All students. It's warming my heart. Thank you for being here.

More important, we celebrate your future. I invite you to come to my home, to come to Israel, to come to Jerusalem to celebrate your heritage. If your moms will refuse, please tell them it's a presidential invitation. You can sit down. Thank you.

To your parents, to everyone else in the room, I want to say let's make this generation the last to know conflict, the last to know bloodshed. Let's make this generation the first to enjoy redemption. It will make our heritage our destiny.

Well, you wouldn't believe it, but I've been young, and now I grow older, as the psalm says. But I feel I have the right, with all what I have seen, to be an optimist. My generation experienced serious trials and tribulations. We triumphed over them all. You and us gained together a license to be optimists, to be believers, to be a hopeful meeting of people.

You know, when I look ahead, I see a world that knows no limits, no boundaries, a world of ongoing progress. Let me tell a secret. My own children surpassed their parents. My grandchildren surpass my daughter and sons. But I am blessed with two great grandchildren, Ella and Ari. I am objective when I say they are wonderful. When we sit, it is two wonderful young boy and girl. When we sit on the carpet and they climb on my shoulder, I suspect they don't respect the President. Yet I feel respected. I even feel reassured that our future in their tiny hands -- in their strong hands.

Ladies and gentlemen, to know the future you have to remember our history. Calling history is actually remembering the past. But as you know, we are pragmatic people. So when Moses came down from Mount Sinai, he turned to his people and called them. "People, listen, Israel. *Shema Yisrael*." He asked them -- he asked us to listen, so we shall be able to hear the prophetic message, the mountainous music of peace and justice to this very day. But as you know, we are pragmatists. So the people replied, "We shall do and listen. Naaseh Venishma."

My friends, there is so much to do. Time is always short, but the time is now. Let's go to work, now, right away, together -- hopeful, believing, and offering peace to our own people and to the people around us. It's a great message, a great duty, a great task. You are able. You and us are able to do it together.