

Vice President Joseph Biden
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THE VICE PRESIDENT: Thank you very much. (Applause.) Please. (Applause.) Larry, thank you for that introduction.

Ladies and gentlemen, there's an old -- there's an old Saxon expression. And what it says is -- (applause) -- there's an old expression. This is the man who introduced me to AIPAC. And there's an old expression that says an institution is little more than the lengthened shadow of a man. This is the man right here. This is the man. (Applause.)

Ladies and gentlemen, I was backstage and the stage director, a lovely young woman, was telling me that she was the stage director, and I told her how well I take orders. (Laughter.) And Larry was speaking, and I said, you see that man? I said, he's been my friend for 38 years. And she looked at me like, that's not possible -- (laughter) -- not that I don't look that old, but that she wasn't born, I don't think -- when she said it. (Laughter.)

But the truth is Larry, and his magnificent wife, have been just wonderful, wonderful, wonderful supporters of Israel and AIPAC. And he really did, along with one of my closest friends, period, not just in politics, Michael Adler -- Michael Adler's dad in Miami and Larry Weinberg on the West Coast are the two people who gave me my formal education. And I thank them both. Thank you both. (Applause.)

I say to the board and all of you that are here, I'm delighted by your warm welcome. And it's very good to be among friends. I'd like to begin by congratulating your president, David Victor, for -- and the incoming president, Lee Rosenberg. Rosy, we're all pulling for your dad, Big Rosy, and we know how proud he must be right now as you're about to take on your new responsibilities. (Applause.)

I'd like to also congratulate AIPAC's Executive Director, Howard Kohr, and the rest of the staff for another successful conference. (Applause.)

And I want to congratulate an old friend, who I think is probably the most articulate and eloquent speechmaker in the world, Shimon Peres, President of the State of Israel -- (applause) -- on the 61st anniversary of Israel's independence, which we're going to celebrate -- which we celebrated last week. And the President -- President Obama and I look forward to visiting later today with the President. I'm anxious to see him in the White House. (Applause.)

A little over a hundred days ago, our country started on a new path. The citizens of this country made a very fundamental decision. And it began with the historic inauguration of the 44th President, Barack Obama, but it grew -- it grew out of the determination of millions of Americans who desperately wanted to change not only the direction of our country, but quite frankly, the trajectory that the world was on. That's what the Obama-Biden administration has set out to do, a lofty goal but an absolutely minimum required task -- to change the direction of this country and all the trajectory of the world. We not only want to do it here at home; we believe our fate is inextricably tied to the direction the world is moving in.

But in the midst of change, with all the change you will hear about, there is one enduring, essential principle that will not change; and that is our commitment to the peace and security of the state of Israel. (Applause.) That is not negotiable. That is not a matter of change. That is something to be reinforced and made clear. (Applause.) It seems almost unnecessary to state it, but I want the word to go forth in here that no one should mistake it.

That commitment began when the United States of America emerged from World War II as the preeminent economic, political, and military power in the world, and one of our great Presidents, Harry Truman, reached out to a tiny, struggling state, emerging from the ashes of the Holocaust, and recognized the state

of Israel. It's a commitment that spans generations, and administrations of both political parties. And our job -- obviously you know it's yours -- just so you know, we know it's our job to ensure that that endures.

The bond between Israel and the United States was forged by a shared interest in peace and security; by shared values and to respect all faiths and for all faiths and for all people; by deep ties evidenced here today among our citizens, both Christian and Jew; and a common, unyielding commitment to democracy.

Indeed, we've both experienced recent elections and the peaceful transition of power. I want to congratulate my friend, Prime Minister Netanyahu -- and as they say in the Senate, he is my friend -- for his victory. Bibi and I have been friends for a long, long time -- too long to mention. And you know the old cliché -- imitation is the sincerest form of flattery. Well, I looked at Likud's website, campaign website -- and on behalf of the Obama-Biden administration, I must say I am flattered. (Laughter.) Take a look at the website. It looked like we were running co-joint campaigns here. (Laughter.) And we didn't charge Bibi a thing for it. (Laughter.) All kidding aside, a lot of you in the audience, and a lot of board members here, have been my friends for a long, long time

My commitment, though, to Israel did not begin with the friendships that I share on this stage. As the friends on this stage know, and some of you have heard me say, my commitment began at my father's dinner table. My father was what you'd refer to as a righteous Christian. My father -- we had dinner at my father and mother's home as an occasion to sit down and have conversation and, incidentally, eat, rather than eat and, incidentally, have conversation. And over the years, my commitment was nurtured by many of the people in this room, starting with Larry and many others that are here.

In 1973, as a 29-year-old or just 30 -- just turned 30 years old, elected United States senator from the state of Delaware -- I made my first overseas trip to Israel. It was on the eve at the time unknown of the Yom Kippur War. I had just come from Cairo, and visited the Suez Canal. And I then went to visit the Prime Minister, Golda Meir, which was one of the great honors. I was asked not long ago, what are the two most meaningful meetings I ever had as a senator. And they were with the freed later president of South Africa, and Golda Meir. (Applause.) They both embodied everything I had been taught -- different races, different religions, different regions -- the same tenacity and the same open heart.

I sat across the desk from the Prime Minister. And she, as many of you know, is a chain smoker. She continually smoked. And she had a set of maps behind her, the old maps that were on rollers. There was a whole big slew of them, like eight maps in one set. And she was describing to me the Six-Day War and reading letters from the front, from young Israelis, most of whom had died defending their country. It was very moving. She kept flipping the maps up and down and pointing to different battles. I'm sure many of you had the experience. I'm sure you had the experience, Larry.

And there was a young man sitting next to me who didn't say a lot. His name was Rabin. And we had a conversation that lasted -- I won't put a time on it, but I'm quite confident it was over an hour. It was a long time. It was a great moment for a young man like me. It was meaningful. I learned a lot. But it also gave me a sense of the degree of -- how do I say it -- the pain, the history, the hope, the pragmatism, the grit of an entire nation. And almost it seemed in mid-sentence, she looked at me -- and my good friend, Michael Adler, heard me say this before, it was -- kind of startled me -- she said, Senator, would you like a photo? It was, like, by the way, do you want to go to the ball game?

And I said, well, of course, Madam Prime Minister. And the office in those days that she had, there were double doors that opened up onto a hallway. And we walked out, and there were photographers arrayed. And we stood next to one another, looking straight at the camera, at the photographers and the cameras. But she was talking to me without looking at me. She said the following. She said, Senator -- looking straight ahead, but talking -- she said, Senator, you seem worried. You look like you're worried. And I turned to her, and I said, well, Madam Prime Minister, I am. The picture you just painted -- in those days 60 million Arabs, 2 million Jews, et cetera.

And she put her hand out -- still looking at the camera -- on my arm. She said, Senator, don't worry. We Jews have a secret weapon in our struggle here. We have no place else to go. (Applause.)

And, for me, I thought at the time -- some of you know, she was so engaging -- I thought at the time, I'm probably the only person in the world she ever said that to. (Laughter.) And it was for me, at that moment, her comments crystallized for me everything I'd learned at my father's table, and everything about the basic responsibility of the United States to be a partner in ensuring that there will always, always be a place for Jews of the world to go -- (applause) -- and that place always must be Israel. (Applause.) It's real. It's serious. It's compelling. It's the only certainty, the only certainty. (Applause.)

Ladies and gentlemen, I'm here today to tell you something you already know, and I assure you this -- President Barack Obama shares that same commitment. (Applause.) His support is rooted in his personal connection to the Zionist idea to which he spoke about last year at this conference. He said last year that when he was a child, and I quote, "I was drawn to the belief that you could sustain a spiritual, emotional and cultural identity, and I deeply understood the Zionist idea that there is always a homeland at the center of our story."

Ladies and gentlemen, Barack Obama's commitment was reinforced -- not that it need to have been -- by his two relatively recent trips to Israel, when he met with Israeli leaders from across the spectrum -- and you all know it's a very wide spectrum in Israel; by the powerful, searing experience that he had visiting maybe in a sense the holiest of all places, commemorating the Holocaust; by seeing, first-hand, Israel's unique security dilemmas from a helicopter with top generals -- the sort of experience I had in '73 when I stood on the Golan Heights and realized if you had a really good arm you could literally throw a grenade down in the territory that could do damage to Israelis.

He also had it reinforced by traveling to the northern border, and met with families whose homes had been destroyed by rockets fired by Hezbollah and Hamas into their villages. But the President and I both know that ultimately we'll be judged not by our commitment and our verbal assurances to you or to anyone else or to the state of Israel, but by the results of the commitment we have made. (Applause.)

We believe that the results we seek, including a secure Israel at peace, can be best achieved by taking a new direction in our foreign policy; by, first and foremost, reestablish America's preeminent leadership in the world. (Applause.) The nation who asserts it leads, but has no one following, is not leading. We must reassert the confidence that we once had, and the confidence the world once had in us to lead the world.

When America has confidence -- the confidence of our allies and our friends, and the broad support we need in the world -- not only is America stronger but Israel will be stronger, because America is able to be a more efficient partner and effective partner, and our adversaries and Israel's adversaries know that as well.

In the Middle East, we stand for the premise that the status quo of the last decade has not served the interests of the United States or Israel very well. It has not enhanced the peace and security of the region, no matter how good the intention. I went to a Catholic grade school. When you got in trouble, the nuns would make you -- I'd say, but, sister -- and they'd make you write on the board a hundred times after school: The road to hell is paved with good intentions. All the good intentions of the last decade have not resulted in a more secure, more stable Middle East; a more secure, more stable Israel; a more secure, more stable United States.

So we are working to change that by responsibly ending the war in Iraq, by refocusing our efforts on Afghanistan and Pakistan to defeat al Qaeda, by engaging all countries in the region, including those with whom we have overwhelming disagreements, in order to advance our national security interests.

We are intensely focused on avoiding the grave danger, as Larry spoke about and others have, as well, including my good friend, John, of a nuclear armed Iran. (Applause.) A nuclear-armed Iran risks an arms race in the region that would make every country less secure; presents an existential threat. What we have tried with Iran in recent years has obviously not worked. What will work remains to be seen.

Since 2000, Iran has installed thousands of centrifuges and produced over a thousand kilograms of low-

enriched uranium; not capable of use in a nuclear weapon -- low-enriched -- but nonetheless, they have produced that. Instead of arresting the danger; in the last six years, the danger has grown. It has not been arrested. We're determined to change that. That's why we will pursue direct, principled diplomacy with Iran with the overriding goal of preventing them from acquiring nuclear weapons.

The United States will approach Iran initially in the spirit of mutual respect. We want Iran to take its rightful place in the community of nations, politically and economically. That's a path that the Islamic Republic can take if it so chooses. Or that government can choose a different future: one of international pressure, isolation; and one which nothing is taken off the table.

If our efforts to address this problem through engagement are not successful, we have greater international support to consider other options. And ladies and gentlemen, don't kid yourselves -- international support matters, as we've learned over the last eight years. (Applause.) We must sometimes act alone, but it's always stronger when we act in unison.

Given the situation we inherited, we know we don't have unlimited time to make this assessment. Iran also has played a dangerous role in the region supporting terrorist organizations like Hamas and Hezbollah and undermining many of our friends and those who claim to be our friends. Indeed, these proxies are the tools in my view, our view, that Iran uses to exploit conflicts like the Israeli-Palestinian conflict -- use it to their advantage.

In this way the continuation of Israeli-Palestinian and Israeli-Arab -- Arab-Israeli conflicts, strengthen Iran's strategic position. They give Iran a playing field upon which to extend its influence, sponsor extremist elements, inflame public opinion -- all which are counterintuitive. It's counterintuitive if you think about it, that Iran's Shia influence in a Sunni Arab world would be able to be extended.

There are many reasons to pursue an end to these conflicts. It gives Israelis peace and security they deserve; to help the Palestinians fulfill their aspirations of an independent and better life; to ease tension in the regions -- in this region.

Today, one of the most pressing reasons may be to deprive Iran of the ability to extend its destabilizing influence. Again, it's counterintuitive if you think about its ability to extend its influence in the region.

That's why from day one of this administration we began to make a strong, sustained effort on behalf of peace. The President decided that we must be engaged; we must take risk on behalf of peace for Israel. The President appointed one of our most tenacious diplomats to lead that effort, George Mitchell, and the President is strongly and personally committed to achieving what all have basically said is needed -- a two-state solution, with a secure Jewish state of Israel living side by side in peace and security with a viable and independent Palestinian state. (Applause.)

He and I both believe that it's absolutely necessary to ensure Israel's survival as a Jewish democratic state that this occur. (Applause.) That is also the solution that Israel and the Palestinians committed to in the road map and reaffirmed in Annapolis. It can be achieved. It must be achieved.

There's an old expression, which Larry will get a kick out of, and it relates to Christianity. G.K. Chesterton once said, "It's not that Christianity has been tried and found wanting; it's been found difficult and left untried." Well, the truth of the matter is, the fact that peace has not occurred does not mean peace cannot occur.

Same time, we'll pursue a secure and lasting and comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace. The Israelis and its Arab neighbors have sufficient common interest to bring this goal within reach. Progress towards peace has only been possible when people -- when people were willing to think differently; to take risks; to make a principled compromise. That's why we have to pursue every opportunity for progress while standing up for one core principle: First, Israel's security is non-negotiable. (Applause.) Period. Period. Our commitment is unshakable. We will continue to provide Israel with the assistance that it needs. We will continue to defend Israel's right to defend itself and make its own judgments about what it needs to do to

defend itself. (Applause.)

Secondly, all of us have obligations to meet, including commitments Israel and the Palestinians made in the road map. The Palestinian Authority must combat terror and incitement against Israel. The United States and its partners have provided funding and training for a reformed Palestinian security force, which has impressed everyone, including the Israeli security officers with its recent demonstrations of professionalism and effectiveness. We are right now seeking funds from Congress to expand this program. But Israel has to work towards a two-state solution. You're not going to like my saying this, but not build more settlements, dismantle existing outposts, and allow the Palestinians freedom of movement based on their first actions -- (applause) -- its access to economic opportunity and increased security responsibility. This is a "show me" deal -- not based on faith -- show me. Prime Minister Netanyahu has important ideas about how to achieve some of these objectives and we look forward to working with him to help develop them when he comes to visit.

The Quartet and the Arab states also have clear responsibilities. One of the most important is to support the Palestinian Authority with the tools and funds it needs to govern on the West Bank, develop and reform its institutions, help the people of Gaza work toward returning to Gaza. We are doing our part with major assistance packages currently before the Congress. We expect others to do theirs.

The Arab states should act now, not later, to build upon -- (applause) -- to build upon the Arab Peace Initiative -- a constructive combination that contains the promise of a cooperative and comprehensive peace, but now is the time. Now is the time for Arab states to make meaningful gestures to show the Israeli leadership and the people that the promise of ending Israel's isolation in the region is real and genuine. They must take action now -- show me. (Applause.)

Ladies and gentlemen, finally, the world must continue to make clear to Hamas that the legitimacy it seeks will only come when it renounces violence, recognizes Israel, and abides by past agreements -- period. (Applause.) These are not -- some say, when I repeat that and the President says it, that these are unreasonable. These are not unreasonable demands -- they're basic standards of international conduct.

We're working hard to provide assistance to Palestinians in Gaza that does not benefit Hamas, and to coordinate with our allies to end the smuggling of weapons in the Gaza, which continue. And we demand -- we demand the immediate and unconditional release -- unconditional release of Gilad Shalit -- (applause) -- after nearly three years -- three years of captivity. It is not acceptable. (Applause.) And we remain committed -- we remain committed to seeing him returned safely to his family.

We will also explore opportunities, as the Israelis are, for progress between Israel and Syria. Peace between Israel and Syria could reshape the region. We will ensure that it does not come if it comes at the expense of Israel's security or Lebanon's sovereignty and independence.

The search for a secure and just and lasting peace in the Middle East has frustrated many and all who have come before us. We understand the immensity of the challenge. We recognize the hard choices that must be made. But we also know this: The path we have been on in recent years will not result in security and prosperity for Israel or the Palestinians, nor will it produce the stability and progress that's needed in the region to ultimately guarantee Israel's security.

Look, we know there are different views in this room. We know there are different views in this town about how to move forward. Nowhere are these issues debated more openly and vividly than in the streets of Israel and in the Knesset, which is an overwhelming tribute to its democracy. But I believe the critical question is not where we stand today, but how we see tomorrow, and what we're prepared to do to get there. This administration sees and seeks a future of lasting peace and security in which Israeli children can leave behind the tyranny of rockets and terror; when Israeli mothers, as they send their children off to school, do not have to worry about whether or not they will come home; or Palestinian children have full opportunities to live out their dreams, and the entire Middle East does not have to live under the dread of a nuclear cloud.

Delaying the pursuit of these goals is not an option. It's easier, but it is not an option. And the longer we wait, the harder it will be. Now is the time to work together for the promise of a better day, and for the success and strength and security of our most-treasured ally, Israel.

Thank you very much. God bless you all, and may God protect our troops. (Applause.)