

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu at AIPAC Policy Conference 2010 Transcript

Members of the Obama Administration,

Senators,

Members of Congress,

Ambassadors,

Leaders of AIPAC,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As the world faces monumental challenges, I know that Israel and America will face them together. We stand together because we are fired by the same ideals and inspired by the same dream the dream of achieving security, prosperity and peace. This dream seemed impossible to many Jews a century ago.

This month, my father celebrated his one-hundredth birthday. When he was born, the Czars ruled Russia, the British Empire spanned the globe and the Ottomans ruled the Middle East. During his lifetime, all of these empires collapsed, other powers rose and fell, and the Jewish destiny swung from despair to a new hope the rebirth of the Jewish state. For the first time in two thousand years, a sovereign Jewish people could defend themselves against attack.

Before that, we were subjected to unremitting savagery: the bloodletting of the Middle Ages, the expulsion of the Jews from England, Spain and Portugal, the wholesale slaughter of the Jews of the Ukraine, the pogroms in Russia, culminating in the greatest evil of all the Holocaust. The founding of Israel did not stop the attacks against the Jews. It merely gave the Jews the power to defend themselves against those attacks.

My friends,

I want to tell you about the day when I fully understood the depth of this transformation. It was the day I met Shlomit Vilmosh over forty years ago. I served with her son, Haim, in the same elite unit in the army. During a battle in 1969, Haim was killed by a burst of gunfire. At his funeral, I discovered that Haim was born shortly after his mother and father had been freed from the death camps of Europe. Had he been born two years before, this daring young officer would have been tossed into the ovens like a million other Jewish children. Haim's mother Shlomit told me that though she was in great anguish, she was proud. At least, she said, my son fell wearing the uniform of a Jewish soldier defending the Jewish state.

Time and again the Israeli army was forced to repel attacks of much larger enemies

determined to destroy us. Recognizing that we could not be defeated in battle, Egypt and Jordan, embraced the path of peace. Yet there are those who continue the assault against the Jewish state and who openly call for our destruction. They seek to achieve this goal through terrorism, missile attacks and most recently by seeking to develop atomic weapons.

The ingathering of the Jewish people to Israel has not deterred these fanatics. In fact, it has only whetted their appetite. Iran's rulers say Israel is a one bomb country. "The head of Hezbollah says: "If all the Jews gather in Israel, it will save us the trouble of going after them worldwide. "

My friends,

These are unpleasant facts, but they are the facts. The greatest threat to any living organism or nation is not to recognize danger in time. Seventy-five years ago, the leading powers in the world put their heads in the sand. Untold millions died in the war that followed. Ultimately, two of history's greatest leaders helped turn the tide. Franklin Delano Roosevelt and Winston Churchill helped save the world. But they were too late to save six million of my own people. The future of the Jewish state can never depend on the goodwill of even the greatest of men. Israel must always reserve the right to defend itself.

Today an unprecedented threat to humanity looms large. A radical Iranian regime armed with nuclear weapons could bring an end to the era of nuclear peace the world has enjoyed for the last 65 years. Such a regime could provide nuclear weapons to terrorists and might even be tempted to use them itself. Our world would never be the same. Iran's brazen bid to develop nuclear weapons is first and foremost a threat to Israel, but it is also a grave threat to the region and to the world. Israel expects the international community to act swiftly and decisively to thwart this danger. But we will always reserve the right to defend ourselves.

We must also defend ourselves against the lies and vilifications. Throughout history, the slanders against the Jewish people always preceded the physical assaults against them and were used to justify them. The Jews were called the well-poisoners of mankind, the fomenters of instability, the source of all evil under the sun. Like the physical assaults, these libelous attacks against the Jewish people did not end with the creation of Israel. For a time after World War Two, overt anti-Semitism was held in check by the shame and shock of the Holocaust. But only for a time.

In recent decades the hatred of the Jews has reemerged with increasing force, but with an insidious twist. It is not merely directed at the Jewish people but increasingly at the Jewish state. In its most pernicious form, it argues that if only Israel did not exist, many of the world's problems would go away.

My friends,

Does this mean that Israel is above criticism? Of course not. Israel, like any democracy, has imperfections but we strive to correct them through open debate and scrutiny. Israel has independent courts, the rule of law, a free press and a vigorous parliamentary debate believe me, its vigorous. I know that members of Congress refer to one another as my distinguished colleague from Wisconsin or the distinguished Senator from California. In Israel, members of Knesset don't speak of their distinguished colleagues from Kiryat Shmona and Beer Sheva. We say well, you don't want to know what we say. In Israel, self-criticism is a way of life, and we accept that criticism is part of the conduct of international affairs. But Israel should be judged by the same standards applied to all nations, and allegations against Israel must be grounded in fact.

Here is one allegation that is not. The attempt by many to describe the Jews as foreign colonialists in their own homeland is one of the great lies of modern times.

In my office, I have on display a signet ring that was loaned to me by Israel's Department of Antiquities. The ring was found next to the Western wall, but it dates back some 2,800 years ago, two hundred years after King David turned Jerusalem into our capital city. The ring is a seal of a Jewish official, and inscribed on it in Hebrew is his name:

Netanyahu.

His name was Netanyahu Ben-Yoash. My first name, Benjamin, dates back 1,000 years earlier to Benjamin, the son of Jacob. One of Benjamin's brothers was named Shimon, which also happens to be the first name of my good friend, Shimon Peres, the President of Israel. Nearly 4,000 years ago, Benjamin, Shimon and their ten brothers roamed the hills of Judea.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The connection between the Jewish people and the Land of Israel cannot be denied. The connection between the Jewish people and Jerusalem cannot be denied.

The Jewish people were building Jerusalem 3,000 year ago and the Jewish people are building Jerusalem today. Jerusalem is not a settlement. It is our capital.

In Jerusalem, my government has maintained the policies of all Israeli governments since 1967, including those led by Golda Meir, Menachem Begin and Yitzhak Rabin. Today, nearly a quarter of a million Jews, almost half the city's Jewish population, live in neighborhoods that are just beyond the 1949 armistice lines. All these neighborhoods are within a five-minute drive from the Knesset. They are an integral and inextricable part of modern Jerusalem. Everyone knows that these neighborhoods will be part of Israel in any peace settlement. Therefore, building them in no way precludes the possibility of a two-state solution.

Nothing is rarer in the Middle East than tolerance for the beliefs of others. Israeli

sovereignty in Jerusalem has ensured that the religious sites of all faiths have been protected. While we cherish our homeland, we also recognize that Palestinians live there as well. We don't want to govern them. We don't want to rule them. We want them as neighbors, living in security, dignity and peace.

Yet Israel is unjustly accused of not wanting peace with the Palestinians. Nothing could be further from the truth. My government has consistently shown its commitment to peace in both word and deed. From day one, we called on the Palestinian Authority to begin peace negotiations without delay. I make that same call today. President Abbas, come and negotiate peace. Leaders who truly want peace should be prepared to sit down face-to-face. Of course, the United States can help the parties solve their problems but it cannot solve the problems for the parties. Peace cannot be imposed from the outside. It can only come through direct negotiations in which we develop mutual trust. Last year, I spoke of a vision of peace in which a demilitarized Palestinian state recognizes the Jewish state. Just as the Palestinians expect Israel to recognize a Palestinian state, we expect the Palestinians to recognize the Jewish state. In the past year, my government has removed hundreds of roadblocks, barriers and checkpoints in the West Bank. As a result, we have helped spur a fantastic economic boom there. Finally, we announced an unprecedented moratorium on new Israeli construction in Judea and Samaria.

This is what my government has done for peace. What has the Palestinian Authority done for peace? Well, they have placed preconditions on peace talks, waged a relentless international campaign to undermine Israel's legitimacy, and promoted the notorious Goldstone Report that falsely accuses Israel of war crimes.

I want to thank President Obama and the United States Congress for their efforts to thwart this libel. The Palestinian Authority has also continued incitement against Israel. Less than two weeks ago, a public square was named after a terrorist who murdered 38 Israeli civilians, including 13 children. The Palestinian Authority did not prevent it.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Peace requires reciprocity. It cannot be a one-way street in which only Israel makes concessions. Israel stands ready to make the compromises necessary for peace. But we expect the Palestinian leaders to compromise as well. But one thing I will never compromise is our security.

If you want to understand Israel's security predicament, imagine the entire United States compressed to the size of New Jersey. Next, put on New Jersey's northern border an Iranian terror proxy called Hezbollah which fires 6,000 rockets into that small state. Then imagine that this terror proxy has amassed 60,000 more missiles to fire at you. Now imagine on New Jersey's southern border another Iranian terror proxy called Hamas. It too

fires 6,000 rockets into your territory while smuggling ever more lethal weapons into its territory.

Do you think you would feel a little bit vulnerable? Do you think you would expect some understanding from the international community when you defend yourselves? A peace agreement with the Palestinians must include effective security arrangements on the ground. Israel must prevent a repeat in the West Bank of what happened when it withdrew from Lebanon and Gaza. Israel's main security problem with Lebanon is not its border with Lebanon. It is Lebanon's porous border with Syria, through which Iran and Syria smuggle tens of thousands of weapons to Hezbollah.

Israel's main security problem with Gaza is not its border with Gaza. It is along Gaza's border with Egypt, under which nearly 1,000 tunnels have been dug to smuggle weapons. Experience has shown that only an Israeli presence on the ground can prevent weapons smuggling. This is why a peace agreement with the Palestinians must include an Israeli presence on the eastern border of a future Palestinian state. As peace with the Palestinians proves its durability over time, we can review security arrangements. We are prepared to take risks for peace, but we will not be reckless with the lives of our people and the life of the one and only Jewish state.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The people of Israel want a future in which our children no longer experience the horrors of war. We want a future in which Israel realizes its full potential as a global center of technology, anchored in its values and living in peace and security with all its neighbors. I envision an Israel that dedicates its creative and scientific energies to help solve some of the great problems of the day, foremost of which is finding a clean and affordable substitute for gasoline. If we can help find an alternative to gasoline, we will stop transferring hundreds of billions of dollars a year to radical regimes that support terror worldwide.

I am confident that in pursuing these goals, we have the enduring friendship of the United States of America, the greatest nation on earth. The American people have always shown their courage, their generosity and their decency. Time and again, America has stood by Israel's side against common enemies. From one President to the next, from one Congress to the next, America's commitment to Israel's security has been unwavering. In the last year, President Obama and the U. S. Congress have given meaning to that commitment by providing Israel with military assistance, by enabling joint military exercises and by working on joint missile defense. So too, Israel has been a staunch and steadfast ally of the United States. As Vice President Biden said, America has no better friend in the community of nations than Israel.

For decades, Israel served as a bulwark against Soviet expansionism. Today it is helping America stem the tide of militant Islam. Israel shares with America everything we know about fighting a new kind of enemy. We share intelligence and we cooperate in countless other ways that I am not at liberty to divulge. This cooperation saves American lives.

Our soldiers and your soldiers fight against fanatic enemies that loathe our common values. In the eyes of these fanatics, we are you and you are us. To them, the only difference is that you are big and we are small, you are the Great Satan and we are the Little Satan. This fanaticism's hatred of Western civilization predates Israel's establishment by over one thousand years. Militant Islam does not hate the West because of Israel. It hates Israel because of the West. Because it sees Israel as an outpost of freedom that prevents them from overrunning the Middle East. When Israel stands against its enemies, it stands against America's enemies. President Harry Truman, the first world leader to recognize Israel, said: I have faith in Israel and believe that it has a glorious future not just as another sovereign nation, but as an embodiment of the great ideals of our civilization.

My Friends, We are gathered here today because we believe in those ideals. And because of those ideals, I am certain that Israel and America will always stand together.