

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton at AIPAC Policy Conference 2010

Transcript

Thank you. Thank you for that welcome. And it is wonderful to be back at AIPAC with so many good friends. I saw a number of them backstage before coming out, and I can assure you that I received a lot of advice. (Laughter.) I know I always do when I see my friends from AIPAC. And I want to thank Lee Rosenberg for that introduction. And congratulations, Rosy; you're going to be a terrific president. (Applause.)

I also want to thank David Victor and Howard Kohr and Lonny Kaplan and J.B. Pritzker and Howard Friedman and Ester Kurz and Richard Fishman -- and I'd better stop - but all of AIPAC's directors and staff for your leadership and hard work. And I'm very pleased that you will be hearing from a good friend of mine, Congressman Jim Langevin, a great champion for Israel. And let's hear it for Jim. (Applause.)

And to all of you, all of AIPAC's members, thank you once again for your example of citizen activism. Petitioning your government, expressing your views, speaking up in the arena - this is what democracy is all about. (Applause.) And I am particularly pleased to see that there are, once again, so many young people here. (Applause.) You recognize that your future and the future of our country are bound up with the future of Israel. (Applause.) And your engagement today will help to make that future more secure.

Given the shared challenges we face, the relationship between the United States and Israel has never been more important. (Applause.) The United States has long recognized that a strong and secure Israel is vital to our own strategic interests. (Applause.) And we know that the forces that threaten Israel also threaten the United States of America. (Applause.) And therefore, we firmly believe that when we strengthen Israel's security, we strengthen America's security. (Applause.)

So from its first day, the Obama Administration has worked to promote Israel's security and long-term success. And if you ever doubt the resolve of President Obama to stay with a job, look at what we got done for the United States last night when it came to passing quality affordable healthcare for everyone. (Applause.) And we know that, as Vice President Biden said in Israel recently, to make progress in this region, there must be no gap between the United States and Israel on security. (Applause.) And let me assure you, as I have assured you on previous occasions with large groups like this and small intimate settings, for President Obama and for me, and for this entire Administration, our commitment to Israel's security and Israel's future is rock solid, unwavering, enduring, and forever. (Applause.)

And why is that? Why is that? Is it because AIPAC can put 7,500 people into a room in the Convention Center? I don't think so. Is it because some of the most active Americans in politics and who care about our government also care about Israel? That's not the explanation. Our countries and our peoples are bound together by our shared values of freedom, equality, democracy, the right to live free from fear, and our common aspirations for a future of peace, security and prosperity, where we can see our children and our children's children, should we be so lucky - and as a future mother of the bride, I'm certainly hoping for that - (applause) - to see those children, those generations come of age in peace, with the opportunity to fulfill their own God-given potentials.

Americans honor Israel as a homeland for a people too long oppressed and a democracy that has had to defend itself at every turn, a dream nurtured for generations and made real by men and women who refused to bow to the toughest of odds. In Israel's story, we see our own. We see, in fact, the story of all people who struggle for freedom and the right to chart their own destinies.

That's why it took President Harry Truman only 11 minutes to recognize the new nation of Israel - (applause) - and ever since, our two countries have stood in solidarity. So guaranteeing Israel's security is more than a policy position for me; it is a personal commitment that will never waver. (Applause.)

Since my first visit to Israel nearly 30 years ago, I have returned many times and made many friends. I've had the privilege of working with some of Israel's great leaders and have benefited from their wise counsel. I may have even

caused some of them consternation - I don't think Yitzhak Rabin ever forgave me for banishing him to the White House balcony when he wanted to smoke. (Laughter.) And over the years, I have shared your pride in seeing the desert bloom, the economy thrive, and the country flourish. But I have also seen the struggles and the sorrows. I have met with the victims of terrorism, in their hospital rooms I've held their hands, I've listened to the doctors describe how much shrapnel was left in a leg, an arm, or a head. I sat there and listened to the heart-rending words that Prime Minister Rabin's granddaughter Noa spoke at her grandfather's funeral. I went to a bombed-out pizzeria in Jerusalem. I've seen the looks on the faces of Israeli families who knew a rocket could fall at any moment.

On one of my visits, in 2002, I met a young man named Yochai Porat. He was only 26, but he was already a senior medic with MDA and he oversaw a program to train foreign volunteers as first responders in Israel. I attended the program's graduation ceremonies and I saw the pride in his face as yet another group of young people set off to do good and save lives. Yochai was also a reservist with the IDF. And a week after we met, he was killed by a sniper near a roadblock, along with other soldiers and civilians. MDA renamed the overseas volunteer program in his memory and it has continued to flourish. When I was there in 2005, I met with his family. His parents were committed to continuing to support MDA and its mission - and so was I. That's why I spent years urging the International Red Cross, introducing legislation, rounding up votes to send a message to Geneva to admit MDA as a full voting member. And finally, with your help - (applause) in 2006, we succeeded in righting that wrong. (Applause.)

As a senator from New York, I was proud to be a strong voice for Israel in the Congress and around the world. And I am proud that I can continue to be that strong voice as Secretary of State.

Last fall, I stood next to Prime Minister Netanyahu in Jerusalem and praised his government's decision to place a moratorium on new residential construction in the West Bank. And then I praised it again in Cairo and in Marrakesh and in many places far from Jerusalem to make clear that this was a first step, but it was an important first step. And yes, I underscored the longstanding American policy that does not accept the legitimacy of continued settlements. As Israel's friend, it is our responsibility to give credit when it is due and to tell the truth when it is needed.

In 2008, I told this conference that Barack Obama would be a good friend to Israel as president, that he would have a special appreciation of Israel because of his own personal history - a grandfather who fought the Nazis in Patton's Army, a great-uncle who helped liberate Buchenwald. President Obama and his family have lived the Diaspora experience. And as he told you himself, he understands that there is always a homeland at the center of our story. As a senator, he visited Israel and met families whose houses were destroyed by rockets. And as President, he has supported Israel in word and in deed.

Under President Obama's leadership, we have reinvigorated defense consultations, redoubled our efforts to ensure Israel's qualitative military edge, and provided nearly \$3 billion in annual military assistance. (Applause.) In fact, as Rosy told you - or maybe it was Howard - that assistance increased in 2010 and we have requested another increase for 2011. (Applause.) And something else I want you to know, more than 1,000 United States troops participated in the Juniper Cobra ballistic missile defense exercises last fall, the largest such drill ever held. (Applause.) President Obama has made achieving peace and recognized secure borders for Israel a top Administration priority.

The United States has also led the fight in international institutions against anti-Semitism and efforts to challenge Israel's legitimacy. We did lead the boycott of the Durban Conference and we repeatedly voted against the deeply flawed Goldstone Report. (Applause.) This Administration will always stand up for Israel's right to defend itself. (Applause.)

And for Israel, there is no greater strategic threat than the prospect of a nuclear-armed Iran. (Applause.) Elements in Iran's government have become a menace, both to their own people and in the region. Iran's president foments anti-Semitism, denies the Holocaust, threatens to destroy Israel, even denies that 9/11 was an attack. The Iranian leadership funds and arms terrorists who have murdered Americans, Israelis, and other innocent people alike. And it has waged a campaign of intimidation and persecution against the Iranian people.

Last June, Iranians marching silently were beaten with batons. Political prisoners were rounded up and abused. Absurd and false allegations and accusations were leveled against the United States, Israel, and the West. People everywhere were horrified by the video of a young woman shot dead in the street. The Iranian leadership denies its people rights that are universal to all human beings, including the right to speak freely, to assemble without fear, the right to the equal administration of justice, to express your views without facing retribution.

In addition to threatening Israel, a nuclear-armed Iran would embolden its terrorist clientele and would spark an arms race that could destabilize the region. This is unacceptable. It is unacceptable to the United States. It is unacceptable to Israel. It is unacceptable to the region and the international community. So let me be very clear: The United States is determined to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons. (Applause.)

Now, for most of the past decade, the United States, as you know, declined to engage with Iran. And Iran grew more, not less, dangerous. It built thousands of centrifuges and spurned the international community. But it faced few consequences. President Obama has been trying a different course, designed to present Iran's leaders with a clear choice. We've made extensive efforts to reengage with Iran, both through direct communication and working with other partners multilaterally, to send an unmistakable message: Uphold your international obligations. And if you do, you will reap the benefits of normal relations. If you do not, you will face increased isolation and painful consequences.

We took this course with the understanding that the very effort of seeking engagement would strengthen our hand if Iran rejected our initiative. And over the last year, Iran's leaders have been stripped of their usual excuses. The world has seen that it is Iran, not the United States, responsible for the impasse. With its secret nuclear facilities, increasing violations of its obligations under the nonproliferation regime, and an unjustified expansion of its enrichment activities, more and more nations are finally expressing deep concerns about Iran's intentions. And there is a growing international consensus on taking steps to pressure Iran's leaders to change course. Europe is in agreement. Russia, where I just returned from, has moved definitely in this direction. And although there is still work to be done, China has said it supports the dual-track approach of applying pressure if engagement does not produce results. This stronger consensus has also led to increased cooperation on stopping arms shipments and financial transactions that aid terrorists, threaten Israel, and destabilize the region.

We are now working with our partners in the United Nations on new Security Council sanctions that will show Iran's leaders that there are real consequences for their intransigence, that their choice is to live up to their international obligations. Our aim is not incremental sanctions, but sanctions that will bite. It is taking time to produce these sanctions, and we believe that time is a worthwhile investment for winning the broadest possible support for our efforts. But we will not compromise our commitment to preventing Iran from acquiring these nuclear weapons. (Applause.)

But Iran is not the only threat on the horizon. Israel today is confronting some of the toughest challenges in her history. The conflict with the Palestinians and with Israel's Arab neighbors is an obstacle to prosperity and opportunity for Israelis, Palestinians, and people across the region. But it also threatens Israel's long-term future as a secure and democratic Jewish state.

The status quo is unsustainable for all sides. It promises only more violence and unrealized aspirations. Staying on this course means continuing a conflict that carries tragic human costs. Israeli and Palestinian children alike deserve to grow up free from fear and to have that same opportunity to live up to their full God-given potential. (Applause.)

There is another path, a path that leads toward security and prosperity for Israel, the Palestinians, and all the people of the region. But it will require all parties, including Israel, to make difficult but necessary choices. Both sides must confront the reality that the status quo of the last decade has not produced long-term security or served their interests. Nor has it served the interests of the United States. It is true that heightened security measures have reduced the number of suicide bombings and given some protection and safety to those who worry every day when their child goes to school, their husband goes to work, their mother goes to market. And there is, I think, a belief

among many that the status quo can be sustained. But the dynamics of demography, ideology, and technology make this impossible.

First, we cannot ignore the long-term population trends that result from the Israeli occupation. As Defense Minister Barak and others have observed, the inexorable mathematics of democracy - of demography are hastening the hour at which Israelis may have to choose between preserving their democracy and staying true to the dream of a Jewish homeland. Given this reality, a two-state solution is the only viable path for Israel to remain both a democracy and a Jewish state. (Applause.)

Second, we cannot be blind to the political implications of continued conflict. There is today truly a struggle, maybe for the first time, between those in the region who accept peace and coexistence with Israel and those who reject it and seek only continued violence. The status quo strengthens the rejectionists who claim peace is impossible, and it weakens those who would accept coexistence. That does not serve Israel's interests or our own. Those willing to negotiate need to be able to show results for their efforts. And those who preach violence must be proven wrong. All of our regional challenges - confronting the threat posed by Iran, combating violent extremism, promoting democracy and economic opportunity - become harder if the rejectionists grow in power and influence.

Conversely, a two-state solution would allow Israel's contributions to the world and to our greater humanity to get the recognition they deserve. It would also allow the Palestinians to have to govern to realize their own legitimate aspirations. And it would undermine the appeal of extremism across the region.

I was very privileged as First Lady to travel the world on behalf of our country. I went from Latin America to Southeast Asia. And during the 1990s, it was rare that people in places far from the Middle East ever mentioned the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Now, when I started traveling as Secretary of State and I went to places that were so far from the Middle East, it was the first, second, or third issue that countries raised. We cannot escape the impact of mass communications. We cannot control the images and the messages that are conveyed. We can only change the facts on the ground that refute the claims of the rejectionists and extremists, and in so doing create the circumstances for a safe, secure future for Israel. (Applause.)

And then finally, we must recognize that the ever-evolving technology of war is making it harder to guarantee Israel's security. For six decades, Israelis have guarded their borders vigilantly. But advances in rocket technology mean that Israeli families are now at risk far from those borders. Despite efforts at containment, rockets with better guidance systems, longer range, and more destructive power are spreading across the region. Hezbollah has amassed tens of thousands of rockets on Israel's northern border. Hamas has a substantial number in Gaza. And even if some of these are still crude, they all pose a serious danger, as we saw again last week.

Our message to Hamas is clear: Renounce violence, recognize Israel, and abide by previous signed agreements. (Applause.) That is the only path to participation in negotiations. They do not earn a place at any table absent those changes. (Applause.) And I will repeat today what I have said many times before: Gilad Shalit must be released immediately and returned to his family. (Applause.)

Unfortunately, neither military action nor restricting access into and out of Gaza has significantly stemmed the flow of rockets to Hamas. They appear content to add to their stockpile and grow rich off the tunnel trade, while the people of Gaza fall deeper into poverty and despair; that is also not a sustainable position for either Israelis or Palestinians.

Behind these terrorist organizations and their rockets, we see the destabilizing influence of Iran. Now, reaching a two-state solution will not end all these threats - you and I know that - (applause) - but failure to do so gives the extremist foes a pretext to spread violence, instability, and hatred.

In the face of these unforgiving dynamics of demography, ideology, and technology, it becomes impossible to entrust our hopes for Israel's future in today's status quo. These challenges cannot be ignored or wished away. Only by choosing a new path can Israel make the progress it deserves to ensure that their children are able to see a future

of peace, and only by having a partner willing to participate with them will the Palestinians be able to see the same future.

Now, there is for many of us a clear goal: two states for two peoples living side by side in peace and security, with peace between Israel and Syria, and Israel and Lebanon, and normal relations between Israel and all the Arab states. (Applause.) A comprehensive peace that is real, not a slogan, that is rooted in genuine recognition of Israel's right to exist in peace and security, and that offers the best way to ensure Israel's enduring survival and well-being. That is the goal that the Obama Administration is determined to help Israel and the Palestinians achieve.

George Mitchell has worked tirelessly with the parties to prepare the ground for the resumption of direct negotiations, beginning with the proximity talks both sides have accepted. These proximity talks are a hopeful first step, and they should be serious and substantive. But ultimately, of course, it will take direct negotiations between the parties to work through all the issues and end the conflict.

The United States stands ready to play an active and sustained role in these talks, and to support the parties as they work to resolve permanent status issues including security, borders, refugees, and Jerusalem. The United States knows we cannot force a solution. We cannot ordain or command the outcome. The parties themselves must resolve their differences.

But, we believe - (applause) - we believe that through good-faith negotiations, the parties can mutually agree to an outcome which ends the conflict and reconciles the Palestinian goal of an independent and viable state based on the '67 lines, with agreed swaps, and Israel's goal of a Jewish state with secure and recognized borders that reflect subsequent developments and meet Israel's security requirements. (Applause.)

And the United States recognizes that Jerusalem - Jerusalem is a deeply, profoundly important issue for Israelis and Palestinians, for Jews, Muslims, and Christians. We believe that through good-faith negotiations the parties can mutually agree on an outcome that realizes the aspirations of both parties for Jerusalem and safeguards its status for people around the world.

But for negotiations to be successful, they must be built on a foundation of mutual trust and confidence. That is why both Israelis and Palestinians must refrain from unilateral statements and actions that undermine the process or prejudice the outcome of talks.

When a Hamas-controlled municipality glorifies violence and renames a square after a terrorist who murdered innocent Israelis, it insults the families on both sides who have lost loved ones over the years in this conflict. (Applause.) And when instigators deliberately mischaracterize the rededication of a synagogue in the Jewish quarter of Jerusalem's old city and call upon their brethren to "defend" nearby Muslim holy sites from so-called "attacks," it is purely and simply an act of incitement. (Applause.) These provocations are wrong and must be condemned for needlessly inflaming tensions and imperiling prospects for a comprehensive peace.

It is our devotion to this outcome - two states for two peoples, secure and at peace - that led us to condemn the announcement of plans for new construction in East Jerusalem. This was not about wounded pride. Nor is it a judgment on the final status of Jerusalem, which is an issue to be settled at the negotiating table. This is about getting to the table, creating and protecting an atmosphere of trust around it - and staying there until the job is finally done. (Applause.)

New construction in East Jerusalem or the West Bank undermines that mutual trust and endangers the proximity talks that are the first step toward the full negotiations that both sides say want and need. And it exposes daylight between Israel and the United States that others in the region hope to exploit. It undermines America's unique ability to play a role - an essential role - in the peace process. Our credibility in this process depends in part on our willingness to praise both sides when they are courageous, and when we don't agree, to say so, and say so unequivocally.

We objected to this announcement because we are committed to Israel and its security, which we believe depends on a comprehensive peace, because we are determined to keep moving forward along a path that ensures Israel's future as a secure and democratic Jewish state living in peace with its Palestinian and Arab neighbors, and because we do not want to see the progress that has been made in any way endangered. .

When Prime Minister Netanyahu and I spoke, I suggested a number of concrete steps Israel could take to improve the atmosphere and rebuild confidence. The prime minister responded with specific actions Israel is prepared to take toward this end, and we discussed a range of other mutual confidence-building measures. Senator Mitchell continued this discussion in Israel over the weekend and is meeting with President Abbas today. We are making progress. We're working hard. We are making it possible for these proximity talks to move ahead. I will be meeting with Prime Minister Netanyahu later today and President Obama will meet with him tomorrow. (Applause.) We will follow up on these discussions and seek a common understanding about the most productive way forward.

Neither our commitment nor our goal has changed. The United States will encourage the parties to advance the prospects for peace. We commend the government of President Abbas and Prime Minister Fayyad for the reforms they've undertaken to strengthen law and order, and the progress that they've made in improving the quality of life in the West Bank. But we encourage them to redouble their efforts to put an end to incitement and violence, continue to ensure security and the rule of law, and ingrain a culture of peace and tolerance among Palestinians. (Applause.)

We applaud Israel's neighbors for their support of the Arab Peace Initiative and the proximity talks. But their rhetoric must now be backed up by action. (Applause.) They should make it easier to pursue negotiations and an agreement. That is their responsibility.

And we commend Prime Minister Netanyahu for embracing the vision of the two-state solution, for acting to lift roadblocks and ease movement throughout the West Bank. And we continue to expect Israel to take those concrete steps that will help turn that vision into a reality - build momentum toward a comprehensive peace by demonstrating respect for the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinians, stopping settlement activity, and addressing the humanitarian crisis in Gaza.

Now, from the time of David Ben-Gurion, who accepted the UN proposal to divide the land into two nations, Israel and Palestine, leaders like Begin and Rabin and Sharon and others have made difficult but clear-eyed choices to pursue peace in the name of Israel's future. It was Rabin who said, "For Israel there is no path that is without pain. But the path of peace is preferable to the path of war." And last June at Bar-Ilan University, Prime Minister Netanyahu put his country on the path to peace. President Abbas has put the Palestinians on that path as well. The challenge will be to keep moving forward, to stay on what will be a difficult course.

Peace does bring with it a future of promise and possibility. Ultimately, that is the vision that drives us and that has driven leaders of Israel going back to the very beginning - a future freed from the shackles of conflict; families no longer afraid of rockets in the night; Israelis traveling and trading freely in the region; Palestinians able to chart their own futures; former adversaries working together on issues of common concern like water, infrastructure, and development that builds broadly shared prosperity and a global strategic partnership between Israel and the United States that taps the talent and innovation of both our societies, comes up with solutions to the problems of the 21st century.

From addressing climate change and energy to hunger, poverty and disease, Israel is already on the cutting edge. Look at the spread of high-tech start-ups, the influx of venture capital, the number of Nobel laureates. Israel is already a force to be reckoned with. Imagine what its leadership could be on the world stage if the conflict were behind it. We are already working as partners. There is so much more we could achieve together.

We are entering the season of Passover. The story of Moses resonates for people of all faiths, and it teaches us many lessons, including that we must take risks, even a leap of faith, to reach the promised land. When Moses urged the Jews to follow him out of Egypt, many objected. They said it was too dangerous, too hard, too risky. And later, in the desert, some thought it would be better to return to Egypt. It was too dangerous, too hard, too risky. In fact, I

think they formed a back-to-Egypt committee and tried to stir up support for that. And when they came to the very edge of the promised land, there were still some who refused to enter because it was too dangerous, too hard, and too risky.

But Israel's history is the story of brave men and women who took risks. They did the hard thing because they believed and knew it was right. We know that this dream was championed by Herzl and others that many said was impossible. And then the pioneers - can you imagine the conversation, telling your mother and father I'm going to go to the desert and make it bloom. And people thinking, how could that ever happen? But it did. Warriors who were so gallant in battle, but then offered their adversaries a hand of peace because they thought it would make their beloved Israel stronger. Israel and the generations that have come have understood that the strongest among us is often the one who turns an enemy into a friend. Israel has shed more than its share of bitter tears. But for that dream to survive, for the state to flourish, this generation of Israelis must also take up the tradition and do what seems too dangerous, too hard, and too risky. And of this they can be absolutely sure: the United States and the American people will stand with you. We will share the risks and we will shoulder the burdens, as we face the future together.

God bless you. God bless Israel and God bless the United States of America. (Applause.)