

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu at AIPAC Policy Conference 2011

Transcript

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thanks a lot.

My friends, before I talk about things about Israel, I want to say something about the scenes on television that I saw today, and you have been seeing, as well. When tragedy strikes America, Israel feels an immediate identification, and tragedy has struck America. In recent days, floods and tornadoes have claimed the lives of hundreds of Americans, including today, in Joplin, Missouri. All I can say is, America, we're with you; on this day, on every day.

And that's very evident from the things I just heard from my two close friends, Speaker of the House John Boehner, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid. You lead the many friends who are here today, the distinguished Senators and Congressmen and Congresswomen of the United States of America.

I want to greet AIPAC president Lee Rosenberg. Rosie, I learned the other day that if I take you on, it's not going to be in basketball. It will be in soccer. And executive director Howard Kohr. Howard, you I'm not going to take on in anything. I want to welcome here also the representatives of the government of Israel, members of Knesset, the U.S. Ambassador to Israel Jim Cunningham, Ambassador-Designate Dan Shapiro -- -- my beloved wife and the mother of our two boys, Sara -- -- and finally, our terrific ambassador to the United States, a man who knows a few things about the U.S.-Israel alliance, Michael Oren.

To all our supporters in this great hall and to the millions of supporters across this great land, the people of Israel thank you. Thank you for your staunch commitment to Israel's security. Thank you for defending Israel's right to defend itself. Thank you for standing by Israel as it seeks a secure peace.

Now, I heard tonight from all the speakers something that you know, that Israel is America's indispensable ally. You understand that Israel and America stand shoulder-to-shoulder, fighting common enemies, protecting common interests. You know that Israeli innovators help power computers, fight disease, conserve water, clean the planet. Your support for Israel flows from the heart. You see, it's not just what Israel does. It's what Israel is.

Now, let me explain that. Yesterday, I had a great day. They let me out. Sara and I could actually go for a walk, and I have to congratulate the American security services. They're a little more generous than ours. So we walked along the Potomac, and we got to visit Washington's majestic memorials. I read Jefferson's timeless words, "We hold these truths to be self-evident that all men are created equal."

I read Lincoln's immortal address, "Government of the people, for the people, by the people." Now, let me tell you why these words resonate so powerfully with me and with all Israelis: Because they're rooted in ideas first championed by our people, the Jewish people, the idea that all men are created in God's image, that no ruler is above the law, that everyone is entitled to justice. These are revolutionary Jewish ideas, and they were spoken thousands of years ago -- -- when vast empires ruled the earth, vast slave empires ruled the world, and the Jews spoke these truths.

Israel is the cradle of our common civilization. It's the crucible of our common values. And the modern state of Israel was founded precisely on these eternal values. And this is why Israel's more than 1 million Muslims enjoy full democratic rights. This is why the only place in the Middle East where Christians are completely free to practice their faith is the democratic state of Israel. And this is why Israel and only Israel can be trusted to ensure the freedom for all faiths in our eternal capital, the united city of Jerusalem.

My friends, Israel and America have drawn from these -- -- deep wellsprings of our common values.

We've forged an enduring friendship, not merely between our governments, but between our peoples. Support for Israel doesn't divide America. It unites America. It unites the old and the young, liberals and conservatives, Democrats and Republicans, and yes, Joe Lieberman, it even unites independents.

I want to take this opportunity to salute one of the great Senators in my lifetime, a man who's given unbelievable service to his country, America, and has been unbelievably dedicated to Israel and the Jewish people. Thank you, Joe Lieberman.

You see, this broad support for Israel in the United States is a tremendous help and gives tremendous strength to my country, and since Harry Truman, Israel has looked to American presidents to stand by it as we meet the unfolding challenges of a changing world. Yesterday, President Obama spoke about his ironclad commitment to Israel's security. He rightly said that our security cooperation is unprecedented. He spoke of that commitment not just in front of AIPAC. He spoke about it in two speeches heard throughout the Arab world, and he has backed those words with deeds.

See, I know these are tough economic times. So I want to thank the president and Congress for providing Israel with vital assistance so that Israel can defend itself by itself.

I want to thank you all for supporting the Iron Dome missile defense system. A few weeks ago, Hamas terrorists in Gaza fired eight rockets at our cities, at Ashkelon and Be'er Sheva. Now, these rockets never reached their targets. Iron Dome intercepted them in midair. For the first time, a missile defense system worked in combat. That's a precedent in military history, and I want to say thank you, America.

Now, America and Israel are cooperating in many other ways, as well. We're cooperating in science, in technology -- -- in trade, in investment. Since not only American companies that are investing in Israel. It's Israel companies investing in America. In the last decade, Israeli companies have invested more than \$50 billion in the United States.

One of those -- -- thank you. Thank you. Thank you. You think they have these protests in Gaza? What a way to get a standing ovation. Thank you.

So one of those companies is investing just down the road in Richmond. It's a company that is building a food factory. Now, here's what it means: more business, more jobs, and yes, more hummus. Well, it's not just food we're bringing to America. Take medicine. Israel has advanced a cure for multiple sclerosis, Alzheimer's, cancer. We've developed mechanical means to make paraplegics walk again. We've placed a tiny diagnostic camera inside a pill. I have not swallowed it, but I understand it's quite effective.

And you've just heard of this miraculous bandage developed by an Israeli company that has helped save Congresswoman Gabby Giffords' life -- -- and I wish Gabby, a great friend of Israel, refuah shlemah, a happy, quick, speedy recovery.

Israel and America are also cooperating to -- to end the world's worst addiction, the addiction to oil. This dependence fuels terrorism. It poisons the planet. So we've launched a 10-year program in Israel to kick the habit, to find a substitute for gasoline -- -- and if we succeed, we can change the world. We can change history.

My friends, the American people's support for Israel is reflected in my invitation to address a joint meeting of Congress tomorrow. Thank you, John Boehner, for that invitation.

Now, I will talk about the great convulsion taking place in the Middle East, the risks and the opportunities, and I will talk the dangers of a nuclear-armed Iran, and I will also outline a vision for a secure Israeli-Palestinian peace. I intend to speak the unvarnished truth -- -- because now more than ever, what we need is clarity, and events in our region are finally opening people's eyes to a simple truth. Events in the region are opening people's eye to a simple truth. The problems of the region are not rooted in Israel.

The remarkable scenes we're witnessing in town squares across the Middle East and North Africa are occurring for a simple reason: People want freedom. They want progress. They want a better life. For many of the peoples of the region, the 20th century skipped them by, and now, 21st-century technology is telling them what they missed out on.

You remember that desperate food vendor in Tunis? Why did he set himself on fire? Not because of Israel. He set himself on fire because of decades of indignity, decades of intolerable corruption, and the millions who poured into the streets of Tehran, Tunis, Cairo, Sana'a, Benghazi, Damascus, they're not thinking about Israel. They're thinking of freedom. They're yearning for opportunity. They're yearning for hope for themselves and for their children. So it's time to stop blaming Israel for all the region's problems.

Let me stress one thing: Peace between Israelis and Palestinians is a vital interest for us. It would be the realization of a powerful and eternal dream, but it is not a panacea for the endemic problems of the Middle East. It will not give women in some Arab countries the right to drive a car. It will not prevent churches from being bombed. It will not keep journalists out of jail. What will change this? One word: Democracy, real genuine democracy.

And by "democracy," I don't just mean elections. I mean freedom of speech, freedom of press, freedom of assembly, the rights for women, for gays, for minorities, for everyone. What the people of Israel want -- -- is for the people of the Middle East to have what you have in America, what we have in Israel -- democracy.

So it's time to recognize this basic truth: Israel is not what's wrong with the Middle East. Israel is what's right about the Middle East. My friends, we want peace because we know the pain of terror, and we know the agony of war. We want peace because we know the blessings peace can bring; what it could bring to us and to our Palestinian neighbors. But if we hope to advance peace with the Palestinians, then it's time that we admitted another truth: This conflict has raged for nearly a century because the Palestinians refuse to end it.

They refuse to accept the Jewish state. Now, this is what this conflict has always been about. There are many issues linked to this conflict that must be resolved between Israelis and Palestinians. We can, we must resolve them, but I repeat: We can only make peace with the Palestinians if they're prepared to make peace with a Jewish state.

Tomorrow in Congress, I'll describe what a peace between a Palestinian state and the Jewish state could look like, but I want to assure you of one thing: It must leave Israel with security. And therefore, Israel cannot return to the indefensible 1967 lines.

I'll talk about these and other aspects of peace tomorrow in Congress, but tonight, I want to express Israel's gratitude for all you're doing to help strengthen Israel and the great alliance that Israel has with America. You helped maintain our qualitative military edge. You backed sanctions against Iran. You supported genuine peace. You opposed Hamas, and you've joined President Obama and me in denouncing Hamas and demanding that it release our captive soldier, Gilad Shalit.

That's another outrageous crime of Hamas. Just imagine keeping a -- a young soldier locked in a dark dungeon for five years without even a single visit, not a single visit of the Red Cross. I think that the entire civilized community should join Israel and the United States and all of us in a simple demand from Hamas: Release Gilad Shalit.

My friends, I spent my high school years in Philadelphia -- -- who I understand has developed quite a bit since then. But during those years, when it was a sleepier town, I used to go visit the Liberty Bell. Now, as prime minister of Israel, I can walk down the street and see an exact replica of that bell in Jerusalem's Liberty Park. On both bells is the same inscription. It comes from the Bible, from the Book of Leviticus.

"Ukeratem derovr ba'arezt lechol-yosheveiha. Proclaim liberty throughout the land." My dear friends, this is the essence of the great alliance between our two nations, two peoples bonded in liberty and seeking freedom and peace for all. That's what this alliance is all about -- -- and you are part of it. You maintain it. I thank you on behalf of the people of Israel and the government of Israel. Thank you for the American-Israel alliance. Thank you, AIPAC.