

Senator Robert Casey, Jr. at AIPAC Policy Conference 2011

Transcript

Well, thank you very much. Thank you, Lonny for that kind introduction. I'd also like to thank a couple of other folks. I won't go to everyone here today, but President Lee Rosenberg, President-elect Michael Kassen, Chairman of the Board David Victor, and Executive Director Howard Kohr and all AIPAC members who are here and especially my friends from Pennsylvania. Thank you for having me here.

I have to say that I'm particularly honored to speak at this time of great turmoil in the Middle East, at a time of promise and peril when it is more important than ever to stand with Israel, to respect her borders and to ensure her sovereignty. We meet this morning to reaffirm a commonly held truth. Israel's borders must be defensible, must be determined by the parties on the ground.

In the four years that I've been on the Senate Foreign Relations committee, we've brought one war to a close and accelerated another. We've seen regimes change, terrorists eliminated, dictators vanquished, and hostile countries pursue the weapons of Armageddon. The danger is that it is an American tendency to live in the moment and then to forget. But thankfully, forgetting is not a tendency of Israel, nor a tendency of AIPAC because you recognize and you remember the inherent dangers of instability in the Middle East. When you see the so-called Nakba demonstrations across the region against Israel's legitimacy, you know we must stand vigilant in the defense of Israel's right to exist.

When you look at the Iranian regime, you recognize the dangers of it becoming another North Korea, where its nuclear ambitions are on the front page one day, then once achieved, forgotten the next. And when you look at countries like Libya and Syria, you know that those who kill the wrong people lose all legitimacy. The collective memory of Israel and AIPAC doesn't live in the moment. It lives on passed down from generation to generation and from this collective memory in the face of unrelenting threats to Israel come three principles for peace.

First, there must be full recognition of Israel's right to exist because without that, any negotiation is meaningless. Second, Jerusalem must be the undivided and eternal capital of Israel. Because without that, the idea of Israel as a sovereign state is meaningless.

And third and finally, Hamas must renounce violence, recognize Israel's right to exist, and abide by past agreements because without that any peace treaty would be meaningless. Negotiating with the Palestinian government that includes Hamas is putting a veneer of respectability on terrorism and hate, and I will never accept that as long as I am a United States senator from the state of Pennsylvania.

But we know, as with all things in the Middle East, the peace process is not confined to one set of talks or one adversary or even one front in one war. What we are hearing from Iran should trouble not just the Western world but all of the world. Any time an anti-Semitic dictator denies the horror of the holocaust and says that Israel should be wiped off the map, we should be vigilant.

And when that same person clearly intends to acquire the most powerful weapons in history, we should be prepared to act, and that's why I've worked to pass the toughest sanctions bill in history last year against the Iranian regime and why when we went even further today in the Senate and introduced additional sanctions to make it even more difficult for the Islamic republican guard corps to stay in business. Until Iran gives up its nuclear ambitions, we will not rest. We will not let up. We will not let it happen.

We also know that we can't turn a blind eye when the Iranian regime supports terrorism at home and abroad. Two weeks ago I chaired a Senate Foreign Relations committee hearing which probed the brutality of the Iranian Basij militias and the harsh Iranian judiciary. We felt the wrath of that regime even within the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

One of my constituents, Josh Fattal, and his friend Shane Bauer have been held in the notorious Evin Prison for 663 days now, and their crime, allegedly straying across the border on a hiking trip. So we must keep them in our prayers, but we must say this as well. Any regime that cannot show mercy on two lost hikers cannot be expected to be rational caretakers of weapons of mass terrorism.

We know that Iran, their regime continues to support terrorism across the region in Syria and Gaza. In Lebanon, Hezbollah has more than 50,000 rockets and missiles pointed at Israel and continues to call for Israel's destruction. So while Israel faces threats from Iran and Iran-sponsored terrorism, she also constantly confronts enemies who question her legitimacy. And this goes to the heart of the problem. There cannot be long-standing peace in the Middle East without full recognition of Israel's right to exist.

And so the United States should be unequivocally clear when it comes to the peace process with the Palestinians. The Palestinians cannot pursue statehood unilaterally. And a plan cannot be imposed upon the Israelis and Palestinians from outside. That's not compromise. That's coercion.

And in order for an agreement to work, both sides need to be engaged at the table. They need to buy into the final result, direct talks one on one, and it's the reason I introduced a resolution that calls upon the Palestinians to abandon their unilateral push to declare themselves a sovereign state.

I support a two-state solution with Israel and Palestine living side by side in peace and security, but how we get there matters and I think that matters to all of you as well. This resolution I spoke of also states that the United States will not deal with or in any way fund a Palestinian government that includes Hamas unless Hamas renounces violence, recognizes Israel's right to exist, and abides by past agreements.

Because we know this is the same Hamas that continues to fire rockets into Southern Israel. This is the same Hamas that denies Israel's right to exist. This is the same Hamas that has held Gilad Shalit for five long years, and yes, this is the same Hamas that called Osama bin Laden a martyr. But the Hamas threat from Gaza continues unabated. Last July I visited Sderot and met with Mayor Buskila and others who took me on a tour of that community.

And I held in my hands the collection of the heavy spent rockets from Gaza which serve as a jagged metal reminder of the fragility of life in this small town. And the mayor took me to visit an indoor children's center which is hardened to protect against rocket attack. The children cannot play outside. They live with the daily threats to their lives with the drone of air raid sirens in the background, and yet they're still happy. They still have joy in their hearts. Seeing that had a profound impact on me, as I know it has for many of you.

On that same day the very visible and life saving impact that U.S. security systems has on small children who want nothing more than a safe place to play made an impact on me as well. It's why our country's partnership with the Iron Dome program is so vital. In just the last few weeks a battery in Ashkelon repelled eight rockets from Gaza. Even in tough budget times, our solemn covenant with Israel and with the Israelis themselves, the people of Israel to provide security assistance must continue, must be sustained, and must be protected.

So let us be clear. Sticking by our friends in these increasingly uncertain times has to mean something, and as long as I'm in the U.S. Senate, you will have a friend who will fight for these resources that are so vital to Israel's security.

I will always remember an experience I had visiting Israel in 2005 and hearing the translation of an inscription that was etched on the outer wall of a school in Jerusalem from the eighth chapter of the prophet Zechariah, and here's what it said. "Thus said the Lord of Hosts, old men and old women, each with staff in hand because of old age, shall sit again in the streets of Jerusalem. The city shall be filled with boys and girls playing in her streets," unquote.

That's what the prophet Zechariah said. "The city shall be filled with boys and girls playing in her streets." Children do indeed play on the streets of Jerusalem today, but the prophecy will not be fully realized until the day when the

world recognizes Jerusalem as the undivided and eternal capital of Israel. And that prophecy will not be fully realized until the day when the children can play in the streets in every corner of Jerusalem, in every Sderot.

I want to say a few words to those who are leaving this building today to go to Capitol Hill. As you leave here today to meet with your senators and representatives down the street here in Washington, I want you to go there knowing with certainty that you'll make a difference with every member that you meet because you've always made a difference with me. I also want you to know with certainty that the United States of America will never abandon Israel, never.

I also want you to know with certainty that Israel will get through this challenging period of her history. And I want all of the young people here to know something as well, that you are in fact the future of AIPAC and I'm proud to stand with you always and always in all of your tomorrows. So thank you today for this honor. Thank you for your work. Shalom and may God bless you. Thank you.