

Speaker of the House John Boehner at AIPAC Policy Conference 2011

Transcript

Sander, thank you for that kind introduction, and to all of you, thank you for what you do. You know, I've had a chance to meet so many of you over the years, not just those of you from Ohio, but throughout the country. So to be assembled under one roof feels like getting old friends back together again, and we've got an awful lot of catching up to do, don't we?

You know, recent events bring to mind Henry Kissinger's lament at one point when he said, "There can be no crisis next week. My schedule's already full." I thought about that when I was thinking about what I was going to say tonight, and I began to recall the last time that I was in Israel, several years ago. I'll never forget visiting the northern border with Lebanon, standing there with the IDF soldiers, and many of them 18, 19 years old, and the closeness of the enemy hit me, how Israel doesn't get to choose its battle space. And where I stood on that border is about 100 miles from Jerusalem, about the same distance my home in Ohio is from our state capital in Columbus.

As Speaker of the House, I feel a responsibility to help ensure that our nation keeps its political and financial commitments and maintains its role as the beacon of freedom and democracy, and it's in that spirit that I join with all of you tonight. Much has been said about the special bond between Israel and the United States. Ambassador Oren called Israel "the ultimate ally," and I couldn't agree more.

In the last 63 years, through all the threats that we have faced, America and Israel have formed and honed a strategic alliance built on trust and based on shared values. That is the reason we gather year in and year out to honor and strengthen, in a very public, the historic friendship between our two great democracies.

As so many know, the world is a dangerous place for democracies, and we saw it in this country on 9/11. Israel sees it in the terrorist attacks that seem to come every month, or sometimes, every day. Now, the death of Osama bin Laden marks an important victory in the fight against al-Qaeda and the fight against Islamic extremism, and our nation's military and intelligence professionals have achieved an important goal in our nation's, and in all free nations, fight against terrorism, and I think they deserve our deepest appreciation.

But terrorist organizations are more resilient than just one person. Al-Qaeda has been weakened, but they have not been destroyed. My job as speaker is to ensure that the House remains focused on confronting and defeating the complex and evolving terrorist threat that still targets the United States and her allies.

In Lebanon, Hezbollah cast out a freely elected government and dominates that country, and every day, that terrorist organization, committed to the destruction of Israel, gets more weapons from Syria and from Iran. And looming over the entire region, of course, the Iranian regime and the threat it poses there and in the wider world.

Now, there's no doubt that the regime in Tehran has taken notice of how the United States has responded to the threats in Libya versus how it has responded to the threats in North Korea, and if anyone here still doubts the Iranian regime's quest for nuclear weapons, I think you're awfully optimistic. And if anyone thinks that we can contain the aggression and terrorist subversion of a nuclear-armed Iran, you may not just be optimistic but somewhat delusional.

Now, the best remedy for the threat to the world is for the people of Iran to rise up and replace that regime, just as the people of Tunisia and Egypt have risen up and replaced their regimes. And we all hope that the regimes in Libya and Syria will be replaced as well, so that the peoples of those countries can escape tyranny and enter freedom. Now, we should make it clear, and clearer than it has been for the last two years, that America is on the side of those who yearn and struggle for their own freedom. That is our historic and moral responsibility as a great and free nation, and we should never apologize or be ashamed of that role that we play in the world.

That's why America's commitment to the advancement of democracy in the Middle East remains critical, and one of those democracies is Iraq. As President Obama recently said, Iraq represents the promise of a multi-ethnic, multi-sectarian democracy. Now, Iraq is more than a simple democracy on the make. It is in the position to become a vital

strategic ally in the region, and this is a tribute to the resilience of the Iraqi people, the sacrifices made by our troops and by our diplomats and the many nations that have played a role in this task. But we must remain committed to ensuring that Iraq continues toward a transition as a sovereign country that is capable of defending itself and is at peace with its neighbors.

Now, let me be clear. Experience reminds us that one election does not constitute a transition to a viable and responsible democratic state. As Americans, we know that democracy means not just majority rule, but the rule of law, the protection of minority rights, of the basic freedoms of religion, speech and assembly.

And yes, the Arab Spring marks an overdue rejection of corruption and police states, but now, we're witnessing the battle for the region's political identity. Will they now build governments that respect human life and dignity? That will uphold human rights, and where the people rule? Or will we see women and religious minorities repressed and fundamental rights abridged? Will we see one man, one vote -- one time?

We are watching the struggle to play out in Egypt, and fostering economic development in Egypt is important, but just as critical is the work to secure a strategic partnership with the people of Egypt to protect our interests and maintains their commitment to peace with Israel.

And this brings me to Israel and the peace. I know the hour is late, but over in Jerusalem, the sun is just beginning to rise, and with it, another day of uncertainty. The work of achieving a safe and secure Israel has never been easy, but the cause is right. And I'll tell you that you have my 100 percent support for the cause of peace and support in Israel.

Israel has demonstrated time and again that it seeks nothing more than peace with its neighbors, and in any negotiation, both sides need to make compromises. And like every prime minister before him, Prime Minister Netanyahu knows this and accepts it, but what does the other side want? When it embraces terrorist organizations, I think it makes its intentions known.

You know, where I come from, you're judged by the company that you keep. You know, there are some out there that complain that the United States is too pro-Israel. Well, let me tell you what I think. Doubts about what America stands for and who America stands with slows the search for peace and stability in the region.

The president and the Congress should work together so that the American people, our friends and, yes, our enemies understand the national security policies and our goals and so that our allies -- allies like Israel -- have no cause to doubt that we'll be with them through thick and thin. You know, before there was an AIPAC, securing American support for a Jewish state was the work of a dedicated few, including an historian by the name of Benzion Netanyahu.

He said at one point, "Many people in those days had no faith." Today, we hear the same kind of thing from people who believe that Israel must always give in. That view was wrong then, and it is wrong today. Tomorrow, his son, a prime minister of Israel, will address the United States Congress, marking another milestone in this historic friendship. I was honored to invite him, and it will be our honor to have him there. It'll be our honor to have him there, the representative of a free people who have overcome all odds to rebuild an ancient nation.

Ladies and gentlemen, congratulations on the largest AIPAC gathering ever. Thank you for having me and remember this: Keep up the fight. Thank you.