



THE WHITE HOUSE  
Office of the Vice President

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For Immediate Release  
March 11, 2010

**REMARKS BY VICE PRESIDENT BIDEN**  
**“The Enduring Partnership Between the United States and Israel”**  
**Tel Aviv University**

VICE PRESIDENT BIDEN: Mr. President, thank you for that lovely introduction. And thank you for hosting me at such a world-class center for higher learning. It's been a long time since I've been back on campus. I was a mere child, a 31-year-old Senator when I was here the first time. But it's a privilege to be back.

The past few days being back in Israel has been wonderful. It's -- it's been an honor to be here, and it's been -- I wanted everyone to know with whom I spoke, and all of you to know, the deep friendship and kinship I feel as well as President Obama feels for this magnificent country. I should probably be used to it by now, but I'm always struck every time I come back by the hospitality of the Israeli people. No matter how long I've been away -- and I imagine you've experienced this yourself -- the instant I return, I feel like I'm at home. I feel like I never left. I feel like things just picked up where they left off the day that I left being here. So please accept my warmest gratitude, as well that of President Obama, who knows as well as I do that the United States has no better friend in the community of nations than Israel. Thank you so much.  
(Applause.)

I see some of my U.S. friends down there in the front row. I won't identify them and ruin their reputations. But they -- they know where my love for this country comes. It started at my dinner table with my father, who you would refer to as a righteous Christian. My father -- my dinner table was a place where we gathered to have conversation and incidentally eat, as opposed to the other way around. And my father -- my father's support for Israel is outrage for what had happened in the '30s and the failure of the world to act, his support for the creation of the state of Israel. It generated a feeling for Israel that began in my gut and went to my heart, and the older I got matured in my mind.

During those sessions, my other -- my father often spoke passionately about the special connection between the Jewish people and this land. Like many of my countrymen, I experienced the magic of Israel at a relatively young age -- at least it looks young now from my perspective. When I first visited here in 1973 on the eve of the Yom Kippur War, your nation was only a quarter-century old, and I was not much older. Already, Israel had a tragic as well as triumphal

history behind it, and as we all know, some very difficult days ahead. Already, there was a sense here that anything was possible.

My very first meeting in Israel was maybe the one that I carry closest to my heart. My first meeting in Israel -- I was invited by a woman named Golda Meir, who I admired from afar as millions of Americans did. We sort of claimed her as our own. I know she is Israeli, but we claimed her. We claimed her as our own in America. And I remember walking into her office as a young senator being literally in awe as she was so gracious the way she accepted me and gave me a hug more like my mother would, sat down behind her desk and while chain-smoking -- she had a series of maps behind her. And there were six or seven maps. She kept flipping the maps up and down, and explaining to me what exactly had happened in the Six-Day War. And there was a young man sitting next to me, a guy named Yitzhak Rabin, who I met for the first time. And as she pulled those maps up and down, educating this young senator as to the -- to the threat that this young nation of Israel was facing, I guess she could see the sense of apprehension on my face. I found myself being -- the more she talked about 2 million Jews -- and back then, by the way, there were not that many Arabs compared to today. The numbers were much smaller, but they were still exponentially larger than the Jewish population. And she went through the threats that were faced, and how it had come through the battles of the Six-Day War. She spoke so passionately about her country.

And I was concerned. I guess it showed in my face. I was concerned that surrounded by the neighbors who denied the very right of the nation to exist, how were you going to do this? The Prime Minister caught me off guard. After about an hour and a half, she looked at me and she said, "Senator, would you like a photo opportunity?" And I thought, what the hell is a photo opportunity? And I said, "Well, yes, Madam Prime Minister." We opened those double doors and we walked out into the ending room of her office and there was a lot of press there -- a lot, half a dozen photographers and cameras. (Laughter.)

For me, that was a lot, not like today. And they started snapping pictures. And while looking straight ahead, she talked to me without turning her head. She said, "Senator, don't look so worried." She said -- I said, "Well I am, Madam President, and because I just had this hour and a half." And she said -- she said, "We Israelis have a secret weapon." And I thought she only had said this to me, no one else in the whole world. She said, "We have a secret weapon in our struggle with the Arabs." And I thought she was going to tell me about a new secret weapon. (Laughter.) And I found myself turning and looking at her, and the press -- because this was all just a stand-up photo opportunity. And she said, "We have a secret weapon. We have nowhere else to go."

That trip was almost four decades ago, but I remember it as clearly as if it happened yesterday. And it drove home all that my father had spoken of -- randomly, occasionally but consistently -- over the previous 15 years. And he told me as a young boy, that Israel and Jews in the world had no place else to go with absolute certitude. This place, it gets in your blood. It never really lets you go.

I expect that there are several people in the audience today who have had similar experiences who first came here as tourists or religious pilgrims and ended up making aliyah and launching a new life in northern kibbutz, or a small town in Negev, or in the beautiful city by the

sea. Throughout my career, Israel has not only remained close to my heart but it has been the center of my work as a United States Senator and now as Vice President of the United States.

I have had the privilege of returning many times, and to know every one of your prime ministers over these past three and a half decades, including your current leader who is a close, personal friend of over 33 years, Bibi Netanyahu.

Israel's history is a tale of remarkable accomplishment. On a perilous patch of desert with sparse natural resources, you have built perhaps the most innovative economy in the world. You have more start-ups per capita than any nation on the planet, more firms on the NASDAQ exchange than anyone except the United States, and more U.S. patents per capita than any country, including my own. You have cultivated the gifts of 11 Nobel laureates, the great -- and as well as those of the great Itzhak Perlman, and in recent years you have Shai Agassi, whose path-breaking work on electric automobiles began not very far from where I stand.

Israel owes this remarkable and yet improbable success, I believe, to your democratic traditions, to its patriotic and pioneering citizens, and as with my own country, to its willingness to welcome the persecuted and the downtrodden from far-flung corners of the globe. All this gives life to Theodor Herzl's famous slogan, which I was reminded of this week while visiting his grave on this 150th anniversary of his birth. He said, "If you will it, it is no dream."

I had said in a speech in the United States some years ago for which I got some criticism, I said were I a Jew, I would be a Zionist. And it got a lot of national publicity, how could I say that, until I was reminded by my father you need not be a Jew to be a Zionist.

Ladies and gentlemen, just over 60 years ago, Israel's founders gave life to Herzl's dream by willing Israel into being. Since then, this nation has become more than an undeniable fact, more than just a legacy of age-old ties between a people and a land, though it is both of those things. Your very existence is also a hard-won and inviolable right.

Israel's unique relationship with the United States means that you need not bear that heavy burden alone. Our nations' unbreakable bond borne of common values, interwoven cultures, and mutual interests has spanned the entirety of Israel's history. And it's -- it's impervious to any shifts in either country and either country's partisan politics. No matter what challenges we face, this bond will endure. As a result, generations of Israelis and Americans and American-Isrealis have kept a foot in each country, enriching both our nations and peoples. I met with some of your leading high-tech leaders earlier, prior to coming to the stage. And they have a foot in both countries, many of them.

While these close relationships span the realm of commerce and education, medicine and technology, culture and the arts, at its core is an ironclad commitment to security -- Israel and my own country's. Every day, Israel faces bravely threats no country should have to endure. No parent should their child to schools equipped with air raid sirens in the year 2010. No government should be expected to turn a blind eye while an enemy calls for its destruction.

I am here to remind you, though I hope you will never forget, that America stands with you shoulder-to-shoulder in facing these threats. President Obama and I represent an unbroken chain

of American leaders who have understood this critical, strategic relationship. As the President said recently, "I will never waver from ensuring Israel's security and helping them secure themselves in what is a very hostile region."

President Obama has not only stated those words, he has translated that vow into action in his first year in ways both known to the public and not known to you, as Prime Minister Netanyahu eloquently acknowledged the other day when he and I were meeting and had a short press conference that followed. Beyond providing Israel nearly \$3 billion in military aid each and every year, we have reinvigorated defense consultations and redoubled our efforts to ensure that Israel's -- that Israel's forces will always maintain a qualitative edge.

We lead the fight in international institutions against the insidious campaign to challenge Israel's legitimacy and question its right to self-defense. Since our administration came into office, our militaries have expanded cooperation -- not maintained, expanded -- cooperation on joint exercises and missile defense. Last fall, more than 1,000 American troops participated in Juniper Cobra ballistic missile defense exercises, the largest such drill to date.

And it should go without saying, but I'll say it anyway so there's no doubt, the United States stands resolutely beside Israel against the scourge of terrorism, from which both of our countries have suffered badly. No one in this audience needs to be reminded of the fear and devastation caused by suicide bombers or by rockets from Southern Lebanon or from Gaza. The band of Israeli territory outside the rocket's range grows narrower all the time. And I, as an American, continue to marvel -- continue to marvel at the residents in the region being able to resolutely get up every morning of the communities -- other communities that in fact are within the bulls eye, the crosshairs, how you respond to that with defiance and not fear. American support for Israel is not just an act of friendship; it's an act of fundamental national self-interest on the part of the United States, a key component to our broader efforts to secure this region and a wider world, as well as our own security.

Ladies and gentlemen, I've heard it raised occasionally in editorials in this country and others wondering about our resolve. Make no mistake about America's resolve. Make no mistake about America's resolve. We have 200,000 young women and men -- we are spending a quarter of a trillion a year. We have had tens of thousands of fallen angels and multiple times more injured in the service of our nation deployed far from home in Iraq and Afghanistan. There, and elsewhere, we are aggressively confronting violent extremism and radical ideologies that threaten not only you and the United States, but our allies as well.

But our approach consists of more than the awesome military might we possess and are willing to use. From the very start, President Obama has called for a new era of diplomatic engagement with both our friends -- some of whom we had alienated the previous years -- as well as -- as well as those who are not viewed as our friends.

In Cairo last June, he launched a new beginning between the United States and the Muslim communities around the world. Later this month, the President will continue this engagement by visiting Indonesia, home of the world's largest Muslim population where he lived as a boy. We are absolutely convinced that this approach will improve not only our security, but as a consequence, your security.

A new generation of Muslims is coming to age, more numerous than its predecessors, more dispersed geographically, and because of technology, more closely connected with each other and with the forces and events that shape the world we share. If we can rollback recent tensions and redirect crude stereotypes -- theirs and our own -- it will make America safer and our closest allies, like Israel, safer as well in our view.

We are returning an ambassador to Damascus and elevating our diplomatic contacts. We do so with our eyes wide open both to our deep concerns with Syrian actions that has threatened your security and the stability of the region, and also to the hope of a better relationship and peace between Israel and Syria. And we will continue to help strengthen the institutions in Lebanon and work to implement the U.N. Security Council resolutions aimed at ending the flow of weapons to Hizballah and disarming this threat to Israel, as well as to the civilian Lebanese.

With other Arab and Muslim countries, we are revitalizing a partnership in education, science, technology, business, culture; because the best way to counter the lure of extreme ideology is to offer future opportunity. In speaking with your Prime Minister recently, he talked about the high birth rates in neighboring poor countries, including Yemen, and the need for us to provide economic outlets and opportunities so there is an option.

Looming over all our efforts in this region is the shadow cast by Iran, home of a -- home of a great civilization and proud people who suffer from a leadership that flouts the will of the world by pursuing nuclear weapons and supporting terrorism and terrorists. Over the past decade, Iran has become more, not less dangerous, building thousands of centrifuges that churn out nuclear material, funding and arming dangerous proxies like Hizballah and Hamas, intimidating both its neighbors as well as its own citizens.

From the moment we were elected, President Obama decided that we needed a new approach. He has sought to engage Iran's leaders for the purpose of changing their conduct, knowing full well how difficult that may be, but also knowing that if they fail to respond, we would be in a much stronger position to rally the international community to impose consequences for their actions.

Iran thus far has refused to cooperate, as the whole world has witnessed. Instead it has engaged in more violations of international obligations, like undeclared enrichment facilities that were recently exposed by the United States, and the decision to enrich uranium to 20 percent to build more -- and to build more enrichment facilities, all violations. It rejected a good-faith offer to exchange its low enriched uranium for fuel that could power a research reactor to produce medical isotopes. And it continues to deploy thugs to lock up and beat down those who bravely take to the streets in a quest for basic justice in their own country.

The Iranian leadership's continuing defiance has set the stage for our efforts to mobilize the world to impose meaningful sanctions that clarify for the Iranian leadership the stark choice: follow international rules or face harsh penalties and further isolation.

You have to acknowledge that today Iran is more isolated with its own people as well as the region and in the world than it has been at any time in the past two decades. The United States is

determined to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons, period. I know -- I know that for Israel -- (applause) -- I know that for Israel, there is no greater existential strategic threat. Trust me, we get that. It's also a threat -- the acquisition of nuclear weapons by Iran is also a threat to the security -- short-term, mid-term, and long-term -- to the United States of America.

And many other countries in this region and around the world strongly oppose a nuclear-armed Iran. It would threaten them, trigger an arms race in this region, and undermine the efforts to stop the spread of nuclear weapons, which would be a sorry outcome for such a promising beginning of the 21st century. For all those reasons, confronting this challenge is and must be a top national priority for the United States of America.

We are determined to keep the pressure on Iran so that it will change its course. And as we do, we will also be seeking to improve relations between the Israelis and Palestinians. They are connected indirectly, but there is a relationship. We call on Arab states who share a mutual concern about Iran -- we call on Arab states to support the effort to bring peace between Palestinians and the Israelis, and to take their own steps forward for peace with Israel.

These are critical goals in their own rights. Their pursuit also denies Tehran the opportunity to exploit the differences between Israelis and Palestinians, and Israelis and the Arab world, and to distract the many countries that stand united against Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons and the support of terrorism. Building peace and security between a Jewish democratic state of Israel and a viable, independent Palestinian state is profoundly in Israel's interest, if you will forgive me for suggesting that. (Applause.)

I've learned never tell another man or another country what's in their own interest, but it seems so -- it's also profoundly in the interest of Palestinians. And it's fundamentally in the national security interest of the United States of America.

Ladies and gentlemen, in my experience one necessary precondition for progress is that the rest of the world knows this. There is no space -- this is what they must know, every time progress is made, it's made when the rest of the world knows there is absolutely no space between the United States and Israel when it comes to security, none. No space. (Applause.) That's the only time when progress has been made.

And I applaud Prime Minister Netanyahu's recent call for two states for two people, lending a vital voice to what the Israelis, Palestinians, their Arab neighbors all know in their heart to be true. Ladies and gentlemen, the status quo is not sustainable.

It's no secret the demographic realities make it increasingly difficult for Israel to remain both a Jewish homeland and a democratic country in the absence of the Palestinian state. Genuine steps toward a two-state solution are also required to empower those living to live in peace and security with Israel and to undercut their rivals who will never accept that future.

For Israel, then, this is about both preserving your identity and achieving the security you deserve, lasting security.

For Palestinians, statehood will not just fulfill a legitimate and long-sought aspiration common to all peoples; it will restore the fundamental dignity and self-respect that their current predicament denies them. I understand why both sides are skeptical. I've been doing this for a long time, not as long as my friend, Dennis Ross who is with me -- Ross, who is with me -- Ross who is with me. He is with me. (Laughter and applause.) He has even more experience in the nitty-gritty of this than I do. We understand why both sides are skeptical. We've been down this road before and so have you, which every time makes it a little harder to go down the road again.

But I know -- I know that Israel's faith in the prospects for peace have been shaken by the searing experience of withdrawing from Lebanon and from Gaza, only to be rewarded with rocket fire and ambushes across your border. I know you've been frustrated by the unwillingness of some Palestinian leaders to curb incitement and take the risk that peace requires, just as when the West Bank checkpoints proliferate and settlements grow, the Palestinians experience their own crisis in confidence and come to doubt Israeli intentions.

And we all know what happens when cynicism festers -- distrust, harsh words, and eventually violence. The cycle of unintended consequences, which has happened more times than I can count, has led you to build more walls that may offer short term relief, but will not bring the sustained security that you seek. This is no way to live. This cycle must be broken.

In the Middle East -- in the Middle East that I first visited, peace between Israelis and its neighbors seemed absolutely impossible even to discuss. Those who suggested a two-state solution -- and no one did that, actually. But had someone suggested a two-state solution, they would have been considered either demented or dreamers. But then, Israel, Egypt and Jordan all acted boldly to end decades of conflict. Over time, other contacts have emerged between Israelis and Arabs.

And there is now an Arab Peace Initiative that makes an important contribution by envisioning a future in which Israel is secure and at peace with its Arab neighbors. Turning these visions into reality is among the hardest challenges we face, but we have to face it. There is no alternative. (Applause.)

As Prime Minister Netanyahu said, "all sides" -- "all sides need to take action in good faith if peace is to have a chance." But it's hard, my words, it's hard. While it's always easier to point fingers, it's time for Israeli and Palestinian leaders to acknowledge each others' steps to heed this call, even when more remains to be done -- and for the world to do the same thing.

Your Prime Minister is roundly criticized in other parts of the world, but your Prime Minister has endorsed the idea of a Palestinian State. He has removed roadblocks and checkpoints that choked the West Bank. These were difficult decisions -- not all that was asked for on the other side, but these were difficult decisions.

It was also difficult for the Palestinian Authority to take a step that it has to take to combat incitement and reform the institutions it's reforming. Of an even greater note, it's building an effective -- for the first time a genuinely effective security force to uphold law and order, in my view, with the potential to do it throughout the West Bank and throughout the Palestinian territories.

President Obama and I believe that -- believe that in President Abbas and Prime Minister Fayyad, men who I've known for a long time, Israeli leaders finally have willing partners who share the goal of peace between two states and have the competence to establish a nation. Their commitment to peace is an opportunity that must be seized. It must be seized. Who has there been better to date, to have the prospect of settling this with? But instead, two days ago the Israeli government announced it would advance planning for new housing units in East Jerusalem. I realize this is a very touchy subject in Israel as well as in my own country. But because that decision, in my view, undermined the trust required for productive negotiations, I -- and at the request of President Obama condemned it immediately and unequivocally. (Applause.)

Now, some legitimately may have been surprised that such a strong supporter of Israel for the last 37 years and beyond, but 37 years as an elected official, how I can speak out so strongly given the ties that I share as well as my country shares with Israel. But quite frankly, folks, sometimes only a friend can deliver the hardest truth. And I appreciate, by the way, the response your Prime Minister today announced this morning that he is putting in place a process to prevent the recurrence of that sort of that sort of events and who clarified that the beginning of actual construction on this particular project would likely take several years -- a statement he put out. That's significant, because it gives negotiations the time to resolve this, as well as other outstanding issues. Because when it was announced, I was on the West Bank. Everyone there thought it had meant immediately the resumption of the construction of 1,600 new units.

Look, folks, as we move forward I promise you this: The United States will continue to hold both sides accountable for any statements or any actions that inflame tensions or prejudice the outcome of these talks. The most important thing is for these talks to go forward and go promptly and go forward in good faith. We can't delay, because when progress is postponed, extremists exploit our differences and they sow hate.

These indirect talks everyone knows are just that, indirect talks, indirect negotiations. The only path, though, to finally resolving the permanent status issues, including borders, security, refugees, and Jerusalem are direct talks. Our administration -- (applause) -- but you've got to begin. The process has to begin. Our administration fully supports this effort led by our Special Envoy, Senator George Mitchell, a seasoned negotiator and a proven peacemaker in whom the President, the Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, and I have complete and utter confidence.

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.

Many challenges remain. Gilad Shalit is still in captivity and we pray every day for the day when he will come home and be reunited with his family. (Applause.) Ladies and gentlemen, incitement against Israel continues as do attacks on the legitimacy of Jewish ties to this ancient land.

And the ongoing threat from Gaza still in Hamas's grip, and from Hizballah in Southern Lebanon, remind us that your security is far from assured. Meanwhile, though, our policy and our

concerns about Israel's settlements remain unchanged. And while Hamas has condemned Gaza's populace to misery and hopelessness, Israel too has a responsibility to address their many needs. That's why we're working with the Israeli government to do just that and address some of legitimate needs without -- without further endangering Israel's security.

Ladies and gentlemen, I'm a Roman Catholic. And no one -- and I'm no expert on the Old Testament. But I know we're gathered today between Purim and Passover, holidays that teach us about salvation and redemption. It was written in the Book of Isaiah that Israel shall be "a light unto the nations." And yet, for more than six decades, Israelis have often sought but never found the salvation of a lasting peace. And it is very hard -- it is very hard to be a beacon for others, when you are constantly at war. To end this historic conflict, both sides must be historically bold, because if each waits stubbornly for the other to act first, this will go on and we'll be waiting for an eternity.

Back home, I am sometimes called an optimist, but I am an optimist about the prospects for peace because I am a realist. And to paraphrase Golda Meir, there is nowhere else to go. There is nowhere else to go. I cannot tell you that peace will come easily, you know better. In human history, it rarely has. But I can promise you, both Israelis and Palestinians, that the rewards for success will be boundless and that so long as well-intentioned people are engaged in this struggle, the United States will be your partner.

Thank you. And may God protect you, and may God protect Israel. Thank you very much. (Applause.)

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