
Remarks Presented to the American Israel Public Affairs Committee's Annual Policy Conference

By
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Let me begin by saying that Israel has no greater friend and no stronger supporter than the United States of America. For over half a century, American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) has strengthened the religious, cultural and political bonds that unite our two great nations, and I thank you for that. The United States and Israel share much in common. We both affirm the innate freedom and dignity of every human life, not as prizes that people confer to one another, but as divine gifts of the Almighty. As Thomas Jefferson once wrote, "The God that gave us liberty and life gave them to us at the same time." Moral clarity is an essential virtue in our world today and for sixty years cynics and skeptics have proven that we have been looking to false choices in the Middle East. They have claimed that we must choose either freedom or stability, either democracy or security. They have said that the United States could either uphold its principles or advance its policies.

By trying to purchase stability at the price of liberty, we achieved neither and we saw the result of that on a fine September morning. That is why President Bush has rejected sixty years of false choices in the Middle East. And as he said last week at the International Republican Institute, "The United States has a new policy, a strategy that recognizes that the best way to defeat the ideology that uses terror as a weapon is to spread freedom and democracy."

The President holds the deep belief that all human beings desire and deserve to live in liberty. This idea, of course, did not immediately find favor. Many continued to defend the false choices of the past. But we knew then and we know now America's message is clear, our principles are sound and our policies are right, and today the nations of the world are finally joining with the United States to support the cause of freedom.

We measure our success in the democratic revolutions that have stunned the entire world: vibrant revolutions of rose and orange and purple and tulip and cedar. The destiny of the Middle East is bound up in this global expansion of freedom. The days of thinking that this region was somehow immune to democracy are over. Working with our G-8 partners, the United States has created the Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative to build partnerships with people in the region who are working for greater liberty.

The flagship of this bold new policy is the Forum for the Future, an unprecedented international venue to amplify the voices of reform that are redefining the region. Together, we will tackle the urgent goals of the forum that include the following: political openness, economic liberty, educational opportunity and the empowerment of women.

Today, nations all across the world are speaking a common language of reform and they are helping citizens throughout the broader Middle East to transform the parameters of debate in their societies. The people of this region are expressing ideas and taking actions that would have been unthinkable only one year ago.

Some in the Arab media have even asked why the only real democracies in the Middle East are found in the occupied lands of Iraq and the Palestinian territories. What an incredible thought.

Today, citizens in the region are demanding that their governments respond to this simple, audacious question.

And many states will have to answer their people's call for genuine reform. Jordan and Bahrain and Qatar and Morocco are all taking steps to introduce greater openness into their political systems. Egypt has amended its constitution with electoral reform. And even Saudi Arabia has held multiple elections. And just last week (May 2005), remarkably, the Kuwaiti legislature granted its women citizens the right to vote. Kuwait's recognition that it must include all of its people in political life is, hopefully, an example that its neighbors will follow. In Lebanon, hundreds of thousands of citizens have demanded an end to the foreign suffocation of their country. With strong international support, led by the United States and by France, and with an explicit mandate from the United Nations Security Council, Syria has gotten the message loud and clear that it is not welcome in Lebanon. The Syrian regime has withdrawn its decades-long military presence. And at the end of this month, the Lebanese people will go to the polls and set a new course of action. But we cannot rest. Syria must also remove its intelligence forces and allow the Lebanese people to be free.

To be sure, a vital source of inspiration for all of these reformers comes from the people of Iraq, who defied threats of murder to vote in free elections in January. They declared with one voice that the will of the people, not the whim of a dictator, would determine Iraq's future. They declared with that same voice that no Iraqi regime would ever again torture its people, invade its neighbors, attack its neighbors and offer financial incentives to Palestinian homicide bombers.

Today, Iraq has a transitional government that will soon begin framing a new national constitution. Free nations everywhere have rallied to Iraq's side. There is a coalition of thirty countries helping the Iraqi people to defend themselves from murderers and terrorists. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) is training Iraq's army officers, police forces and civilian administrators. And next month, at the request of Iraq's new government, the United States and the European Union (E.U.) will co-host an international conference to build greater support for democracy, prosperity and security.

Now, I speak to these reform efforts because the United States looks to a future and has a vision of a day when Israel is no longer the sole democracy in the Middle East. This aspiration shapes the very heart of our approach to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as well. For four years, President Bush refused to meet with Yasser Arafat. He did so because Arafat valued neither Israel's security nor his own people's liberty. There were those who ridiculed this principled decision as if the refusal to negotiate with a man who aided and abetted terrorism somehow revealed a lack of concern for peace. America and Israeli had tried before to gain peace where democracy did not exist and we are not going down that road again. Instead, President Bush advanced a vision of two democratic states: Israel and Palestine living side by side in peace and security. And today, the Palestinian people are trying to meet this democratic challenge. In January 2005, they voted in historic elections for a leader who rejects violence as a path to peace. President Abbas has committed to both freedom and security and President Bush has offered his hand in friendship, just as he promised he would.

In three days, when they meet together here in Washington, they will build a relationship that is one that is based on the good faith that only democratic leaders can bring. The President will be clear that there are commitments to be met, that there are goals to be met, but that democracy is a goal that is unassailable and incontrovertible.

Prime Minister Sharon has also recognized that Israel is gaining a legitimate partner for peace and he has made courageous decisions that could change the course of history. Beginning in August 2005, Prime Minister Sharon will implement his plan to withdraw from Gaza and parts

of the West Bank. Israel's disengagement strategy presents an unprecedented and incredibly delicate opportunity for peace and we must all work together to capitalize on this precious moment. To strengthen our present opportunities, all nations must meet their obligations. Israel must take no actions that prejudice a final settlement or jeopardize the true viability of the Palestinian state. And Israel must help to create the conditions for the emergence of that democratic state. The Palestinian Authority must advance democratic reform and it must dismantle all terrorist networks in its society. Arab states must end incitement in their media, cut off all support for terrorism and extremist education, and establish normal relations with Israel.

To nurture our present opportunity, President Bush proposed and the Quartet nations endorsed the appointment of James Wolfensohn as Special Envoy for Gaza Disengagement. Jim Wolfensohn will help the Israelis and Palestinians coordinate on non-military aspects of their disengagement, including disposition of assets and revitalization of the Palestinian economy. To protect our present opportunity, President Bush has sent General William Ward to help the Palestinians reform their security services. General Ward is also coordinating all international security assistance to the Palestinians, including training and equipment. To expand our present opportunity, the United States has greatly increased our financial assistance to the Palestinian people. We are pledging \$350 million to help the Palestinians build the free institutions of their democratic state. This is an unprecedented contribution to the future of peace and freedom in the Middle East. Yes, this past year has brought forth a dramatic shift in the political landscape of the Middle East. But this moment of transformation is very fragile and it still has committed enemies, particularly the government of Iran, which is the world's leading sponsor of terrorism.

The United States has focused the world's attention on Iran's pursuit of weapons of mass destruction. And along with our allies, we are working to gain full disclosure of Iran's efforts to obtain nuclear weapons. The world must not tolerate any Iranian attempt to develop a nuclear weapon. Nor can it tolerate Iran's efforts to subvert democratic governments through terrorism. The Middle East is changing and even the unelected leaders in Tehran must recognize this fact. The energy of reform that is building all around them will one day inspire Iran's citizens to demand their liberty and their rights. The United States stands with the people of Iran.

President Bush has declared that advancing the cause of freedom is the calling of our time and in the broader Middle East, his policies are expanding the scope of what many thought possible. With our support, the people of the region are demonstrating that all great human achievement begins with free individuals who do not accept that the reality of today must also be the reality of tomorrow. Of course, there will always be cynics and skeptics who hold the misguided belief that if they can not see their goal, then it cannot be possible. They will try to elevate their cynicism by calling it realism and they will criticize all who echo the stirring words of Theodore Hertzl, "If you will it, it is no dream."

In 1776, cynics and skeptics could not see an independent America, so they doubted that it could be so. They saw only thirteen colonies that could never hang together and would surely hang separately. But there were others who had a vision, a vision of the United States as a free and great nation, a democracy, and one day, a complete multiethnic society. With perseverance, the American people made that vision a reality. In 1948, cynics and skeptics could not see the promise of Israel, so they doubted it, said it could never be fulfilled. They saw only a wounded and wandering people beset on all sides by hostile armies.

But there were those who had another vision, a vision of a Jewish state that would shelter its children, defend its sacred homeland, turn its desert soil green and reaffirm the principles of freedom and democracy. With courage, the Israeli people made that vision a reality.

Today, cynics and skeptics cannot see a democratic Middle East, so they doubt that it is a realistic goal. They focus only on the despotism that has shaped the region's past and still defines much of its present. But ladies and gentlemen, make no mistake, freedom is on the march in Afghanistan and Iraq and in Lebanon and in Georgia and Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan and in the Palestinian territories.

Yes, it is hard and progress is uneven. There are violent men who will stop at nothing to prevent democracy's rise. Yet people all across the Middle East today are talking and demonstrating and sharing their vision for a democratic future. Many have given their very lives to this noble purpose. The United States and Israel must defend the aspirations of all people who long to be free. And with our unwavering support, we can help to make the promise of democracy a reality for the entire region. But there were those who had another vision, a vision of a Jewish state that would shelter its children, defend its sacred homeland, turn its desert soil green and reaffirm the principles of freedom and democracy. With courage, the Israeli people made that vision a reality.