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Vice President's Remarks to the American Israel Public Affairs Committee 2006 Policy Conference

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THE VICE PRESIDENT: Thank you. (Applause.) Thank you very much. (Applause.) Thank you. (Applause.) Well, you made my day. (Laughter.) Well, thank you very much. And, Ed, thank you for the kind introduction. And let me thank all of you for that very warm welcome. It's a delight to be here this morning.

I want to thank the distinguished guests who've joined us, especially Israel's ambassador to the United States, Danny Ayalon. (Applause.) I also want to recognize the substantial delegation of student attendees from all over the U.S.: Welcome to Washington, it's good to see you here. (Applause.)

I'm grateful to the board of AIPAC for inviting me to be part of your 2006 Policy Conference. It's obviously a very well attended and successful event. And to everyone attending the conference, I bring personal greetings from our President, George W. Bush. (Applause.)



As always, AIPAC has brought together a large and public-minded group, representing different parts of America, many callings in life, and varied points of view on the issues of the day. Gathered here this morning, some of us are Republicans; some of us are Democrats. Yet all of us share a fundamental belief -- that the freedom and security of Israel are vital interests to the United States of America. (Applause.)

Nearly 58 years ago, in May of 1948, the new Jewish state was declared. On the day Israel came into being it was 12 midnight in Jerusalem -- six o'clock in the evening here in Washington. Eleven minutes later, Harry S. Truman made America the first nation to recognize Israel. (Applause.) From that moment to this very day, the United States has counted Israel as a special and valued friend that shares our basic principles.

As fellow democracies, both founded in struggle, we have shown our devotion to the ideals of liberty, equality, and the dignity of every person. We have shown, as well, great resolve and deep faith in times of testing and a true willingness to work and sacrifice for the cause of peace. We are, as President Bush has said, natural allies. There is no doubt that America's commitment to Israel's security is solid, enduring and unshakeable. (Applause.)

Over the years, our two peoples have also known the good fortune of having some very capable, resolute leaders come along when they were most needed. In my career I've had the privilege of meeting a long line of Israeli statesmen and women, including many prime ministers, starting with Yitzhak Rabin in the mid '70's. And in recent days I've been feeling especially grateful to have had many years of a relationship and friendship with Ariel Sharon. (Applause.)

The Prime Minister's life has been in many respects a reflection of Israel's modern history. He gave decades of service to Israel -- fighting in all of its wars, rising to high office, and leading the nation with purpose. When their country came under attack, Israelis knew that Ariel Sharon would stand in the line of fire. And in the effort to achieve peace, which requires so much wisdom, and boldness, and vision -- Israelis again placed their trust in this fearless member of the pioneering generation. Last year at AIPAC's policy conference, Prime Minister Sharon said, "I am willing to make painful compromises for peace ... There is one thing on which we will not make any compromises -- not now and not in the future -- and that is our security." (Applause.)



Today Ariel Sharon's voice is silent, and our thoughts are with him as he battles for his life. It's a comfort to know that his deeds will live on, and in our memory the man himself will stand like a rock. We honor him as one of the great statesmen of our time, and a man of peace. (Applause.)

As a small country in a tough part of the world, Israel has always had to be on guard against enemies to have a clear-eyed view of potential threats, and to confront dangers squarely. Throughout its history, the country has faced sudden, random acts of terrorism -- attacks intended to shake Israel's confidence and break the will of its people. Yet Israel has held firm, and has defended itself with patience, with moral courage, and decisive action. Those are the very qualities by which freedom is preserved, innocent lives are protected, and wars are won. And by those qualities, Israel, and the United States, and all civilized nations will win the war on terror. (Applause.)

To prevail in this fight, we must understand the nature of the enemy. As Israelis have seen so many times, and as America experienced on September 11th, 2001, the terrorist enemy is brutal and heartless. This enemy wears no uniform, has no regard for the rules of warfare, and is unconstrained by any standard of decency or morality. We are dealing with enemies who plot and plan in secret, then attempt to slip into a country, blend in among the innocent, and kill without mercy.

This enemy has a set of beliefs -- and we saw the expression of those beliefs in the rule of the Taliban.

They seek to impose a dictatorship of fear, under which every man, woman, and child lives in total obedience to a narrow, hateful ideology. This ideology rejects tolerance, denies freedom of conscience, and demands that women be pushed to the margins of society. Such beliefs can be imposed only through force and intimidation, so those who refuse to bow to the tyrants will be brutalized or killed -- and no person or group is exempt.

The terrorists have targeted people of every nationality and every religious faith, including Muslims who disagree with them. The war on terror is a fight against evil; victory in this war will be a victory for peaceful men and women of every religious faith. (Applause.)

This enemy also has a set of clear objectives. The terrorists want to end all American and Western influence in the Middle East. Their goal in that region is to seize control of a country, so they have a base from which to launch attacks and wage war against governments that do not meet their demands. The terrorists believe that by controlling one country, they will be able to target and overthrow other governments in the region, and ultimately to establish a totalitarian empire that encompasses a region from Spain, across North Africa, through the Middle East and South Asia, all the way around to Indonesia.

They have made clear, as well, their ultimate ambitions: to arm themselves with chemical, biological and even nuclear weapons; to destroy Israel; to intimidate all Western countries; and to cause mass death here in the United States.

Some might look at these ambitions and wave them off as extreme and mad. Well, these ambitions are, indeed, extreme and they are mad. They are also real, and we must not wave them off. We must take them seriously. We must oppose them. And we must defeat them. (Applause.)

Over the last several decades, Americans have seen how the terrorists pursue their objectives. Simply stated, they would hit us, but we would not hit back hard enough. In Beirut in 1983, terrorists killed 241 Americans, and afterward U.S. forces withdrew from Beirut. In 1993 we had the killing of American soldiers in Mogadishu, and the bombing of the World Trade Center in New York. Then came the attack on the Saudi National Guard Training Center in Riyadh in 1995; the killings at Khobar Towers in 1996; the attack on our embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998; and, of course, the attack on the USS Cole in 2000. With each attack, the terrorists grew more confident in believing they could strike America without paying a price -- and indeed, believing that if they killed enough Americans, they could change American policy.

So they continued to wage those attacks -- making the world less safe and eventually striking the United States in our homeland on September 11th. And we've seen the work of terrorists in many attacks since 9/11 -- in Jerusalem, Riyadh, Casablanca, Istanbul, Karachi, Mombassa, Bali, Jakarta, Najaf, Baghdad, London and Madrid. The terrorists have declared war on the civilized world. And America will lead the civilized world to victory. (Applause.)

We have a strategy of our own in this fight. First, we are absolutely determined to prevent attacks before they occur, and so we are on the offensive against the terror networks. (Applause.) At home and with coalition partners abroad, we've broken up terror cells, tracked down terrorist operatives, and

put heavy pressure on their ability to organize and plan attacks. The work is difficult and very often perilous, and there is much yet to do. But we've made tremendous progress against an enemy that dwells in the shadows. We've counted on the skill and the dedication of our professionals in law enforcement, intelligence, and homeland security -- and, of course, on the United States military. They have been superb, and they make us proud each and every day. (Applause.)

Second, we are determined to deny safe haven to the terrorists. Since the day our country was attacked, we have applied the Bush Doctrine: Any person or government that supports, protects, or harbors terrorists is complicit in the murder of the innocent, and will be held to account. (Applause.)

Third, we are working to halt the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and to keep those weapons out of the hands of killers. In the post-9/11 world, the United States and our allies are determined: we will not live at the mercy of terrorists or regimes that could arm them with chemical, biological, or nuclear weapons. This requires that we deal with threats before they fully materialize. (Applause.)

The President has put it very well: "Terrorists and terror states do not reveal these threats with fair notice, in formal declarations -- and responding to such enemies only after they have struck first is not self-defense, it's suicide." (Applause.) By whatever means are necessary -- whether diplomatic or military -- we will act to protect the liberty and lives of our people. (Applause.)

Fourth, we are determined to deny the terrorists the control of any nation, which they would use as a home base and a staging ground for terrorist attacks against others. That is why we continue to fight Taliban remnants and al Qaeda forces in Afghanistan. That's why we are working with President Musharraf to oppose and isolate the terrorist element in Pakistan. And that is why we are fighting the Saddam remnants and terrorists in Iraq. (Applause.)

Our strategy in Iraq is clear, our tactics will remain flexible, and we'll keep at the work until we finish the job. (Applause.) On the security side, our forces are hunting down high-value targets like Zarqawi and his lieutenants. Our soldiers and Marines are conducting smart, focused, aggressive, counterterrorism operations in the areas where the terrorists are known to be concentrated. And our coalition continues to train more Iraqi forces that are effective, well trained and well equipped, and prepared to assume increased responsibility for their country's security.

As the security force grows in strength and the political process advances, we'll be able to decrease troop levels without losing our capacity to defeat the terrorists. And going forward, any decisions about troop levels will be driven by conditions on the ground and the judgment of our commanders -- not by artificial timelines set by politicians in Washington, D.C. (Applause.)

Progress in Iraq has not come easily, but it has been steady. A short time ago, the Iraqi people had an appointed government, no popularly elected legislature, no permanent constitution and no recent experience with free national elections. In less than two years' time they've voted for a transitional government, drafted a progressive, democratic constitution in the heart of the Arab world, then approved the document in a national referendum, and elected a new government under its provisions. And in each successive election in Iraq there has been less violence, broader participation, and bigger

voter turnout -- over 70 percent turn-out in the most recent election. (Applause.) Iraqis have shown that they value their own liberty and are determined to chart the future of their own country.

It is not hard to see why the terrorists oppose and rage against the rise of democracy in Iraq. They know that as liberty advances, as men and women are given a say in the affairs of their country, they turn their creative gifts to the pursuits of peace. People who live in freedom are able to choose their own destiny, and this gives them real hope for material progress in their own lives, and a better future for their children. As democracy advances, ideologies that stir anger and hostility lose their appeal, and terrorists lose recruits, safe havens, and sources of funding.

For that reason, our strategy for victory in the war on terror has a fifth and crucial element: Across the broader Middle East, we will work to replace hatred and resentment with democracy and hope. (Applause.)

Supporting political freedom and peaceful change in a troubled part of the world is a long-term commitment. And we already know that the work will be difficult. Yet there is no alternative. On 9/11, the United States learned that problems boiling in a far-off region of the world could lead directly to a sudden and murderous attack right here on our own soil. For decades in the Middle East, millions of people have known nothing but dictatorship and heavy-handed rule -- resulting in misery, bitterness, and the ideologies of violence. If we simply accept the status quo, that region will be a source of conflict and mounting violence for this generation and beyond.

If the peoples of that region are given the rights of free men and women, and live under elected, accountable governments, and have a chance to work and succeed in hopeful societies, then the flow of radicalism and hate will one day come to an end.

In this way, as the President has said, America's ideals and interests are one and the same: The survival of liberty in our own land increasingly depends on the success of liberty in other lands; the best hope for peace in the world is the expansion of freedom throughout the world. (Applause.)

As Americans, we have faith in democracy, but no illusions. We know that it takes time and effort and patience for democratic values and free institutions to take hold, and the greater Middle East has a long way to go. The promise of democracy rests ultimately on free elections and the ability of free peoples to hold accountable those who govern them -- but that is only the beginning.

A functioning democracy requires institutions that endure beyond a single vote. Democracy requires the protection of minority rights, religious liberty, equality before the law, freedom of expression, and an inclusive society in which every person belongs. And those who win elections have a duty to nurture institutions and laws that serve the peaceful aspirations of their people.

Such duties now belong to the newly elected government in the Palestinian territories. I recognize that the outcome of last month's election has caused some to question whether democracy is truly the way toward peace in the Middle East. They argue that, by promoting democratic change, we are actually destabilizing the region and undermining hopes for peace. I believe that's a faulty argument.

For one thing, it's hard to claim that you get lasting stability and peace by denying people a voice in their own government. In fact, the denial of legitimate means of expressing dissent is one of the causes of extremism in the Middle East. For decades, many thought it was worth tolerating oppression for the sake of stability in that region. But we were only buying time as problems multiplied, and demagogues stirred resentment, and the ideologies of violence took hold.

We must make a clean break with that history of failed policy. By helping the peoples of that region gain the freedom to express their views, to have open debate, and to choose their own leaders, we have a better chance of defeating the radicalism that threatens us all. (Applause.)

An alternative to democratic rule is command and control by a tiny elite. That's unfortunately what we have seen for much of the past decade in the Palestinian territories -- and we're still living with the legacy of corruption, broken promises, abject poverty, the collapse of the rule of law and, ultimately, the outbreak of a terrorist campaign on Israel's doorstep. The Hamas candidates pledged to fight corruption and to improve social services, and they'll be held to that standard by the Palestinian people. If the leaders of Hamas desire the help of America and the international community to build an independent, prosperous Palestinian state, then the way forward is very clear. The Palestinian government must recognize Israel's right to exist. (Applause.) And Hamas must renounce terror and dismantle the infrastructure of terror. (Applause.) One thing is certain: The United States will not be a party to the establishment of a Palestinian state that sponsors terror and violence. (Applause.)

Nearly four years ago President Bush committed himself to the vision of two states, living side by side in peace and security. At the same time, he made it clear: There is simply no way to achieve that peace until all parties fight terror.

Ladies and gentlemen, one of the basic truths of the world we live in today is that George W. Bush is a man of his word. (Applause.) The policies of the United States reflect our ideals and the commitments we've made as a nation. And we will be consistent. We will not abandon our belief in democracy. We will not abandon our opposition to terrorism. And we will not abandon our commitment to the security of our friends and allies. Israel can count on the United States of America. (Applause.)

Over the past four years, other free nations have risen in the broader Middle East. America will remain on the side of democratic reformers, and the reformers are on the side of history. Across that region, the political dialogue has been transformed -- and politicians, scholars, students, and men and women from every walk of life are talking about freedom, equal rights, and accountable institutions of government. One leader in Lebanon said: "When I saw the Iraqi people voting, it was the start of a new Arab world...The Syrian people, the Egyptian people, all say that something is changing. The Berlin Wall has fallen. We can see it."

Indeed, the whole world can see the change, and the rising hope in places like Lebanon. Now that Syrian troops have left that country, the Syrian government must stop trying to interfere with the future of free Lebanon. (Applause.) America is committed to a sovereign, independent, Lebanon, dismantling all armed militias, and control by Lebanon's government over all of Lebanon's territory. (Applause.)

The inquiry into the assassination of former Prime Minister Hariri should be carried out in full, so the

killers can be brought to justice and all those involved -- no matter what their official positions may be -- can be held accountable. (Applause.) America supports the Lebanese people in their aspirations for freedom and democracy. They deserve the right to decide their country's future, and they deserve a President who truly represents them and who looks to the future, not to the past. (Applause.)

America supports, as well, the democratic aspirations of the people of Iran. (Applause.) Iranians have endured a generation of repression at the hands of a fanatical regime. That regime is one of the world's primary state sponsors of terror. The current President has spoken openly of wiping Israel off the map, and of a world without America. He's made despicable statements doubting the crimes of the Nazis, aligning himself with the rest of the fantasy-world Holocaust deniers.

The regime in Tehran also continues to defy the world with its nuclear ambitions. Of course, this matter may soon go before the U.N. Security Council. The Iranian regime needs to know that if it stays on its present course, the international community is prepared to impose meaningful consequences. (Applause.) For our part, the United States is keeping all options on the table in addressing the irresponsible conduct of the regime. (Applause.) And we join other nations in sending that regime a clear message: We will not allow Iran to have a nuclear weapon. (Applause.)

The people of Iran can be absolutely certain that we respect them, their country, and their long history as a great civilization -- and we stand with them. Iranians desire and deserve to be free from tyranny and oppression in their own homeland. Freedom in the Middle East requires freedom for the Iranian people -- and America looks forward to the day when our Nation can be the closest of friends with a free and democratic Iran. (Applause.)

In the months and years ahead, America will continue to support democracy as the expression of our ideals for the sake of our own security, as well as for that of our friends and allies. And we will continue to act with the kind of resolve that has made these past five years a time of progress in the broader Middle East.

Consider for a moment where we were five years ago, when President Bush and I took office. The secret planning for the attacks of 9/11 was already well underway. Hijackers had been recruited; funds raised; training had taken place. Some of the hijackers were already in the United States. In Afghanistan, the Taliban were in power. Al Qaeda was operating training camps that in the late '90s turned out thousands of terrorists. In Iraq, Saddam Hussein was in power, overseeing, along with his two malevolent sons, one of the bloodiest regimes of the 20th century.

Five years ago, there was a serious problem with proliferation, especially in the nuclear area. A. Q. Khan, the man who helped put Pakistan's nuclear program in place, had established a network that was providing nuclear weapons technology to rogue states including North Korea and Iran. And Moammar Ghadafi of Libya, one of the A.Q. Khan network's biggest customers, was spending millions to acquire nuclear weapons.

Today the picture is very different. The Taliban regime is now history, and 25 million Afghans are free. (Applause.) We have captured or killed hundreds of al Qaeda; put its leaders on the run; and closed the camps that had trained the killers. (Applause.) Saddam Hussein wakes up every day in a jail cell,

his sons are dead -- (applause) -- and Iraqis by the millions have embraced democracy. (Applause.) Iraq's leaders reflect the decency of the Iraqi people, and no dictator is taking their money and giving it to the families of suicide bombers. (Applause.)

Only days after Saddam was captured, the leader of Libya announced he would turn over all of his weapons of mass destruction materials. (Applause.) A short time later, Libya's uranium and centrifuges were sent to a U.S. facility in Oak Ridge, Tennessee. (Applause.) And the A.Q. Khan proliferation network has been shut down. (Applause.)

Our great country, which over the decades has aided the rise of new democracies in Europe, Asia, and Latin America, now serves that cause in the Middle East -- with courage, and firm purpose, and a level of generosity by the American people not seen since the Marshall Plan.

Five years ago, many would have found it hard to imagine that all these changes were on the way. And, obviously, they did not just happen. Because we've been willing to act on our convictions, we live in a better world today. We cannot know every turn that lies ahead in the fight against terror, and tyranny, and proliferation. Yet at every point, we will be patient and resolute -- because the supporters of democracy will need our help, and the enemies of democracy will test our will. And we will be confident, because events are moving in the direction of human liberty. Freedom's cause is the right cause, and every action we take in support of it makes this world better and safer for our children. (Applause.)

Once again, ladies and gentlemen, I appreciate your hospitality this morning. The President and I are grateful for your counsel, for your commitment to the security of our country, and for all you do on behalf of America's friendship with Israel.

Thank you very much. (Applause.)

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