

Shalom!

It's wonderful being with you this evening, and I'm thankful to be part of an event with so many friends from the United States as well as so many friends from right here in Israel. My Thanks to Joel Anand Samy, Natasha Srdoc and Becky Norton Dunlop for conceiving of this forum and bringing it about.

There is never a time I'm not grateful to be in Israel. As Christians it is the land in which our faith is rooted. It is the soil upon which the authors of our faith walked. It is the home of the Jewish people, people I believe were chosen uniquely by God to bring His Word and His will to the world.

In the seventh chapter of Deuteronomy, the fifth book of Moses, God says, "The Lord your God has chosen (Israel) to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the Lord set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but it is because the Lord loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers."

That love and that promise are fixed in time and eternity. No political manipulations or violent attacks or terrorist threats can ever shake them or replace them.

When I announced this trip to Israel, I made clear my reasons. As I said at the time, this trip emphasizes Bible-believing Christians' steadfast support for Israel. It underscores our need to not only pray for, but also work for the peace of Jerusalem so that all the people of this region, Jewish and Palestinian, can live in freedom, without fear.

As an Evangelical Christian, the city of Jerusalem has a special significance to me. It is the location of what I regard as the greatest acts in all history, acts of love from a God Who extends His offer of forgiveness and new life to all.

These convictions are not unique to me. Faithful Christians throughout the United States affirm them. In a study done last year by the respected Pew Research firm, more than 80 percent of Evangelicals said they believe that God gave Israel to the Jewish people. **1**

There is a small minority of Evangelicals who are wavering in their commitment to Israel. Don't let the media persuade you that this group is anything but an outlier. Those feeling ambivalent about supporting the Jewish state need some good theological education; some teaching about Israel's strategic importance to the United States, and some instruction about all Israel does of value to the Middle East and to the world. Better yet, they should come to Israel and experience communities in Samaria like Ariel or stand on the Golan Height and look down on Kuneitra, a Syrian city just minutes from Israel's border that has become a haven for ISIS. Or watch the effectiveness of Israel's Iron Dome as I did last summer as I was on the Gaza border as Hamas fired nearly 4000 rockets and mortar rounds into Israel.

I should note that the term "Evangelical" refers to someone who believes in the good news about Jesus. So I'm here to bring good news to you: As a lover of Jesus, we love the people of Israel, and will stand with you through whatever storms may come. It is not a blind love, but a love like that between David and Jonathan. When we disagree we will tell you, but no matter who may desert you, we will not join them.

I also stand before you as an American. Historically, the two defining purposes of my country's foreign policy have always been the security of the United States and the protection of vital international interests. There is simply no better representation of those purposes than my country's continued commitment to yours. As former Israeli Ambassador to the United States Michael Oren wrote a few months ago, "The U.S. has no substitute for the state that, though small, remains democratic, militarily and technologically robust, strategically located and unreservedly pro-American." **2**

A look at any map proves Ambassador Oren correct: While Jordan and Egypt have at least come to some terms with Israel's existence, the rest of the Arab world is either overtly hostile to Israel or less than secretly harbors those who want to destroy her.

Given Israel's loyalty to the United States, her geographic centrality in a vast region in which America clearly has security concerns, her military alliance with America, and her now almost seven-decade history of representative self-government, which includes religious freedom, my country has both a moral and a strategic obligation to stand with the Jewish state.

Israel is an island of liberty in a sea of repression and authoritarianism. This dedication to human liberty stems from a belief in human dignity, in the value of every person. And Israel's belief in human dignity is grounded in the Hebrew Scriptures – Scriptures we share with the Jewish people. But it's also grounded in something much more grim: Centuries of persecution for simply being Jewish.

That persecution reached a climax of indescribable evil during the Holocaust, an event within living memory. The systematic, well-planned, deliberate, and ongoing annihilation of six million men and women, boys and girls, moms, dads, brothers and sisters, is indisputable testimony of man's capacity for evil.

But what constitutes evil? Is it not a rejection of the bedrock truth that every person on the earth is made in the image and likeness of his Creator and merits respect and dignity? Destroying legions of those image-bearers was surely one of the greatest evils of all time.

Yet there are those who, even today, would replicate the Holocaust, and do so right here in Jerusalem and throughout Israel. Although the United State recently concluded a so-called "deal" with Iran over Iran's attempted development of nuclear weapons, the reality of Iran's mad hatred of Israel remains as deep as ever.

Of course, although Iran is perhaps unique in its longtime quest to develop weapons of mass destruction to destroy Israel, its hatred of Israel is shared by a long list of regimes and organizations dedicated to Israel's eradication.

All of you know the names too well: Hezbollah, the Islamic Brotherhood, Islamic Jihad, ISIS, and other assorted killers and their front groups. As journalist Bret Stephens reported earlier this month in the *Wall Street Journal*, recently an Imam in Gaza said, and I quote:

"Today, we realize why the Jews build walls. They do not do this to stop missiles but to prevent the slitting of their throats." Then, brandishing a six-inch knife, he added: "My brother in the West Bank: Stab!" **3**

What's always a little mystifying to me personally is that Israel is not an expansionist state. It's not as though Israel is seeking to conquer any of its surrounding neighbors or convert them to Judaism.

Israel simply wants to be left alone to live in peace and safety or, to borrow a phrase from the book of Micah, to be a place where every person "will sit under his vine and under his fig tree, with no one to make them afraid" (Micah 4:4).

Yet in the United States, President Obama's policies are eroding Israel's capacity for the safety and liberty it deserves.

Let me be clear about something: I don't know my President's motives. He claims to be Israel's friend and, in his words, "the closest thing to a Jew that has ever sat" in the Oval Office" of the White House. **4**

All I can say is that his policies aren't working. CNN reported earlier this week about what's happening in this very city, Jerusalem, "A growing sense of fear has worked its way into the tension of everyday living, as a wave of attacks on Israelis and violent clashes between Palestinian protesters and Israeli forces has kept people off the streets. Those who do wander out walk cautiously, perhaps even fearfully, keeping an eye out for anything or anyone unusual." **5**

Let me say something so obvious that is often ignored: If we want peace in the Middle East, it starts with Israel's enemies finally acknowledging two basic things: Israel's right to exist and to exist as a Jewish state. Until those hurdles are cleared, I fear that supposedly incremental progress will lead only to ongoing conflict.

America's commitment to Israel has to be composed of more than good intentions and high-sounding words. It has to be material in the form of vital military assistance. It has to be practical in terms of sound strategic policy. It has to be brave enough to weather criticism from the so-called "international community." And it has to be principled enough to be unwavering, resolute, and unbending.

More than 30 years ago, Ronald Reagan expressed his commitment to those very things. "Since the rebirth of the State of Israel, there has been an ironclad bond between that democracy and this one," he said. And he continued, "Back in 1948 when Israel was founded, pundits claimed the new country could never survive. Today, no one questions that Israel is a land of stability and democracy in a region of tyranny and unrest ... America has never flinched from its commitment to the State of Israel--a commitment which remains unshakable."

It must always remain unshakable. For bible-believing Christians it is and we will do our part to insure we select a president in 2016 that it is as well.

May God bless the State of Israel and the United States of America. Thank you very much.

1 <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/02/27/strong-support-for-israel-in-u-s-cuts-across-religious-lines/>

2 <http://www.wsj.com/articles/how-obama-abandoned-israel-1434409772>

3 http://www.wsj.com/article_email/palestine-the-psychotic-stage-1444692875-1MyQjAxMTE1MzExMzlxOTM4Wj

4 <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2015/jun/2/obama-i-am-closest-thing-jew-has-ever-sat-oval-off/>

5 <http://www.cnn.com/2015/11/03/middleeast/israels-new-terror-after-jerusalem-knife-attacks/>

6 <http://www.politico.com/agenda/story/2015/11/israel-iran-syria-and-obama-now-what-000309>