4-26-1997

Washington State AIPAC (American Israel Public Affairs Committee) Conference

Max S. Baucus

Let us know how access to this document benefits you.
Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.umt.edu/baucus_speeches

Recommended Citation
https://scholarworks.umt.edu/baucus_speeches/614

This Speech is brought to you for free and open access by the Archives and Special Collections at ScholarWorks at University of Montana. It has been accepted for inclusion in Max S. Baucus Speeches by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks at University of Montana. For more information, please contact scholarworks@mso.umt.edu.
Senator * or Department*: BAUCUS

Instructions:
Prepare one form for insertion at the beginning of each record series.
Prepare and insert additional forms at points that you want to index.
For example: at the beginning of a new folder, briefing book, topic, project, or date sequence.

Record Type*: Speeches & Remarks

MONTH/YEAR of Records*: April-1998
(Example: JANUARY-2003)

(1) Subject*: Interview with Joel Connelly
(select subject from controlled vocabulary, if your office has one)

(2) Subject* Press Memo

DOCUMENT DATE*: 04/26/1997
Remarks to Washington State AIPAC Conference

Senator Max Baucus
Seattle, Washington

April 26, 1995

Good evening. Thank you, Michele, for that kind introduction. It's great to be here in Seattle.

And let me start by applauding the work you do as volunteers, as activists and simply as people with an interest in Israel and the world around us. It is great to see Americans staying involved; refusing to give in, as many have, to the belief that we can isolate ourselves and assume the rest of the world will take care of itself.
We need you. And the rest of our pro-Israel candidates, of course, need your help and support. But more than that, America needs you. Abroad, citizens groups like yours make sure our country remains a leader abroad, and helps make this era of peace last. And we need you at home too, in an age when hate groups and intolerance are more common than I can remember.

TWO PROMISES
Just two weeks from now, Israel will mark its fiftieth anniversary. Israel’s modern history began with two promises, embodied in the Declaration of Independence of May 15, 1948. The first, to Jews everywhere, was:

"solve the problem of Jewish homelessness by opening the gates to all Jews and lifting the Jewish people to equality in the family of nations."
Second, to the citizens of Israel, was that:

"The State of Israel will promote development of the country for the benefit of all its inhabitants; will be based on precepts of liberty, justice and peace taught by the Hebrew prophets; will uphold the full social and political equality of all its citizens without distinction of race, creed or sex; will guarantee full freedom of conscience, worship, education and culture; will safeguard the sanctity and inviolability of shrines and holy places of all religions; and will dedicate itself to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations."
Israel has kept those promises for fifty years. It has offered a home and a guarantee of security to Jews everywhere. It has provided its citizens a democratic system, human rights, growing prosperity and freedom of conscience, while living with hostility and hatreds all around.

Its people should take great pride in these accomplishments. And we, as supporters and friends of Israel, should take pride in the help we have been able to give throughout these fifty years.

IMPORTANCE OF US-ISRAEL ALLIANCE

And as this fiftieth anniversary approaches, we should all take new heart and redouble our commitment to our country's alliance with Israel, because it remains essential to hopes for peace in the Middle East.
For all these fifty years, Israel has lived with hostility and at times open threats to its survival. I first visited Israel in 1962, just after college. At that time Israel lived within the 1948 armistice lines. At one point it was just about ten miles wide. Today, Israel is still a small country—geographically smaller than many Montana counties. And security must always come first.

Israel still must confront terror and assassination.
It must make strategic decisions in a world where today's top-secret military technology is tomorrow's off-the-shelf commercial product. To take just one example, the Global Positioning Service satellites that guided American troops through the Gulf War will very soon sell the same precise locating services to families going on vacation and teenagers hiking in the woods for a hundred dollars apiece.

And it must still contend with governments who refuse even to admit Israel's right to exist. Begin by assuming the best. Assume most Arab governments sincerely want peace with Israel. Assume even Yasser Arafat has accepted that his future lies in peace with Israel. Even if that is true, we must recognize that the Arab public is divided. To draw a parallel with the Passover story, we may be out of Egypt. But we are not yet across the Red Sea and far away from the Promised Land.
If Arafat has committed himself to peace — an open question — it is clear that the Palestinians are not united. Some believe in the peace process. Others fight it with bombs and sermons that endorse bombings. And they are not alone, as Islamic fundamentalism continues to govern Iran — remains strong as ever in Lebanon — rules the Sudan and threatens Algeria and Tunisia.

Saddam Hussein, a few months before the Gulf War, openly threatened the Jews of Israel with death by poisonous gas. He is still in power, and pressure from France and Russia to raise the economic embargo on Iraq rises every month. It is no exaggeration to say that Iraq is a Nazi-style regime, which is bent on revenge and which — if allowed to sell oil freely and thus get back on its feet — will make Israel its first target.
And of course, Iraq is far from the only remaining violent, totalitarian state in the region. Hafez Assad in Syria may accept a peace agreement. But it is almost impossible for me to believe he genuinely wants peace. And even if he does, anybody who says he can predict what Assad's successors will do is selling you a bill of goods. Israeli leaders can take nothing for granted, and neither can Israel's supporters here in the United States.

BOYCOTT CONTINUES

Our alliance with Israel, and our security assistance to Israel remain a crucial defense against these threats. And it will remain essential until the broader Arab world makes an irrevocable commitment to peace.
Even setting aside the most radical and violent Arab states, only two of the twenty-one Arab governments – Egypt and Jordan – have exchanged diplomatic representatives with Israel. And even as Israel takes risks for peace, most Arab states continue their economic boycott of Israel. Arab newspapers, even in Egypt, continue to run demagogic and even anti-Semitic articles.

And that shows me that even those peace agreements which exist today are not irreversible. Because no government-to-government agreement is a secure foundation for peace. If the "peace process" is to be more than a "process" – if it is to be "peace" itself – we need much more. We need contact between people. We must see scientific and academic links. Tourism. Environmental cooperation. Above all, the ties of trade, business and economic integration.
THE US-ISRAEL FREE TRADE AGREEMENT

The foundation for these things is already there.

Twelve years ago I helped to write the U.S.-Israel Free Trade Agreement. Since we signed that accord in 1985, U.S.-Israel trade has nearly tripled from $3.5 billion to over $9 billion last year. Exports to Israel supported over three hundred Montana jobs in 1993, and in a small state like ours that is a lot.

This was the first full-scale Free Trade Agreement we ever signed with any other country. It stands as a guarantee that our special relationship with Israel is a permanent relationship. And in the future, it can help cement a lasting peace in the Middle East.
As Arab governments commit themselves to peace, we and Israel can consider allowing them to join the agreement. And the small good signs we see today -- the designation of the Special Economic Zone in Irbid, Jordan, where Israeli companies are opening up exports and creating jobs; Israeli business leaders attending trade fairs in the Persian Gulf -- can be the first of many new initiatives.

These are, of course, fairly small events. And they are counterbalanced every day by terrorist attacks from Hamas, verbal threats from Iran and Iraq, and all the rest. So we have to be tough-minded. We have to be realistic. And we have to put security first.
That is still a long way away. And until the Arab nations not only sign peace agreements, but end the embargo and open all the normal human contacts nations generally have with one another, we cannot relax in the slightest way.

THE THIRD PROMISE

But that time may come. And the founders of Israel predicted that someday it would.

Their Declaration of Independence included a third promise, to Israel’s neighbors:
"We offer peace and amity to all neighboring states and their peoples, and invite them to cooperate, with the independent Jewish nation for the common good of all. The State of Israel is ready to contribute its full share to the peaceful progress and reconstitution of the Middle East."

Fulfillment of that promise has been long deferred -- not by Israel's choice, but by the deliberate decision of its neighbors. But the fact that it is deferred does not mean that the door is closed.

And we must have faith that someday, Israel's neighbors will be ready to take the hand of peace and amity, extended fifty years ago. There is nothing to say that Arabs can never accept Israel or Muslims can never accept Jews. There is nothing inevitable about hate and war. And I know that for a fact.
THE BILLINGS MENORAH MOVEMENT

That is not only because I am an optimistic person, but because I have seen first-hand, just in the last year, that while there is hate and evil in the world, there is also a great deal of good in people.

A few years ago, in November 1993, a group of "Skinheads" came to a Jewish house in Billings, Montana, and threw a bottle through the glass door. They had already spray-painted the wall of the Beth Aaron Synagogue and knocked down some of the gravestones. A few days later, they put a brick through the window of another Jewish house, with a five-year-old boy in the room. Then they smashed the windows of Catholic High School, which had a "Happy Hanukah" sign on its marquee.
Events like these can isolate their victims. They can silence people of good will in the community, and open up broader campaigns of hate and violence.

But that did not happen. Instead, the people of Billings rallied with the Jewish community. Wayne Inman, the police chief at the time, cracked down on the hate groups. The Billings Gazette, our major local newspaper, printed up thousands of paper menorahs. People all over town pasted them in their windows as a sign of solidarity. On Martin Luther King Day, I had the honor to take part in a march commemorating the event.
Now Montana's Jewish community is not all that big. And hate groups do not go away quickly. We have seen similar events this year in Big Timber and Helena. But most Montanans, as the events last year showed, consider the community a crucial part of our broader Montana family. And when one part of the family comes under attack, we recognize that it is an attack on all of us.

And that is why I am an optimist about the Middle East. I have to believe that most people, all over the world, feel the same way. Most people reject hate, anti-Semitism and war. Deep down, the Arabs must know that is better to live in peace and to help one another than to fight. Recent developments in Ireland
CONCLUSION

If that is right, we can look forward, someday, to a remarkable future.

In tomorrow's Middle East, the universities, laboratories and businesses of Israel can link with the natural resources of the Gulf and the Fertile Crescent to create growth and scientific progress. Nations of diverse faith and heritage - Jews, Muslims, Druse and Christians; Israelis, Arabs, Kurds and Turks and Persians - can join together in harmony instead of discord. And the entire region can become for the world what it was long ago: a Cradle of Civilization.
Needless to say, this is not certain. If hate and war are not inevitable, neither are peace and brotherhood. It is easy to imagine a future much like the past. A future in which the Arab world is dominated by fundamentalists, demagogues, and tyrants; in which most if not all Arab countries promise war and the destruction of Israel; in which the ordinary people of the region live in fear.

Israel's leaders and people are prepared for that, militarily and psychologically. We, as American supporters of Israel, must be prepared as well. AIPAC members do as much as anyone to make sure that we are prepared, and that our country remains committed to the security of Israel, come what may.
But we must also believe in and work for the other, brighter future. And if we ever think it is impossible, remember one simple, extraordinary fact. The promise of Zionism was fulfilled; and today, fifty years on, the first Jewish state in nearly two thousand years is stronger, more prosperous, and blessed with brighter prospects than ever before.

Each of you and your families deserves some credit for that.

I hope you keep it up.

Thank you all very much.