

Speech in the Knesset by the Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, Newt Gingrich

Jerusalem, Tuesday, 26 May 1998

Speaker Dan Tichon and Mrs. Tichon,

Ministers and deputy ministers of the government of Israel, members of the Knesset, former Knesset speaker Shlomo Hillel, former members of the Knesset, my congressional colleagues, distinguished guests and friends.

It is a great honor to stand before you today in the one truly democratic parliament in the entire Middle East. For fifty years you have led a nation that has gathered in people from over a hundred lands, survived the perils of many wars, and built a thriving nation out of the desert.

As we celebrate the remarkable achievements of the last fifty years, let me simply say: "kol ha-kavod."

Democratic leader Dick Gephardt and I have joined with the largest bipartisan gathering of congressmen and senators ever to visit Jerusalem. We are here to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of Israel's rebirth as a modern state. We commemorate fifty years of a close and cooperative relationship between our two countries and our peoples. In a sense, however, we are not only celebrating the last fifty years. The American and Israeli people are bound together by 3000 years of a shared and ancient tradition.

We are bound together by a common spiritual experience. It is a bond that is felt most powerfully here, in this city. As we overlook Jerusalem, and look at the sites that touched the lives of Abraham, David, and Christ, we understand the depth of a relationship that is far more than shared geopolitical interests.

We are bound together morally. Our two countries are committed to freedom, democracy, the rule of law, and individual rights.

We are bound together by pure friendship. It has been a privilege for me to return to Israel and spend time with your leaders, some of whom I have known for almost twenty years. For Marianne, it has been a chance to see friends she worked with on the Israeli free trade zone issue.

A member of our delegation, Congressman Tom Lantos, a survivor of the Holocaust, first visited Israel in 1956. This is his 57th trip to visit Israel. Two key chairmen in our delegation, Bob Livingston and Ben Gilman, have coupled their leadership in Congress with a deep understanding and love for this land and people of Israel. Another member, Congressman Henry Waxman, returns to Israel often to visit his daughter, son-in-law and grandchildren who live here.

The ties that bind America to Israel are greater than the economic and security interest that our nations share. We are two nations grown from a common source, both forged by the

courage and imagination of pioneers, and both expressing in our founding documents our ultimate reliance on Divine providence.

As we celebrate with you, we remember together the courage of David, who established Jerusalem 3000 years ago as the political and spiritual capital of the Jewish people. We commemorated that event the last time Marianne and I saw prime minister Rabin alive, at an event in our capitol in the rotunda to celebrate the 3000th anniversary of Jerusalem. Rabin spoke with deep emotion of his own ties to Jerusalem, the city where he was born and the city he fought to defend throughout his life. We in Congress stood with him then and stand with you today in recognizing Jerusalem as the united and eternal capital of Israel.

We remember the commitment of the early Zionists, who convened the first Zionist congress a century ago, lived through the horror of the Holocaust, and finally witnessed the birth of a Jewish homeland in Eretz Israel.

We remember the story of the last fifty years, of a state that has survived wars and countless acts of terrorism to maintain its place among the nations.

We remember with you because we believe that the anniversary of Israel's rebirth is not just a celebration for Israel alone. It is a celebration for all who are inspired by the faith that was born in this land. It is a celebration for all who see in Israel an outpost in the struggle for freedom across the globe. And it is a celebration for all who see in the fundamental relationship between our two countries a remarkable history and a great hope.

For we are here to celebrate more than the first fifty years. In a sense, we are here to celebrate the first three thousand years. And we are not just here to look ahead with you to the next fifty years. We are here to dream of the next three thousand years. We dream of how we - and our children - can build a future that holds more than the hope for mere survival, a future that can lead to a lasting prosperity, an enduring peace, and a truly free land.

Such a future - one marked by peace, prosperity and freedom - must be built upon an unending commitment to security for those who seek peace.

One of our greatest presidents, Ronald Reagan, had a simple strategy to expand freedom across the globe. It came down to three words: peace through strength. He knew that strength was the key to security, and that security was essential to peace. He knew that a lasting peace required a durable security.

This truth was reinforced for me in a personal and powerful way during my time in Israel. On Sunday we visited the Weizmann institute, where we met with some of your most talented scientists to learn about the technological breakthroughs that will shape our mutual future.

As we were leaving, I spoke to Manuela Dviri, whose son Yoni was killed in Lebanon on February 26 of this year. A 20-year-old staff sergeant from Kfar Saba, he served in an intelligence unit and died when a mortar round struck his position.

Manuela had, in Abraham Lincoln's words, laid the most costly sacrifice on the altar of freedom. Yet she said to me - unequivocally - that she did not believe peace could come

without security. She had lost her son. She still has another son, daughter-in-law and grandchild.

"You shouldn't need two words", she said. "Peace has within it the word security. When you say peace, it must include security, or it has no meaning".

While this tragedy has deprived Manuela of Yoni, I know the deepest hope she has for her granddaughter is a future of peace, freedom and security.

We join Manuela Dviri and the rest of the Israeli people in their aspirations for peace. No one can understand the depth of that aspiration, unless they have lived so long without peace. And no one can hope to achieve true peace unless it is always coupled with true security.

The peace process must ensure that Israel will retain the ability to protect its own citizens from terrorism. It must ensure that Israel maintains secure borders with its neighbors. Without establishing those realities, it cannot succeed.

For this reason, we support the Clinton administration when it says that Israel alone must determine its security needs. We cannot allow non-Israelis to substitute their judgment for the generals that Israel has trusted with its security. If Israel is to take risks for peace, as she has often done in the past, it must be risks she accepts, not risks that are imposed upon her.

While the peace process is designed to provide security within Israel and on her borders, perhaps the greatest threat is beyond the peace process. Israel and the us now face a growing threat beyond the horizon - weapons of mass destruction in the hands of outlaw dictatorships.

Through our victory in the Cold War, the United States and its allies defeated Soviet communism. In the subsequent years, however, rogue regimes in countries like Iraq, Iran, North Korea and Libya emerged from the shadows of the vanishing Soviet empire. In the hands of these dictatorships, weapons of mass destruction and the means to deliver them have become a dangerous threat to Israel, to the United States and to our allies.

Like few others on the planet, Israelis know the real, palpable threat from regimes that are methodically developing these weapons and delivery technologies. In 1991, thirty-eight Iraqi scud missiles rained down on Israel, inflicting casualties and portending Israel's vulnerability. We, too, know the consequences of these weapons. Thirty-eight young Americans were killed when Iraqi scud struck their barracks in Dhahran.

Despite the power of these missiles ,at times, our only defense was the inaccuracy of the missiles themselves. In our review of the Gulf War, we discovered that not one scud or scud launcher was confirmed destroyed on the ground in Iraq, despite a great effort to do so.

Since 1991, rogue regimes have relentlessly worked to improve both their weapons of mass destruction capability and their delivery systems. Nevertheless, in some quarters there is a breathtaking ambivalence toward what these facts imply.

If dictatorships work while democracies talk, a catastrophe will become inevitable. For democracies to survive and dictatorships to fail, we must establish a vision of a secure democracy, and we must implement three parallel strategies to achieve that vision. Our success must be built on the strategies of containment, defense, and replacement.

First, we must put unrelenting pressure on anyone assisting these outlaw dictatorships with their weapon programs. We cannot have normal relations with governments either tolerating or encouraging assistance to these dictatorships, whether the governments are active participants or acquiescent partners.

Due to Russian assistance, Iran will reportedly be able to manufacture its own medium-range ballistic missiles by the end of this year, capable of striking Israel and parts of Europe. Russia has also assisted Iraq with its own weapons program. It is time for our patience with the Russian government to come to an end.

It should be clearly communicated that Russia's relationship with the United States and Israel - and other nations of the west - will suffer if its actions do not match its commitments. The same message should be expressed to others - including China - who assist these countries in their nuclear, chemical, biological, and missile programs. We have a range of policy instruments at our disposal - including diplomatic and economic levers - and we should be prepared to use them.

The United States must make clear that stopping Iraq and Iran from acquiring weapons of mass destruction is its most intense goal, and we should organize our allies to jointly prevent these dictatorships from acquiring weapons of terror.

(applause)

Second, we cannot rely solely on containment to protect us from rogue dictatorships developing these capabilities. As these countries develop more and more accurate guidance systems for their missiles, with increasingly virulent biological and chemical warheads, it will become even more urgent to develop effective defenses against these missile systems.

In the United States today, we do not have the military capability to stop even one theater or inter-continental ballistic missile from reaching its target. Our senior military officers would be reduced to scanning the horizon, like the rest of us, watching for the missile that could destroy our city, our family, our home. We are totally vulnerable, but we are told that a 25-year-old treaty with a non-existent entity - the Soviet Union - prevents us from responding to this danger.

Israel, not bound by an outmoded dogma, is taking steps to develop missile defense, and we are assisting in those efforts. We have joined the Israeli government in the arrow ballistic missile defense initiative to protect your citizens from this very real threat. The arrow program is a tribute to the ingenuity and determination of the people of Israel to forge an effective defense for your homeland. The United States must aggressively develop both theater and global missile defenses to complement and reinforce the protection arrow will provide here in Israel.

Containment and defense provide interim security, but they cannot by themselves guarantee success. As long as individual dictators or regimes based on hatred work to develop terror weapons, all democratic societies will be threatened with catastrophe. A single nuclear, chemical or biological device in one of our great cities would create a tragedy of unthinkable proportions.

Our third strategy must be to preempt catastrophe by insisting that the dictatorships be replaced with democracies. Clearly, the free world has the capacity to liberate the people of Iraq. Clearly, the free world has the resources to encourage the people of Iran to complete the process which hopefully began with the election of President Khatemi.

We need the will, the courage and the determination to work together to replace dictatorships seeking weapons of terror with democracies seeking friendship and economic prosperity.

This vision of democratic success and the failure of dictatorships will require the same level of courage and commitment that in World War II defeated Nazi Germany, fascist Italy and imperial Japan. It will require the unrelenting persistence that for forty-five years methodically contained, defended against, and, in concert with the Russian and other captive peoples, ultimately replaced a communist dictatorship with fledgling democracies. Those democracies, while still struggling, have advanced freedom dramatically from the police state they replaced.

Free peoples who faced down and defeated these dangers should see today's dangerous but fragile dictatorships for what they are: Our opportunities to expand freedom.

Sustaining security and establishing freedom will lead not only to peace but also to economic prosperity. If we achieve peace through security in this region, the economies will flourish.

They will flourish first because open borders and free trade produce wealth. No one should know this better than the Palestinians. When acts of terror force Israel to seal its border, it is the Palestinians who suffer most. They lose access to the strong Israeli economy, and 100,000 Palestinians are cut off from their jobs. When regional tension chokes off commerce, it is Israel's neighbors who suffer most. Open borders and free trade allow others to share in Israel's economic growth.

In addition, the region's economies will flourish as broad cooperation solves the most pressing problems of the next fifty years. Nowhere is that cooperation more vital than in dealing with the shortage in the region's most precious natural resource: Water.

Water has always been a central security concern in this land. Hezekiah enhanced Jerusalem's security dramatically when he protected the Gihon spring, his water source, by extending the walls of the city. Today, water is an equally critical security concern, with the future of aquifers like the Yarkon as a principal issue in the peace process.

Right now, the United States gives incremental assistance to manage the problem. It has provided hundreds of millions of dollars to the Palestinians, primarily to tap new sources of water and manage the existing ones. In addition, it has assisted other countries in the region by providing them with Israeli expertise on things like drip irrigation and water recycling.

Each of these efforts does assist countries that have a large and growing water deficit. They ultimately have a marginal impact, however. Our challenge for the next fifty years is to find the strategic solution to the shortage of water in the region. We must do more than manage an ever scarcer resource; We must support the scientific and engineering advances that will erase the shortage of water forever.

Israel, the country that caused the desert to bloom, must lead this effort. From the cisterns of Masada to the drip irrigation of today, Israel has learned how to preserve a scarce resource. Today it is the world's leader on those questions.

In the future, Israel should become the world leader on expanding the supply of water. It has both the regional need and the human capital to lower the cost of desalinization and end the shortage of water for the region. The United States has already invested in sharing Israeli expertise with the region, learning to manage a scarce resource. For the future, leadership demands that we do more than simply manage the current options. We, the us, must invest with Israel to overwhelm the shortage of water with research that will provide fresh water from an abundant source, the oceans that cover most of our planet.

Our joint efforts for the future are built on the close relationship between our two countries. This relationship has been fostered in a sustained way by the US Congress.

The strong personal bond that members of congress feel toward Israel has led to consistent support for the state, reaching back to congressional resolutions as early as 1922 that supported a Jewish homeland in Palestine. Congress approved its first package of aid to Israel - \$65 million – in 1951. Congress pressed to maintain Israel's qualitative military edge, it provided emergency military assistance during the gulf war, congress approved \$10 billion in housing loan guarantees in order to absorb the flood of Jewish refugees from the former Soviet Union and Ethiopia.

It is congress that enacted legislation in 1995 that requires our government to move its embassy to Jerusalem, finally recognizing the fact that Jerusalem has been Israel's capital for the last fifty years.

(applause)

As speaker of the US House, I want to initiate a far more direct relationship between the Knesset and the Congress. Today, speaker Tichon and I are inaugurating a new US-Israeli interparliamentary initiative on strategic cooperation to be pursued by members from the US Congress and the Knesset.

This effort was conceived by chairman Uzi Landau of the Knesset's Foreign and Defense Affairs Committee, and Senator Jon Kyl of the US Congress. The initiative will focus on security issues, particularly the crucial question of missile defense. It offers an excellent starting point for broadening and deepening the interaction between the congress and the Knesset.

The relationship we are establishing between congress and the Knesset will not be unique. As democracy spreads across the region, as it inevitably will, we should work together to broaden the interaction with other democratic parliaments.

As we celebrate Israel's fiftieth anniversary, we honor those, both American and Israeli, whose commitment to security and freedom ensured Israel's survival. Today, we must draw inspiration from their example. Together, we can achieve a security and freedom so complete that it will lead to peace and prosperity not only in Israel, but across the entire region.

And let me just close by sharing with you - we have had a wonderful several days, we have just had a meeting with your Foreign and Defense Affairs Committee that was very direct and very candid on both sides - not quite up to the Knesset standard of bluntness but we're trying to learn. I just want to share with you for one brief moment the magic that you represent.

One hundred years ago this was an Ottoman Turkish land, Russia was czarist, Germany was imperial, China had not yet had the revolution that ended the Confucian domination and the Manchu Dynasty was still there, Japan was imperial in every sense and democracy was a strange idea in only a few countries. One hundred years later, we're gaining. It's painful, it costs lives, we make big mistakes. You go to Yad Vashem, we are reminded with heartrending clarity of the cost of being wrong. And yet in America, in Israel, in Europe, in more and more of Asia, in Russia, day by day this thing that we jointly represent - elect people to speak for you, put them in one room to make them fight it out - this thing is slowly spreading across the planet.

I am convinced from our trip here that Israeli democracy has never been more vibrant, it's never had a greater range of potential leaders, pushing, shoving, arguing, it never wrestled more passionately with the future of Israel and its neighbors, and as an American I can tell you how much we gained from these days, how stronger we will be going home, how much more grateful we are to you here in the city of David to continue to stand for freedom, and how much we want to reach out to work with each and every one of you to make sure that fifty years and three thousand years from now freedom exists in this land.

Thank you for allowing us to visit.