



## Binyamin Netanyahu

### *First Speech to a Joint Session of Congress*

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[Audio mp3 of Address](#)

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If I could only get the [Knesset](#) to vote like this.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Vice-President, members of Congress,

This is not the first time that a Prime Minister of Israel addresses a joint meeting of Congress. My immediate predecessor, [Shimon Peres](#), addressed this body -- and before him, the late [Yitzhak Rabin](#), who was [tragically cut down](#) by a despicable, savage assassin. We are grateful that Israeli democracy has proved resilient enough to overcome this barbaric act, but we shall always carry with us the pain of this tragedy.

I recognize, Mr. Speaker, that the great honor you have bestowed on me is not personal. It is a tribute to the unshakable fact that the [unique relationship between Israel and the United States](#) transcends politics and parties, governments and diplomacy. It is a relationship between two peoples who share a total commitment to the spirit of democracy, and infinite dedication to freedom.

We have a common vision of how societies should be governed, of how civilization should be advanced. We both believe in eternal values, we both believe in the Almighty. We both follow traditions hallowed by time and experience.

We admire America not only for its dynamism, and for its power, and for its wealth. We admire America for its moral force. As Jews and as Israelis, we are proud that this moral force is derived from the Bible and the precepts of morality that the Jewish people have given the world.

Of course, Israel and the United States also have common interests. But our bonds go well beyond such interests. In the 19th century, citizens of all free states viewed France as the great guardian of liberty. In the 20th century, every free person looks to America as the champion of freedom.

Yesterday my wife and I spent a very moving hour at [Arlington Cemetery](#), and we saw there the evidence of the price you paid for that freedom -- in the lives of your best and brightest young men. And it's a toll that is exacted from you -- from all of us, but from you, these very days.

I think it was the terrible misfortune of the Jewish people that, in the first half of this century, the United States had not yet assumed its pivotal role in the world. And it has been our great fortune that, in the second half of this century, with the miraculous renewal of Jewish nationhood, the United States became the preeminent power in the world.

You, the people of America, offered the fledgling Jewish state succor and support. You stood by us time and time again, against the forces of tyranny and totalitarianism. I know that I speak for every Israeli and every Jew throughout the world when I say to you today: Thank you, people of America.

Perhaps our most demanding joint effort has been the endless quest to achieve peace and stability for Israel and its Arab neighbors. American presidents have joined successive Israeli governments in an untiring effort to attain this peace.

The first [historic breakthrough](#) was led by Prime Minister Begin and Presidents Carter and Sadat at Camp David. The most recent success was our pact with Jordan under the auspices of President Clinton. These efforts, I believe, are clear proof of our intentions and our direction. We want peace. We want peace with all our neighbors. We have no quarrel with them which cannot be resolved by peaceful means. Nor, I must say, do we have a quarrel with Islam. We reject the thesis of an inevitable clash of civilizations. We do not subscribe to the idea that Islam has replaced Communism as the new rival of the West, because our conflict is specific. It is with those militant fanatics who pervert the central tenets of a great faith towards violence and world domination. Our hand is stretched in peace to all who would grasp it. We don't care about their religion. We don't care about their national identity. We don't care about their ideological belief. We care about peace, and our hand is stretched out to peace.

Every Israeli wants peace. I don't think there is a people who has yearned, prayed and sacrificed more for peace than we have. There is not a family in Israel that has not suffered the unbearable agony of war and, directly or indirectly, the excruciating, ever-lasting pain of grief. The mandate we have received from the people of Israel is to continue the search for an end to wars and an end to grief. I promise you: We are going to live up to this mandate. We will continue the quest for peace, and, to this end, we are ready to resume negotiations with the Palestinian Authority on the implementation of our [Interim Agreement](#).

I want to say something about agreements. Some of you speak Latin, or at least studied Latin. *Pacta sunt servanda* -- we believe agreements are made to be kept. This is our policy, and we expect the Palestinian side to abide by its commitments. On this basis, we will be prepared to begin final status negotiations as well. We are ready to engage Syria and Lebanon in meaningful negotiations. We seek to broaden the circle of peace to the whole Arab world and the rest of the countries of the Middle East.

But I want to make it clear that we want a peace that will last. We must have a peace based on security for all. We cannot, and I might say we dare not, forget that more men, women and children have lost their lives to terrorist attacks in the last three years, than in the entire previous decade.

I know that the representatives of the United States sitting here, the people of the United States, are now becoming tragically familiar with this experience. You've experienced it in places as far afield as [New York's World Trade Center](#), and most recently in [Dhahran](#). And I notice also the recent torching of Afro-American churches

in America, which, I must tell you, strike a familiar, chilling note among Jews.

But I want to try and put the Israeli experience in perspective. One has to imagine, to do so, such attacks occurring time and time again in every city and in every corner of this great country.

So, what we are saying here today is as simple as it is elementary. Peace means the absence of violence. Peace means not fearing for your children every time they board a bus. Peace means walking the streets of your town without the fearful shriek of Katyusha rockets overhead.

We just visited with the wife of a friend of mine, the deputy-mayor of Kiryat Shmona, who was walking the streets of Kiryat Shmona when the [fearful shriek of a rocket](#) over her head burned her car, nearly burned her, and she was miraculously saved and she is alive and she is getting better. But peace means that this doesn't happen, because peace without personal safety is a contradiction in terms. It is a hoax. It will not stand.

What we are facing in the Middle East today is a broad front of terror throughout the area. Its common goal is to remove any Western, and primarily any American, presence in the Middle East. It seeks to break our will, to shatter our resolve, to make us yield.

I believe the terrorists must understand that we will not yield, however grave and fearful the challenge. Neither Israel nor any other democracy, and certainly not the United States, must ever bend to terrorism. We must fight it resolutely, endlessly, tirelessly, we must fight it together, until we remove this malignancy from the face of the earth.

For too long, the standards of peace used throughout the world have not been applied to the Middle East. Violence and despotism have been excused and not challenged. Respect for human freedoms has not been on the agenda. It's been on the agenda everywhere else. Everywhere else: in Latin America, in the former Soviet Union, in South Africa, and that effort has been led by successive American administrations and by this house.

I think it's time to demand a peace based on norms and standards. It is not enough to talk about peace in abstraction. We must talk about the content of peace. It is time, I believe, for a code of conduct for building a lasting Middle East peace.

Such a peace must be based on three pillars, the three pillars of peace.

Security is the first pillar. There is no substitute for it. To succeed, the quest for peace must be accompanied by a quest for security.

Demanding an end to terrorist attacks as a prerequisite for peace does not give the terrorists veto power over the peace process. Because nearly all of the terrorist acts directed against us are perpetrated by known organizations whose activities can be curbed, if not altogether stopped, by our negotiating partners.

This means that our negotiating partners, and indeed all the regimes of the region, must make a strategic choice -- either follow the option of terror as an instrument of policy, of diplomacy, or follow the option of peace. They cannot have it both ways.

This choice means that the Palestinian Authority must live up to the obligations it has solemnly undertaken to prevent terrorist attacks against Israel. This choice also means that Syria must cease its policy of enabling proxy attacks against Israeli cities, and undertake to eliminate threats from Hezbollah and other Syrian-based groups. This means that the fight against terror cannot be episodic. It cannot be conditional. It cannot be whimsical. It cannot be optional. It must become the mainstay of a relationship of trust between Israel and its Arab partners.

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## PM Netanyahu Second Joint Session of Congress Speech

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The second pillar of peace is reciprocity. This means an unshakable commitment to the peaceful resolution of disputes, including the border disputes between Israel and its neighbors.

The signing of a peace treaty should be the beginning of a relationship of reciprocal respect, recognition and the fulfillment of mutual obligations. It should not trigger round after round of hostile diplomacy. Peace should not be the pursuit of war by other means. A peace without pacification, a peace without normalization, a peace in which Israel is repeatedly brought under attack, is not a true peace.

Reciprocity means that every line in every agreement turns into a sinew of reconciliation. Reciprocity means that an agreement must be kept by both sides. Reciprocity is the glue of mutual commitments, that upholds agreements. This is the second pillar of peace.

The third pillar of lasting peace is democracy and human rights. I am not revealing a secret to the members of this chamber, when I say that modern democracies do not initiate aggression. This has been the central lesson of the twentieth century. States that respect the human rights of their citizens are not likely to provoke hostile action against their neighbors. No one knows better than the United States, the world's greatest democracy, that the best guarantor against military adventurism is accountable, democratic government.

The world has witnessed the bitter results of policies without standards in the case of Saddam Hussein. Unless we want more Saddams to rise, we must apply the standards of democracy and human rights in the Middle East. I believe that every Muslim and every Christian and every Jew in the region is entitled to nothing less. I don't think we should accept the idea that the Middle East is the latest, or the last, isolated sanctuary that will be democracy-free for all time except for the presence of Israel.

I realize that this is a process. It may be a long-term process. But I think we should begin it. It is time for the states of the Middle East to put the issues of human rights and democratization on their agenda. Democratization means accepting a free press and the right of a legal opposition to organize and express itself. It's very important for the opposition to be able to express itself, Mr. Speaker. I've just learned and will accord that same right, as you know. This is democracy. To be able to disagree, to express our disagreements, and sometimes to agree after disagreements. It means tolerance. And it means an inherent shift away from aggression toward the recognition of the mutual right to differ.

I'll admit, the Middle East as a whole has not yet effected this basic shift -- this change from autocracy to democracy. But this does not mean that we cannot have peace in this region, peace with non-democratic regimes. I believe we can. It's a fact that we've had such peace arrangements.

But such peace arrangements, as we can now arrive at, can only be characterized as a defensible peace, in which we must retain assets essential to the defense of our country and sufficient to deter aggression.

Until this democratization becomes a mainstay of the region, the proper course for the democratic world, led by the United States, is to strengthen the only democracy in the Middle East, Israel, and to encourage moves to pluralism and greater freedom in the Arab world.

I want to make something clear. We do not want peace merely in our time. We want peace for all time. To the members of "[Peace Now](#)": we do not just want peace now. We want peace now, and later, we want peace for generations. There is no divide. That desire is heartfelt. It should be a point of unity, not of disunity.

This is why we must make the pursuit of human rights and democracy a cornerstone of our quest.

These, then, are the three pillars of peace -- peace, reciprocity and the strengthening of democracy.

I believe that a peace based on these three pillars can be advanced. Yet I, ladies and

gentlemen, would be remiss if I did not refer to a major challenge facing all of us.

I have touched on the problem of the Middle East that is largely undemocratic, and part of it is strongly anti-democratic. Specifically, it is being radicalized and terrorized by a number of unreconstructed dictatorships whose governmental creed is based on tyranny and intimidation.

The most dangerous of these regimes is Iran, that has wed a cruel despotism to a fanatic militancy. If this regime, or its despotic neighbor Iraq, were to acquire nuclear weapons, this could presage catastrophic consequences, not only for my country, and not only for the Middle East, but for all mankind.

I believe the international community must reinvigorate its efforts to isolate these regimes, and prevent them from acquiring atomic power. The United States and Israel have been at the forefront of this effort, but we can and must do much more. Europe and the countries of Asia must be made to understand that it is folly, nothing short of folly, to pursue short-time material gain while creating a long-term existential danger for all of us.

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## PM Netanyahu Third Joint Session of Congress Speech

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Only the United States can lead this vital international effort to stop the nuclearization of terrorist states. But the deadline for attaining this goal is getting extremely close.

In our own generation, we have witnessed how the United States averted, by its wisdom, tenacity, and determination, the dangerous expansion of a totalitarian superpower equipped with nuclear weapons. The policy it used for that purpose was deterrence. Now, we see the rise of a similar threat -- similar, and in many ways more dangerous -- against which deterrence by itself may not be sufficient. Deterrence must now be reinforced with prevention -- immediate and effective prevention.

We are confident that America, once again, will not fail to take the lead in protecting our free civilization from this ultimate horror. But, ladies and gentlemen, time is running out. We have to act -- responsibly, in a united front, internationally. This is not a slogan. This is not over-dramatization. This is the life of our children and our grandchildren. And I believe there is no greater, more noble, more responsible force than the united front of democracy, led by the world's greatest democracy, the United States. We can overcome this challenge. We can beat it successfully.

Let me now say a word about a subject that has been on your mind and ours, and that subject is the city of Jerusalem.

Countless words have been written about that city on the hill, which represents the universal hope for justice and peace. I live in that city on the hill. And in my boyhood, I knew that city, when it was divided into enemy camps, with coils of barbed wire stretched through its heart.

Since 1967, under Israeli sovereignty, united Jerusalem has, for the first time in two thousand years, become the city of peace. For the first time, the holy places have been open to worshippers from all three great faiths. For the first time, no group in the city or among its pilgrims has been persecuted or denied free expression. For the first time, a single sovereign authority has afforded security and protection to members of every nationality who sought to come to pray there.

There have been efforts to re-divide this city by those who claim that peace can come through division -- that it can be secured through multiple sovereignties, multiple laws and multiple police forces.

This is a groundless and dangerous assumption, which impels me to declare today: There will never be such a re-division of Jerusalem.

Never.

We shall not allow a [Berlin Wall](#) to be erected inside Jerusalem. We will not drive out anyone, but neither shall we be driven out of any quarter, any neighborhood, any street of our eternal capital.

Finally, permit me briefly to remark on our future economic relationship. The United States has given Israel -- how can I tell it to this body? The United States has given Israel, apart from political and military support, munificent and magnificent assistance in the economic sphere. With America's help, Israel has grown to be a powerful, modern state. I believe that we can now say that Israel has reached childhood's end, that it has matured enough to begin approaching a state of self-reliance.

We are committed to turning Israel's economy into a free market of goods and ideas, which is the only way to bring ourselves to true economic independence. This means free enterprise, privatization, open capital markets, an end to cartels, lower taxes, deregulation. You know, there's not a Hebrew word for deregulation. By the time this term of office in Israel is over, there will be a Hebrew word for deregulation.

But may I say something that unites all of us across the political divide: I'm committed to reducing the size of government, and I'm quoting Speaker Gingrich, quoting President Clinton, saying that the era of big government is over. It's over in Israel too.

I believe that a market economy is the only way to effectively absorb immigrants and realize the dream of the ages -- the ingathering of the Jewish exiles. To succeed, we must uphold the market economy as the imperative of the future. It's a crucial prerequisite for the building of the promised land.

We are deeply grateful for all we have received from the United States, for all that we have received from this chamber, from this body. But I believe there can be no greater tribute to America's long-standing economic aid to Israel than for us to be able to say: We are going to achieve economic independence. We are going to do it. In the next four years, we will begin the long-term process of gradually reducing the level of your generous economic assistance to Israel. I am convinced that our economic policies will lay the foundation for total self-reliance and great economic strength.

In our Hebrew Scriptures, which spread from Jerusalem to all of mankind, there is a verse: "God will give strength to His people; God will bless His people with peace." This is the original, inspired source for the truth that peace derives from strength.

In the coming years, we intend to strengthen the Jewish people in its land. We intend to build an Israel of reciprocal dialogue and peace with each and every one of our neighbors. We will not uproot anyone, nor shall we be uprooted. We shall insist on the right of Jews to live anywhere in the Land, just as we insist on this right for Jews in any other place in the world. We will build an Israel of self-reliance. We will build an Israel with an undivided and indivisible city of hope at its heart. We will build a peace founded on justice and strength, and amity for all men and women of good will.

And I know the American people will join us in making every effort to make our dream a reality, as I know the American people will join us in prayer: "God will give strength to His people; God will bless His people with peace."

Thank you very much.

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