

Ansprache von US-Präsident Barack Obama am 21. März 2013 im Kongresszentrum Jerusalem

Shalom. It is an honor to be here with you in Jerusalem, and I am so grateful for the welcome that I have received from the people of Israel. I bring with me the support of the American people, and the friendship that binds us together.

Over the last two days, I have reaffirmed the bonds between our countries with Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Peres. I have borne witness to the ancient history of the Jewish people at the Shrine of the Book, and I have seen Israel's shining future in your scientists and entrepreneurs. This is a nation of museums and patents, timeless holy sites and ground-breaking innovation. Only in Israel could you see the Dead Sea Scrolls and the place where the technology on board the Mars Rover originated. But what I've looked forward to the most is the ability to speak directly to you, the Israeli people – especially so many young people – about the history that brought us here today, and the future that you will make in the years to come.

Now I know that in Israel's vibrant democracy, every word and gesture is carefully scrutinized. But just so you know, any drama between me and my friend Bibi over the years was just a plot to create material for Eretz Nehederet¹.

I also know that I come to Israel on the eve of a sacred holiday – the celebration of Passover. And that is where I would like to begin today. Just a few days from now, Jews here in Israel and around the world will sit with family and friends at the Seder table, and celebrate

¹ „Wundervolles Land.“ Es ist nicht klar, ob Obama damit auch auf eine Satiresendung unter diesem Titel im israelischen Fernsehen anspielen wollte.

with songs, wine and symbolic foods. After enjoying Seders with family and friends in Chicago and on the campaign trail, I'm proud to have brought this tradition into the White House. I did so because I wanted my daughters to experience the Haggadah², and the story at the center of Passover that makes this time of year so powerful. It is a story of centuries of slavery, and years of wandering in the desert; a story of perseverance amidst persecution, and faith in God and the Torah. It is a story about finding freedom in your own land. For the Jewish people, this story is central to who you have become. But it is also a story that holds within it the universal human experience, with all of its suffering and salvation. It is a part of the three great religions – Judaism, Christianity, and Islam – that trace their origins to Abraham, and see Jerusalem as sacred. And it is a story that has inspired communities around the globe, including me and my fellow Americans.

In the United States – a nation made up of people who crossed oceans to start anew – we are naturally drawn to the idea of finding freedom in our land. To African-Americans, the story of the Exodus told a powerful tale about emerging from the grip of bondage to reach for liberty and human dignity – a tale that was carried from slavery through the civil rights movement. For generations, this promise helped people weather poverty and persecution, while holding on to the hope that a better day was on the horizon. For me personally, growing up in far-flung parts of the world and without firm roots, it spoke to a yearning within every human being for a home.

Of course, even as we draw strength from the story of God's will and His gift of freedom expressed on Passover, we know that here on Earth we must bear our responsibilities in an imperfect world. That means accepting our measure of sacrifice and struggle, and working

² Geschichte des Auszugs der Israeliten aus Ägypten. Sie wird am Vorabend („Seder“) des Pessach-Festes gelesen.

– through generation after generation – on behalf of that ideal of freedom. As Dr. Martin Luther King said on the day before he was killed – "I may not get there with you. But I want you to know that... we, as a people, will get to the promised land." So just as Joshua carried on after Moses, the work goes on – for justice and dignity; for opportunity and freedom.

For the Jewish people, the journey to the promise of the State of Israel wound through countless generations. It involved centuries of suffering and exile, prejudice, pogroms and even genocide. Through it all, the Jewish people sustained their unique identity and traditions, as well as a longing to return home. And while Jews achieved extraordinary success in many parts of the world, the dream of true freedom finally found its full expression in the Zionist idea – to be a free people in your homeland.

That is why I believe that Israel is rooted not just in history and tradition, but also in a simple and profound idea: the idea that people deserve to be free in a land of their own. And over the last 65 years, when Israel has been at its best, Israelis have demonstrated that responsibility does not end when you reach the promised land³, it only begins.

And so Israel has been a refuge for the diaspora – welcoming Jews from Europe to the former Soviet Union; from Ethiopia to North Africa.

Israel has built a prosperous nation – through kibbutzim that made the desert bloom, business that broadened the middle class, and innovators who reached new frontiers – from the smallest microchip to the orbits of space.

³ Gen, 12,7 und 13,15.

Israel has established a thriving democracy – with a spirited civil society, proud political parties, a tireless free press, and a lively public debate – lively may even be an understatement.

And Israel has achieved this even as it has overcome relentless threats to its security – through the courage of the Israel Defense Forces, and a citizenry that is resilient in the face of terror.

This is the story of Israel. This is the work that has brought the dreams of so many generations to life. And every step of the way, Israel has built unbreakable bonds of friendship with the United States of America.

Those ties began only eleven minutes after Israeli independence, when the United States was the first nation to recognize the State of Israel. As President Truman said in explaining his decision to recognize Israel, "I believe it has a glorious future before it not just as another sovereign nation, but as an embodiment of the great ideals of our civilization"

Since then, we have built a friendship that advances our shared interests. Together, we share a commitment to security for our citizens and the stability of the Middle East and North Africa. Together, we share a focus on advancing economic growth around the globe, and strengthening the middle class within our countries. Together, we share a stake in the success of democracy.

But the source of our friendship extends beyond interests, just as it has transcended political parties and individual leaders. America is a nation of immigrants. We are strengthened by diversity. We are enriched by faith. We are governed not simply by men and women, but by laws. We are fueled by entrepreneurship and innovation. And we are defined by a democratic discourse that allows each generation to reimagine and renew our union once more. So in

Israel, we see values that we share, even as we recognize what makes us different.

Yet I stand here today mindful that for both our nations, these are complicated times. We have difficult issues to work through within our own countries, and we face danger and upheaval in the world. When I look at young people within the United States, I think about the choices that they must make in their lives to define who we will be as a nation in this 21st century, particularly as we emerge from two wars and a painful recession. No matter how great the challenges are, their idealism, their energy, and their ambition always gives me hope.

I see the same spirit in the young people here today. And given the ties between our countries, I believe your future is bound to ours. So I'd like to focus on how we can work together to make progress in three areas that will define our times: security, peace, and prosperity.

I will begin with security. I am proud that the security relationship between the United States and Israel has never been stronger: more exercises between our militaries, and more exchanges among our political, military and intelligence officials than ever before; the largest program to date to help you retain your qualitative military edge. Those are the facts. But to me, this is not simply measured on the balance sheet. I know that here, in Israel, security is something personal. So let me tell you what I think about when I consider these issues.

When I consider Israel's security, I think about children like Osher Twito, who I met in Sderot – children, the same age as my own daughters, who went to bed at night fearful that a rocket would land in their bedroom simply because of who they are and where they live. That's why we've invested in the Iron Dome system to save countless lives – because those children deserve to sleep better at night. That's

why we have made it clear, time and again, that Israel cannot accept rocket attacks from Gaza, and have stood up for Israel's right to defend itself. And that's why Israel has a right to expect Hamas to renounce violence and recognize Israel's right to exist.

I think about five Israelis who boarded a bus in Bulgaria, who were blown up because of where they came from; who were robbed of the ability to live, and love, and raise families. That's why every country that values justice should call Hizbollah what it truly is – a terrorist organization. Because the world cannot tolerate an organization that murders innocent civilians, stockpiles rockets to shoot at cities, and supports the massacre of men, women and children in Syria.

The fact that Hizbollah's ally – the Assad regime – has stockpiles of chemical weapons only heightens the urgency. We will continue to cooperate closely to guard against that danger. And I have made it clear to Bashar al-Assad and all who follow his orders: we will not tolerate the use of chemical weapons against the Syrian people or the transfer of these weapons to terrorists. The world is watching, and we will hold you accountable.

America will also insist that the Syrian people have the right to be freed from the grip of a dictator who would rather kill his own people than relinquish power. Assad must go so that Syria's future can begin. Because true stability in Syria depends upon establishing a government that is responsive to its people – one that protects all communities within its borders, while making peace with countries beyond them.

When I consider Israel's security, I also think about a people who have a living memory of the Holocaust, faced with the prospect of a nuclear-armed Iranian government that has called for Israel's destruction. It's no wonder Israelis view this as an existential threat. But this is not simply a challenge for Israel – it is a danger for the

entire world, including the United States. It would raise the risk of nuclear terrorism, undermine the non-proliferation regime, spark an arms race in a volatile region, and embolden a government that has shown no respect for the rights of its own people or the responsibilities of nations.

That is why America has built a coalition to increase the cost to Iran of failing to meet their obligations. The Iranian government is now under more pressure than ever before, and that pressure is increasing. It is isolated. Its economy is in a dire condition. Its leadership is divided. And its position – in the region, and the world – has only grown weaker.

All of us have an interest in resolving this issue peacefully. Strong and principled diplomacy is the best way to ensure that the Iranian government forsakes nuclear weapons. Moreover, peace is far more preferable to war, and the inevitable costs – and unintended consequences – that would come with it. Because of the cooperation between our governments, we know that there remains time to pursue a diplomatic resolution. That is what America will do – with clear eyes – working with a world that is united, and with the sense of urgency that is required.

But Iran must know this time is not unlimited. And I have made the position of the United States of America clear: Iran must not get a nuclear weapon. This is not a danger that can be contained. As President, I have said to the world that all options are on the table for achieving our objectives. America will do what we must to prevent a nuclear-armed Iran.

For young Israelis, I know that these issues of security are rooted in an experience that is even more fundamental than the pressing threat of the day. You live in a neighborhood where many of your neighbors have rejected your right to exist. Your grandparents had to

risk their lives and all they had to make a place for themselves in this world. Your parents lived through war after war to ensure the survival of the Jewish state. Your children grow up knowing that people they have never met hate them because of who they are, in a region that is changing underneath your feet.

So that is what I think about when Israel is faced with these challenges – that sense of an Israel that is surrounded by many in this region who reject it, and many in the world who refuse to accept it. That is why the security of the Jewish people in Israel is so important – because it can never be taken for granted. But make no mistake: those who adhere to the ideology of rejecting Israel's right to exist might as well reject the earth beneath them and the sky above, because Israel is not going anywhere. Today, I want to tell you – particularly the young people – that so long as there is a United States of America, Ah-tem lo lah-vahd⁴.

The question, then, is what kind of future Israel will look forward to. And that brings me to the subject of peace.

I know Israel has taken risks for peace. Brave leaders – Menachem Begin and Yitzhak Rabin –reached treaties with two of your neighbors. You made credible proposals to the Palestinians at Annapolis. You withdrew from Gaza and Lebanon, and then faced terror and rockets. Across the region, you have extended a hand of friendship, and too often have been confronted with the ugly reality of anti-Semitism. So I believe that the Israeli people do want peace, and you have every right to be skeptical that it can be achieved.

But today, Israel is at a crossroads. It can be tempting to put aside the frustrations and sacrifices that come with the pursuit of peace – particularly when an Iron Dome repels rockets, barriers keep out

⁴ „Ihr seid nicht allein.“

suicide bombers, and so many other pressing issues demand your attention. And I know that only Israelis can make the fundamental decisions about your country's future.

I also know that not everyone in this hall will agree with what I have to say about peace. I recognize that there are those who are not simply skeptical about peace, but question its underlying premise, and that's a part of democracy and the discourse between our two countries. But it is important to be open and honest with one another. Politically, given the strong bipartisan support for Israel in America, the easiest thing for me to do would be to put this issue aside, and express unconditional support for whatever Israel decides to do. But I want you to know that I speak to you as a friend who is deeply concerned and committed to your future, and I ask you to consider three points.

First, peace is necessary. Indeed, it is the only path to true security. You can be the generation that permanently secures the Zionist dream, or you can face a growing challenge to its future. Given the demographics west of the Jordan River, the only way for Israel to endure and thrive as a Jewish and democratic state is through the realization of an independent and viable Palestine. Given the frustration in the international community, Israel must reverse an undertow of isolation. And given the march of technology, the only way to truly protect the Israeli people is through the absence of war – because no wall is high enough, and no Iron Dome is strong enough, to stop every enemy from inflicting harm.

This truth is more pronounced given the changes sweeping the Arab World. I recognize that with the uncertainty in the region – people in the streets, changes in leadership, the rise of non-secular parties in politics – it is tempting to turn inward. But this is precisely the time to respond to the wave of revolution with a resolve for peace. As more governments respond to popular will, the days when Israel could

seek peace with a handful of autocratic leaders are over. Peace must be made among peoples, not just governments. No one step can change overnight what lies in the hearts and minds of millions. But progress with the Palestinians is a powerful way to begin, while sidelining extremists who thrive on conflict and division.

Second, peace is just. There is no question that Israel has faced Palestinian factions who turned to terror, and leaders who missed historic opportunities. That is why security must be at the center of any agreement. And there is no question that the only path to peace is through negotiation. That is why, despite the criticism we've received, the United States will oppose unilateral efforts to bypass negotiations through the United Nations.

But the Palestinian people's right to self-determination and justice must also be recognized. Put yourself in their shoes – look at the world through their eyes. It is not fair that a Palestinian child cannot grow up in a state of her own, and lives with the presence of a foreign army that controls the movements of her parents every single day. It is not just when settler violence against Palestinians goes unpunished. It is not right to prevent Palestinians from farming their lands; to restrict a student's ability to move around the West Bank; or to displace Palestinian families from their home. Neither occupation nor expulsion is the answer. Just as Israelis built a state in their homeland, Palestinians have a right to be a free people in their own land.

Only you can determine what kind of democracy you will have. But remember that as you make these decisions, you will define not simply the future of your relationship with the Palestinians – you will define the future of Israel as well. As Ariel Sharon said, "It is impossible to have a Jewish, democratic state and at the same time to control all of Eretz Israel. If we insist on fulfilling the dream in its entirety, we are liable to lose it all." Or, from a different perspective,

think of what David Grossman said shortly after losing his son, as he described the necessity of peace – "a peace of no choice" he said, "must be approached with the same determination and creativity as one approaches a war of no choice."

Of course, Israel cannot be expected to negotiate with anyone who is dedicated to its destruction. But while I know you have had differences with the Palestinian Authority, I believe that you do have a true partner in President Abbas and Prime Minister Fayyad. Over the last few years, they have built institutions and maintained security on the West Bank in ways that few would have imagined a decade ago. So many Palestinians – including young people – have rejected violence as a means of achieving their aspirations.

Which leads to my third point: peace is possible. I know it doesn't seem that way. There will always be a reason to avoid risk, and there's a cost for failure. There will always be extremists who provide an excuse to not act. And there is something exhausting about endless talks about talks; the daily controversies, and grinding status quo.

Negotiations will be necessary, but there is little secret about where they must lead – two states for two peoples. There will be differences about how to get there, and hard choices along the way. Arab States must adapt to a world that has changed. The days when they could condemn Israel to distract their people from a lack of opportunity are over. Now is the time for the Arab World to take steps toward normalized relations with Israel. Meanwhile, Palestinians must recognize that Israel will be a Jewish state, and that Israelis have the right to insist upon their security. Israelis must recognize that continued settlement activity is counterproductive to the cause of peace, and that an independent Palestine must be viable– that real borders will have to be drawn. I've suggested principles on territory and security that I believe can be the basis for talks. But for the

moment, put aside the plans and process. I ask you, instead, to think about what can be done to build trust between people.

Four years ago, I stood in Cairo in front of an audience of young people. Politically, religiously, they must seem a world away. But the things they want – they're not so different from you. The ability to make their own decisions; to get an education and a good job; to worship God in their own way; to get married and have a family. The same is true of the young Palestinians that I met in Ramallah this morning, and of young Palestinians who yearn for a better life in Gaza.

That is where peace begins – not just in the plans of leaders, but in the hearts of people; not just in a carefully designed process, but in the daily connections that take place among those who live together in this land, and in this sacred city of Jerusalem. Speaking as a politician, I can promise you this: political leaders will not take risks if the people do not demand that they do. You must create the change that you want to see.

I know this is possible. Look to the bridges being built in business and civil society by some of you here today. Look at young people who have not yet learned a reason to mistrust, and those who have learned to overcome a legacy of mistrust that they inherited from their parents because of the simple recognition that we hold more hopes in common than the fear that drives us apart. Your voices must be louder than the extremists who would drown them out. Your hopes must light the way forward. Look to a future in which Jews, Muslims and Christians can all live in peace and greater prosperity in this Holy Land. Look to the future that you want for your own children – a future in which a Jewish, democratic state is protected and accepted, for this time and for all time.

There will be many voices that say this change is not possible. But remember this: Israel is the most powerful country in this region. Israel has the unshakeable support of the most powerful country in the world. Israel has the wisdom to see the world as it is, but also the courage to see the world as it should be. Ben Gurion once said, "In Israel, in order to be a realist you must believe in miracles." Sometimes, the greatest miracle is recognizing that the world can change. After all, that is a lesson that the world learned from the Jewish people.

That brings me to the final area I will focus on: prosperity, and Israel's broader role in the world. I know that all the talk about security and peace can seem distant from other concerns that you have in your daily lives. And every day, even amidst the threats you face, Israelis are defining themselves by the opportunities you create.

Through talent and hard work, Israelis have put this small country at the forefront of the global economy. Israelis understand the value of education, and have produced 10 Nobel laureates. Israelis understand the power of invention, and your universities educate engineers and inventors. That spirit has led to economic growth and human progress: solar power and electric cars; bandages and prosthetic limbs that save lives; stem cell research and new drugs that treat disease; cell phones and computer technology that change the way we live. If people want to see the future of the world economy, they should look at Tel Aviv: home to hundreds of start-ups and research centers. And Israelis are so active on social media that every day seemed to bring a different Facebook campaign about where I should give this speech.

That innovation is just as important to the relationship between the United States and Israel as our security cooperation. Our first free trade agreement in the world was reached with Israel nearly three decades ago, and today the trade between our two countries is at 40

billion dollars each year. More importantly, that partnership is creating new products and medical treatments, and pushing new frontiers of science and exploration.

That is the kind of relationship that Israel should have – and could have – with every country in the world. Already, we see how that innovation could reshape this region. One program here in Jerusalem brings together young Israelis and Palestinians to learn vital skills in technology and business. An Israeli and Palestinian have started a venture capital fund to finance Palestinian start-ups. Over 100 high-tech companies have found a home on the West Bank, which speaks to the talent and entrepreneurial spirit of the Palestinian people.

One of the great ironies of what is happening in the broader region is that so much of what people are yearning for – education and entrepreneurship; the ability to start a business without paying a bribe, to connect to the global economy – those things can be found in Israel. This should be a hub for thriving regional trade, and an engine of opportunity. And this is already a center for innovation that helps power the global economy. I believe that all of that potential for prosperity can be enhanced with greater security, and a lasting peace.

Here, in this small strip of land that has been the center of so much tragedy and triumph, Israelis have built something that few could imagine sixty-five years ago. Tomorrow, I will pay tribute to that history – at the grave of Herzl, a man who had the foresight to see that the future of the Jewish people had to be reconnected to their past; at the grave of Rabin, who understood that Israel's victories in war had to be followed by battles for peace; and at Yad Vashem, where the world is reminded of the cloud of evil that can descend on the Jewish people and all of humanity if we fail to remain ever vigilant.

We bear that history on our shoulders, and we carry it in our hearts. Today, as we face the twilight of Israel's founding generation, you – the young people of Israel – must now claim the future. It falls to you to write the next chapter in the story of this great nation.

As the President of a country that you can count on as your greatest friend, I am confident that you can help us find the promise in the days that lie ahead. And as a man who has been inspired in my own life by that timeless calling within the Jewish experience – tikkun olam⁵ – I am hopeful that we can draw upon what's best in ourselves to meet the challenges that will come; to win the battles for peace in the wake of so much war; and to do the work of repairing this world. May God bless you, and may God bless Israel and the United States of America. Toda raba⁶.

⁵ „Die Welt verbessern.“

⁶ „Vielen Dank.“