

Ambassador Dermer At Israel Bonds Dinner: Why Netanyahu Is Coming

A speech given at an Israel Bonds dinner:

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As purchasers of Israel Bonds, you have been true partners in building Israel.

And in the nearly 67 years of Israel's independence, we should be grateful for many things.

We should be grateful that we have signed peace agreements with Egypt and Jordan that have endured decades of challenges.

We should be grateful that Israel has transformed itself from an agriculturally based economy to a global technological power.

We should be grateful that Israel is a world leader in medicine and science, and can boast of a dozen Nobel Prize Winners.

We should be grateful that Israel has world class museums, first rate restaurants, European League Basketball Championships and a country so exciting that Israelis actually have to go to Manhattan to unwind.

But above all else, the birth of the Jewish state should make the Jewish people grateful for three things: First, Israel gave us a voice. Second, Israel provided a refuge. Third, and most important, Israel enabled us to defend ourselves.

Now, everyone can appreciate the significance of having a refuge. For nearly seven decades, Jews fleeing oppression have found a home in Israel. They came from the killing fields of Europe, were driven out of hostile states in North Africa and the Middle East, were rescued from Ethiopia and arrived en masse when the iron curtain fell.

Today, it is the Jewish community of France that is flocking to Israel. Three years ago, 1900 French Jews made Aliyah. Two years ago, 3500 came. Last year, 7,000 came. This year, we expect 15,000 to come.

That's nearly 3% of the French Jewish community – the equivalent of some 200,000 American Jews moving to Israel in a single year.

French Jews are coming because like Jews elsewhere in Europe, they live with a fear they have not experienced since the 1940s.

Their cemeteries and synagogues are desecrated, their schools are attacked, and their fellow Jews are murdered for being Jews.

For a few decades after the Holocaust, anti-Semitism in Europe was politically incorrect. But time has shown that this proved to be a notable exception rather than a new norm.

Anti-Semitism has once again become as European as Croissants.

And it is not just militant Muslims in Europe, who with their grotesque chants of Gas the Jews, spread the old poison. It also includes many European intellectuals – only they mask the old hatred of the Jewish people behind a new hatred of the Jewish state.

When Nobel Laureates compare Gaza to Auschwitz, when the Middle East's only democracy is singled out for boycotts, and when European governments fall over themselves to embrace a Palestinian government which is backed by a genocidal, terror organization, it's not legitimate criticism of Israel. It's anti-Semitism.

When 60% of the Human Rights Council's resolutions are directed against Israel as hundreds of thousands are being butchered in Syria, gays are being hanged from cranes in Tehran, and scores of journalists rot in Turkish prisons, it's not legitimate criticism of Israel. It's anti-semitism.

A few weeks ago, the signatories of the Geneva Conventions convened for only the third time in their history to condemn a country – and guess what, all three times they have met was to condemn Israel.

They didn't meet to condemn the Khmer Rouge for killing two million Cambodians. They didn't meet to condemn the genocides in Rwanda or in Darfur. They didn't meet to condemn the giant concentration camp that it called North Korea.

They met to condemn Israel, the most beleaguered democracy on Earth – where there is free speech, freedom of religion, independent courts, genuine elections and where the rights of women, gays and all minorities are protected.

And one more thing: When the International Criminal Court – a court that was founded in the wake of the Holocaust to be a permanent Nuremberg that would ensure that mass murderers are brought to justice – when that court goes after Israel for defending itself against a terror organization that fires thousands of rockets at its cities and uses its own people as human shields, it's not legitimate criticism of Israel. It's anti-Semitism.

But amidst all this hatred, and the threats to Jews living in Europe, one thing has changed.

Despite all the concerns regarding the future of French Jewry, one set of questions is not being asked today: Where will the Jews go? Who will take them in? Where can they find refuge?

Those questions are not being asked because Israel is the answer. And I am proud that my Prime Minister made clear to all French Jews that while they have the right to be protected in France, they will be welcomed with open arms in Israel.

And if they decide to come to Israel, they will not be treated as visitors from a foreign land but as family members who have come home.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

If people can appreciate the significance of Israel as a refuge, they can appreciate even more the significance of the Jewish people restoring our capability to defend ourselves.

They appreciate it because they know what happened to our people when we lacked that capability. They know that a defenseless Jewish people was once subjected to calamities of a scope and scale that is unprecedented in the history of nations – centuries of persecution and blood libels, expulsions and countless massacres, and of course the most horrific calamity of all – the Holocaust.

They appreciate that the simple truth remains that if Israel's enemies laid down their arms, there would be peace, but if Israel laid down its arms, there would be no Israel.

They appreciate that without the capacity to defend ourselves, Israel would not have survived five wars, two conflicts in Lebanon, 3 conflicts in Gaza, decades of terrorism and tens of thousands of rockets.

And they appreciate that Israel must have the power to defend itself by itself against the enormous threats we face today – from Hamas in Gaza, Hezbollah in Lebanon, terror organizations in the Sinai and the Golan, and of course from

an Iran determined to develop nuclear weapons.

But if people can appreciate having a refuge and having the ability to defend ourselves, few seem to appreciate what it means for the Jewish people to finally have a voice – a sovereign voice that must be reckoned among the nations.

That became clear to me earlier this month in the debate over whether the Prime Minister of Israel should go to France for the solidarity march in Paris.

To me, his trip there was a no-brainer. After all, Israel constantly asks France to stand with us in our battle against terrorism. It's only natural that Israel should stand with France in its battle against terrorism.

But there were those in Paris and even some in Jerusalem who thought that Israel's presence there would divert attention from the united message France was trying to deliver against terror and focus it instead on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Now, those who think that what the French are facing in Paris is fundamentally different than what Israel is facing in Jerusalem simply don't get it.

And it is precisely because of this wrongheadedness that it was imperative for an Israeli Prime Minister to be there.

He had an obligation to explain that Israel's fight is their fight. He had an obligation to explain that the fanaticism that is driving Boko Haram in Nigeria, ISIS in Iraq and Syria and Al Qaeda throughout the Middle East is the same fanaticism that drives people to attack sentries in Ottawa, shoppers in Sydney, and cartoonists in Paris.

And he has an obligation to explain that this fanaticism is the same fanaticism that drives people to fire thousands of rockets from Gaza, stab passengers on a bus in Tel Aviv and hack worshippers to death in a synagogue in Jerusalem.

This fanaticism is not about this or that grievance. It is not driven by the policies of this or that Israeli government. It is bred by Palestinian leaders who glorify terrorists as heroes, name public squares after killers and who through their media and schools poison children with constant incitement toward Jews and Israel.

Ladies and Genetlemen,

In the battle against militant Islam, Israel is the canary in the coal mine.

Israel is an outpost of Western civilization, tolerance and pluralism in a region poisoned by tyrants and

terrorists.

You know when we'll know that what happened in Paris proves more than a powerful photo-op. You know when we'll know that Europe has truly woken up to the dangers of militant Islam.

When they stop blaming the canary for the poison. When they stop blaming Israel for militant Islam and start standing with Israel against militant Islam.

But for that to happen, to enable Europe to begin to connect the dots – for our sake and theirs – Israel must not be silent. Israel must speak the truth. Fearlessly and unapologetically.

That is why it was so important for the Prime Minister to go to France. That is why it was so important for him to march in Paris and speak out.

And if it was important for the Prime Minister to speak out in Paris about anti-Semitism and the threat from militant Islam, it is even more important for him to speak out in Washington DC about the dangers of a nuclear Iran.

The Prime Minister's visit here is not intended to show any disrespect for President Obama. Israel deeply appreciates the strong support we have received from President Obama in many areas – the enhanced security cooperation, heightened intelligence sharing, generous military assistance and iron dome funding, and opposition to anti-Israel initiatives at the United Nations.

The Prime Minister's visit is also not intended to wade into your political debate. Israel deeply appreciates the strong bipartisan support we enjoy in the American Congress – where Democrats and Republicans come together to support Israel – Just as Israel appreciates the wide and deep support that it enjoys among the American people.

Rather, the Prime Minister's visit to Washington is intended for one purpose – and one purpose only. To speak up while there is still time to speak up. To speak up when there is still time to make a difference.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Iran is the world's most dangerous regime. It has already devoured four Arab capitals – Baghdad, Damascus, Beirut and Sana'a in Yemen – and it is hungry for more.

Iran is the greatest sponsor of terrorism in the world, perpetrating or ordering attacks in 25 countries on five continents in the last four years alone.

Iran is responsible for the murder of thousands of American

soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan and hundreds of Marines in Lebanon. It is responsible for the bombings of US Embassies in Africa and for the twin bombings two decades ago in Argentina.

This reign of terror and violence has all happened without Iran having a nuclear weapon. Now just imagine how much more dangerous Iran will be with nuclear weapons. And do not think that America is beyond Iran's reach.

Today, Iran is building ICBMs – Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles. Now only in cartoons do ICBMS carry TNT. In the real world, they carry nuclear payloads.

And those ICBMS that Iran is building are not designed to hit Israel. Iran already has missiles for that.

Those ICBMs are designed to reach Europe and the United States – to reach New York, Washington and Miami.

For Israel, a nuclear armed Iran would be a clear and present danger.

Iran's regime threatens Israel with destruction. Its leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, recently tweeted – in English – that Israel must be annihilated.

Iran has used Hezbollah, Hamas, Islamic Jihad and other proxies to fire thousands of rockets and threaten Israel from Lebanon, Gaza, the Sinai and the Golan Heights.

Iran's regime is both committed to Israel's destruction and working toward Israel's destruction.

Today, the international community stands at the precipice of forging an agreement with Iran over its nuclear program.

The agreement that is being discussed today is not an agreement that would dismantle Iran's nuclear weapons capability, but rather one that could leave Iran as a nuclear threshold state.

That is an agreement that could endanger the very existence of the State of Israel.

Now there may be some people who believe that the Prime Minister of Israel should have declined an invitation to speak before the most powerful parliament in the world on an issue that concerns the future and survival of Israel.

But we have learned from our history that the world becomes a more dangerous place for the Jewish people when the Jewish people are silent.

That is why the Prime Minister feels the deepest moral obligation to appear before the Congress to speak about an

existential issue facing the one and only Jewish state.

This is not just the right of the Prime Minister of Israel. It is his most sacred duty – to do whatever he can to prevent Iran from ever developing nuclear weapons that can be aimed at Israel.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

For nearly two thousand years, the Jewish people were a stateless, voiceless, and powerless people. We had no sovereignty, no voice in international affairs, and no capability to defend ourselves.

As storm clouds gathered against us, the Jews often had nowhere to go. They begged others to speak to Kings and Presidents on their behalf. They begged others to raise the alarm so that people of good will might heed their call.

And when those storms finally raged, the Jewish people pleaded with others to protect us, to give us shelter to survive another day.

Are there any survivors here tonight? Please stand up.

You know what it means to live in a world where the Jewish people had no state. You know what it means for the Jewish people to have no one to speak on their behalf.