Remarks by Vice President Pence at the American Israel Public Affairs Committee Policy Conference

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THE VICE PRESIDENT: Well, hello, AIPAC! (Applause.) To members of Congress, Israeli ministers, members of the Knesset, and especially to all my fellow Americans who have come here today from near and far: It is great to be back at AIPAC, the largest gathering of friends of Israel anywhere in the world. (Applause.)

Thank you all for that warm welcome. And how about another round of applause for the team that put this extraordinary 2020 Policy Conference together? (Applause.) Betsy Korn, Mort Fridman, and the core of AIPAC, my friend, Howard Kohr! (Applause.)

It’s great to be with you all, but it’s especially great to be here with so many college students from around the country. (Applause.) If any of you get in trouble with your professors for skipping class — (laughter) — just tell them you were here in Washington protesting. (Laughter.) But tell them you weren’t protesting against Israel, you were protesting in your nation’s capital for Israel! (Applause.) So, good to be with so many friends.

And speaking of friends, allow me to bring greetings from another friend of mine — (applause) — and a man I believe is the greatest friend of the Jewish people and the State of Israel ever to sit in the Oval Office of the White House. I bring greetings from the 45th President of the United States of America, President Donald Trump! (Applause.)

We gather today from all across our nation to celebrate a relationship that has never been stronger. But we also gather at a time of concern for millions of Americans as our nation deals with the impact of the coronavirus. So allow me to address that for just a moment.

First, to be clear, President Donald Trump has no higher priority than the health and safety of the American people. (Applause.)

Last month, following word of the outbreak of the coronavirus in China, our President took unprecedented action to protect the health of Americans. He declared a public emergency. We suspended all travel to the United States from China. And we initiated unprecedented quarantine efforts for Americans that were returning, even as the President established the White House Coronavirus Task Force, which he’s — has literally met every single day since.

And the President has directed me to lead a whole-of-government approach to address the coronavirus in this country, and we are doing just that. (Applause.)

And while the risk to the American public remains low, as the President said last week, you can be assured we’re ready for anything.

As of today, we have 43 cases that have been detected in the United States, and another 48 cases among Americans who have been repatriated from China. The vast majority of Americans who have contracted the virus, I’m pleased to report, are recovering and doing well. But several patients — (applause) — but several patients remain hospitalized. And, sadly, the American people learned this morning that another coronavirus patient — a man with an underlying health condition — has passed away. And we send our deepest condolences to his family.

I would encourage all of you gathered here today to keep in your prayers all of those impacted by this disease across our country and around the world. And here at home, also keep in your hearts and prayers the extraordinary healthcare providers that serve this nation every day. (Applause.)

We’re all in this together. It’s always a good idea to practice common sense to protect your health and the health of your family, but especially so today. But I want to assure you, at President Trump’s direction, we will continue to bring the full resources of the federal government to bear to protect the American people. And we will always put the health and safety of America first. (Applause.) So, thank you for that.

As President Trump declared in his historic visit to Jerusalem, as evidenced again here today, the bond between our two peoples is “woven together in the fabric of our hearts.” And so it shall always be.

Under this President, if the world knows nothing else, the world knows this: America stands with Israel. (Applause.)

In January, it was my great honor, on behalf of the President and the American people, to address a ceremony in Jerusalem marking the 75th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz. We paid tribute, along with more than 50 countries, to the 6 million Jews who died in the Holocaust, in what President Trump rightly called the “dark stain on human history” — the greatest evil ever perpetuated by man against man in the long catalogue of human crime.

But just as we honored the dead, we also honored the faith and resilience of the Jewish people who, just three years after walking in the valley of the shadow of death, rose up from those ashes to reclaim a Jewish future and rebuild a Jewish State. (Applause.)

And I’m proud to say, as Vice President of the United States, the American people have been with them every step of the way since 1948. (Applause.)

We stand with Israel today for the same reasons the American people have always stood with Israel. We stand with Israel because her cause is our cause, her values are our values, her fight is our fight. We stand with Israel because we believe in right over wrong, in good over evil, in liberty over tyranny.

And we stand with Israel because we cherish that ancient promise that Americans have always cherished throughout our history: that those who bless her will be blessed. (Applause.)

President Trump promised the United States would ensure that Israel would always have the resources and tools she needed to defend herself by herself. And today, I’m proud to report that American support for the security of the State of Israel is greater than ever before and the State of Israel is stronger than ever before in its history. (Applause.)

President Trump has also taken one action after another to evidence our support for Israel. This President promised to shut down the PLO office in Washington if the Palestinian Authority did not take immediate steps to stop funding terrorists who murder innocent Israeli civilians. And when the PLO did not act, President Donald Trump shut it down. The PLO office in Washington is closed, and today, the Taylor Force Act is the law of the land. (Applause.)

This President also promised that America would no longer allow the United Nations to be a forum for invective against Israel. (Applause.) And this President delivered when he withdrew the United States from the so-called Human Rights Council at the U.N. and ended all U.S. contributions to UNRWA. (Applause.)

Our administration will never tolerate the suppression, persecution, or silencing of the Jewish people. We’ve stood up to anti-Semitism on the world stage and we’ve stood up to it here at home as well.

Last December, President Trump signed the strongest executive order ever written to fight anti-Semitism when he banned taxpayer dollars from any institution of higher education that traffics in anti-Semitic hate. (Applause.) Our message to America’s colleges and universities is clear: If you want billions of dollars in taxpayer support, reject anti-Semitism and reject it now. (Applause.)

And President Trump has repeatedly done what no American President before him had the courage to do, like when he recognized Israel’s sovereignty over the Golan Heights. (Applause.) Like when he rejected half a century of peace-process dogma and proclaimed that Israeli civilian settlements in the West Bank are not illegal. (Applause.) And as I had the joy of seeing firsthand, just a few short weeks ago when I visited Israel in January, I had the honor to meet with Prime Minister Netanyahu — (applause) — at the new American embassy in Jerusalem, the capital of the State of Israel. (Applause.) What a joy.

And just five weeks ago, President Trump also released his vision for peace, prosperity, and a brighter future for Israelis and Palestinians. It is the most serious, realistic, and detailed plan ever presented, and one that could make Israelis, Palestinians, and the region safer and more prosperous. (Applause.)

The American people have always prayed for the peace of Jerusalem. And so we will continue to do. We believe our vision provides the very basis for historic progress toward true and lasting peace. Under President Trump’s plan, Israel will not have to take any additional security risks, not a single Israeli will be uprooted from their home, and Jerusalem will remain the united, recognized capital of the State of Israel. (Applause.)

Peace will require compromise, but I promise you: America will never compromise the safety and security of the Jewish State of Israel. (Applause.)

So we’ve been standing with our most cherished ally and we’ve been standing up to our enemies. As the world and the region understands better every day, Israel isn’t the problem in the Middle East; we all know who is. (Applause.)

Seventy-five years ago, America and Britain defeated Nazi Germany before Hitler could get nuclear weapons. Yet five years ago, under the prior administration, misguided leaders of those very same nations signed a deal that would virtually ensure that Iran would obtain the same weapons.

Then, something extraordinary happened: The American people elected a leader — decisive and unafraid — as their President. And President Trump kept his word when he withdrew the United States from the disastrous Iran nuclear deal. (Applause.) Like the Hebrew prophet Job said, America said, “Thus far shall ye come but no further.” (Applause.)

Our President made that decision in the best interests of the United States and Israel. But he also believed it was in the best interests of peace because we believe a lasting peace can only be built on a foundation of truth.

With the support of our friend Israel, the United States is working to build, as the President said, as we speak, “a coalition of nations who share the aim of stamping out extremism and providing our children a hopeful future that does honor to God.” (Applause.)

And what followed the President’s historic decision: The United States implemented a maximum pressure campaign to change Iran’s malign behavior and we will hold the regime accountable for its destructive actions. (Applause.)

And the campaign is working; the Iranian people are processing [protesting] against the regime, the Iranian economy is reeling under unprecedented U.S. sanctions, and now Iran must choose between caring for its people or continuing to fund its proxies sowing violence the region.

Now, the President has made it clear: The United States of America is ready to embrace peace with all who seek it, and we truly hope for a better and more prosperous future for the people of Iran. (Applause.)

But I’ll make you this promise: We will continue to oppose Iran’s malign influence. We will continue to bring pressure on their economy. And under President Donald Trump, America will never allow Iran to obtain a nuclear weapon. (Applause.)

Quite a contrast from the recent past, isn’t it? The last administration was sending pallets of cash to terrorists in Iran. This President has taken the fight to radical Islamic terrorists on our terms, on their soil. (Applause.)

Last year, American forces captured the last inch of territory beneath the ISIS flag’s caliphate. And last fall, American Special Forces took down their leader without one American casualty. (Applause.)

And when militants stormed our embassy in Baghdad on New Year’s Eve, this President sent in the Marines and said, “No more Benghazis.” (Applause.)

And when American lives were threatened by the most dangerous terrorist in the world, President Donald Trump took action, and Qasem Soleimani is gone. (Applause.)

Now, you all deserve to know that every one of the leading Democrats running for President criticized President Trump’s decision to take out Soleimani.

Bernie Sanders even called the President’s decision to take out Soleimani, in his words, quote, “assassinating a government official.”

AUDIENCE: Booo —

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Well, I’ve got news for Bernie Sanders: Soleimani was not some government official; he was a terrorist. And President Trump was right to take him down. (Applause.) That’s what leadership looks like. That’s the leadership of President Donald Trump. (Applause.)

The days are over when the Jewish people were powerless to face threats of annihilation. And today, the United States stands shoulder to shoulder with Israel in defense of our common civilization and against common threats.

Rebuilding American deterrence to preserve peace through strength is the very centerpiece of President Trump’s national security strategy. In this administration, we understand weakness arouses evil. And history shows the free world is safest when America is strongest. (Applause.)

And I promise you: We will never negotiate with those who seek the destruction of Israel. We will never negotiate with those who commit terrorism against Israel. Not now, not ever. (Applause.)

So, like all of you, we’ve stood with our most cherished ally as never before and we’ve stood up to Iran. But now, my friends, we’ve reached a fateful moment in our history. All over the world, anti-Semitism is on the rise — on college campuses, in the marketplace, even in the halls of Congress.

Anti-Semitism is a unique hatred — uniquely potent, persistent, uniquely responsible for unconscionable acts of violence — which is why we must root anti-Semitism out from every part of our society. It is not just a threat to Jewish Americans and Jews around the world, it is a threat to us all. (Applause.)

But like the vile ideology that it is, anti-Semitism has changed forms in recent days. No longer does it give vent to hatred of the Jewish religion or hatred of the Jewish people on every occasion; now it often propagates as simply hatred of the State of Israel.

So let me be clear about one point: It is the position of the United States government that anti-Zionism is anti-Semitism. (Applause.)

Our President, the proud grandfather of three beautiful Jewish grandchildren — (applause) — made what may have been the strongest single statement against anti-Semitism ever uttered by an American President when, moments after the horrific massacre at the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh, he said that America would seek the destruction of those who seek the destruction of the Jews. (Applause.) Never before has any American President spoken with such clarity and resolve to the wider world. (Applause.) It’s true.

We all know the ancient hatred that they’re stirring up. Anti-Semitism must be universally condemned. It must be fought. It requires more than watered-down resolutions; it requires action.

While might does not make right, in a world filled with evil, right without might assures the triumph of evil. And though Israel is today a global economic power that has benefited humanity in untold ways — innovations in agriculture, medicine, information, and nano-technology — all is not yet well, not even here at home.

The bipartisan consensus that has once supported our most cherished ally and has been so nobly and ably championed by you here at AIPAC is actually beginning to erode in one of America’s two major political parties.

Today, the leading candidate for the presidential nomination of the party of Harry S. Truman openly and repeatedly attacks Israel as a racist state and defames AIPAC as, of all things, as he said, a, quote, platform for “bigotry.” Even more troubling, when Bernie Sanders smeared Israel at last week’s debate, not a single candidate on that stage stood up to challenge him.

But I’ll promise you: We will always call out those who try to cloak their animus towards Israel inside the phony mantle of friendship.

As 18,000 friends of Israel — (applause) — gathered here with each one of you, friends of Israel from all over this country — Republicans, Democrats, independents, Jews and Christians, liberals and conservatives — if we can agree on one thing, it should be this: Those who side with Israel’s enemies must never be allowed to call themselves “friends of Israel.” (Applause.) It is wrong to boycott and slander Israel. It is wrong to boycott and slander AIPAC. (Applause.)

And I say from my heart, in the days ahead, we must ensure the most pro-Israel President in history must not be replaced by one who would be the most anti-Israel President in the history of this nation. (Applause.) That’s why we need four more years of President Donald Trump in the White House. (Applause.)

I’m honored to be with all of you today, as your Vice President, to assure you that President Trump and our administration and this country will stand with you today, tomorrow, and always. For we are, as you are, AIPAC proud. (Applause.)

The bond between our two peoples is woven in the hearts of the people of our countries. It’s unbreakable and so it shall always be. Seventy years on from that day of liberation at Auschwitz, we remember it not simply the tragedy, but also the triumph of freedom — a promise fulfilled, a people restored to their rightful place among the nations of the Earth.

As we remember the long night of that past, the survivors and the faces of those who were lost, the heroes who stood against those evil times, we do well. In January, 50 nations in Israel gathered strong to say, just as we all say here today, from across this nation, with one voice: Never again. (Applause.)

Through pogroms, persecutions, and expulsions in the ghettos, and finally, even through the death camps, the Jewish people clung that ancient promise that He would “never leave you or forsake you” and that He would lead this people to inherit the land that he swore your ancestors to give them. And He has.

The Jewish people, in turn, have turned the desert into a garden, scarcity into plenty, sickness into health. They’ve turned hope into a future of security and prosperity. A tiny land — a land with no natural resources, no rushing rivers or verdant valleys. A nation that, despite not knowing a single day of true peace, has, in two short generations, become one of the world’s most vibrant and successful countries. Israel is an inspiration to the world. (Applause.)

And, today, as we bear witness to the strength and resilience of the faith of the Jewish people, so too we bear witness to God’s faithfulness.

It is an honor to be with you today. The United States of America is proud to stand with Israel and her people as cherished allies and friends.

Providence entrusted the United States to be the guardian of liberty and that is a trust we will never forsake.

And, ladies and gentlemen, Israel and the United States will always stand together because America and Israel are more than friends. We’re more than partners or allies. My friends, the United States and Israel are family. (Applause.) We’re mishpucha. (Applause.) It’s true.

We are a family descended from a common tradition. We are a family that upholds common values. And, together, our family shares a common destiny.

The American-Israeli alliance is stronger than ever before. Our friendship is greater than ever before. And our future is brighter than ever before.

And so we say to all those gathered here, to all who cherish Israel, to the people of Israel, the famous words of that Priestly Blessing: “May the Lord bless you and keep you; May his countenance shine upon you and be gracious unto you; and may all your ways be paths of peace.”’

With the unwavering support of all of you, and all who call these two great nations home, with the leadership of President Donald Trump and with God’s help, I know the best days for Israel and the United States of America are yet to come. (Applause.)

Thank you. God bless you. God bless Israel. And God bless the United States of America. (Applause.)