Remarks by Vice President Pence at the 5th Israeli-American Council National Conference

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The White House

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THE VICE PRESIDENT:  Miriam and Sheldon Adelson, everyone.  (Applause.)  To Miriam and Sheldon, to Ambassador Dermer, to Speaker Edelstein, to Minister Shaked, Dr. Shai, Mayor Levy, to all the friends of Israel who have traveled to be here, far and wide, it is our great honor to join you here at the 5th annual National Conference of the Israeli-American Council.  (Applause.)

I’m really honored you would all come out today.  Before I get started, let me bring greetings from a friend of mine.  (Laughter.)  And while he’s down in Argentina today, I know he’d want me to express his admiration and appreciation.  He is a great friend of the state of Israel.  In fact, I think he’s the most pro-Israel President in American history.  The 45th President of the United States of America, President Donald Trump.  (Applause.)

It really is a joy to be with all of you today.  And it’s a special joy to be here with another great supporter of the state of Israel, who also happens to be the Second Lady of the United States of America.  Would you welcome my wife Karen Pence, who traveled with me here to stand with all of us today?  (Applause.)

You know, it’s the greatest honor of my life to serve as your Vice President, to serve alongside this President, and to serve in the midst of an administration that cares so deeply about our most cherished ally, Israel.

And you think about the people who serve in this administration, many names come to mind.  But a few that are worth mentioning today, like the United States Ambassador to the state of Israel David Friedman.  (Applause.)  Or Senior Advisor to the President of the United States Jared Kushner.  (Applause.)  And there is our Ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley.  (Applause.)  This is an administration that stands with Israel.  (Applause.)

You know, it really is great to stand before such a remarkable group of Americans, to be at this gathering, as we commemorate an extraordinary milestone, not just in the history of Israel, but in the history of the world.  For 71 years ago this week, the United States joined with 32 other nations to declare to the modern world an ancient truth — that the Jewish people have a natural, irrevocable right to an independent state of their own in their ancestral and eternal homeland of Israel.  (Applause.)

Seventy-one years ago yesterday, the United Nations called for the creation of the Jewish state.  And six months later, through the blood and sweat of Jewish pioneers, the state of Israel was reborn.

Last year, it was my great honor to celebrate this same anniversary at the very place where that vote occurred — Flushing Meadows, in New York City.  And today, on behalf of President Donald Trump, it is my privilege to be with all of you, today, this week.

We’ve come here — as I look out — by the hundreds, in fact, the thousands.  We’ve come to this gathering from all walks of life: Jews and Christians; Republicans and Democrats; young citizens and seasoned citizens.  (Laughter.)

And today, on behalf of President Trump and our entire administration, it’s my great honor to say, as “a trumpet among the nations,” if the world knows nothing else, let the world know this: America stands with Israel.  (Applause.)

As I said before the Knesset in the first month of this year, I say again, “We stand with Israel because her cause is our cause, her values are our values, and her fight is our fight.  We stand with Israel because we believe in right over wrong.”  We believe in good over evil, liberty over tyranny.  And we stand with Israel because support for the Jewish state is not a partisan issue; it is an American issue.  (Applause.)  And few understand that truth better than the men and women of the Israeli-American Council.

It’s amazing to think that just 11 years ago, when Hezbollah was firing rockets at Israel, it was a struggle to organize even a modest showing of support by the Israeli-American community.

But then a dedicated band of liberty lovers — people like Danny Alpert, Adam Milstein, Shoham Nicolet — took action — (applause) — and began to engage — engage the American-Jewish community with the goal of building a “coast-to-coast community with Israel in heart” and in spirit.  You began to organize, forming 20 chapters across America.  And today, at a quarter of a million strong, you’ve done no small feat by building the largest Israeli-American organization in the world.  (Applause.)

It’s an impressive achievement, and it wouldn’t have been possible without the support of all of you in this room.  But I know you also recognize it would not have been possible without the support of two of the most tireless friends of Israel in the United States of America: Sheldon and Miriam Adelson.  (Applause.)

There is much to be said about both of these leaders, but today I know Sheldon won’t mind very much if I spend a little bit more time on his better half.  Tomorrow, Jews in synagogues all over the world will read from the book of Genesis about a heartrending story — the story of Reuben.

Jacob’s first born, Reuben, is a good-hearted man wracked with self-doubt.  When Jacob revokes his privileges as firstborn, the Bible recalls that Reuben meekly accepted his fate.  And when his older brothers — his other — Jacob’s other sons — I’m sorry — sold their youngest brother Joseph into slavery, Reuben tried, but failed, to stop them.  We all know the story.  The story of this honest but timid man is one of the most tragic in all of the book of Genesis.

But it’s a story that reminds us of an all-too-important truth: To lead, people need to be encouraged to lead; they need encouragement to do what is right.  And in our day and in our age, few know better how to encourage others to do what is right than the incomparable Miriam Adelson.  (Applause.)

Miriam has proven that in everything she’s done as a scientist, a physician, a philanthropist.  And even now, Miriam Adelson leads by example every single day.  She still sees patients struggling with addiction.  She supports schools that teach our children American and Jewish values.  And she still tears up whenever she hears those students sing “Hatikvah” and recite the Pledge of Allegiance.

And in recognition of all that she has done in philanthropy, in medicine, and in her tireless work to support America’s most cherished ally, two weeks ago, President Donald Trump bestowed on Miriam Adelson the highest civilian award in the United States of America, the Presidential Medal of Freedom.  And, Miriam, I offer you my and our congratulations.  (Applause.)

Over the years, Miriam and Sheldon have worked without ceasing to bring America and Israel even closer together and to make both Israel and America stronger still.  And it’s our great privilege to call them friends.  It’s also a great privilege to serve with a man who has made the alliance between America and Israel stronger than ever before, President Donald Trump.  (Applause.)

You know, over the last two years, one thing has become clear to people all across this country and all across the world: President Trump is a man of his word and he’s a man of action.

Our President promised to ensure that Israel would have the resources and tools to defend itself, by itself.  And today, American support for the security of the state of Israel is greater than ever before.  (Applause.)

President Trump promised to stand with Israel against those who seek to destroy her.  And earlier this year, President Trump took action to ensure that the Palestinian Authority won’t get a dime of American support until it stops rewarding those who kill Israeli citizens.  The Taylor Force Act is the law of the land.  (Applause.)

President Trump promised to take the fight to radical Islamist terrorists on our terms, on their soil.  Thanks to the courage of our armed forces, and the leadership of this Commander-in-Chief, I am pleased to report to my fellow Americans, ISIS is on the run, their caliphate has crumbled, and we will soon drive ISIS from the face of the Earth.  (Applause.)

President Trump also promised to stand up to the leading state sponsor of terror.  And he took decisive action and kept his word, when President Donald Trump withdrew the United States of America from the disastrous Iran nuclear deal.  (Applause.)  And this month, we re-imposed every last sanction that the previous administration had lifted.

This President also promised to confront anti-Semitism on the world stage.  And this summer, he directed our ambassador at the United Nations to withdraw the United States from the so-called Human Rights Council at the United Nations.  (Applause.)  We will no longer allow the U.N. to be a forum for invective against Israel.  (Applause.)

In the wake of Airbnb’s decision to ban listings of Jewish homes in eastern Jerusalem and the West Bank, we’ve made it clear: the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions movement is wrong, and it has no place in the free enterprise of the United States of America.  (Applause.)

And as we all know, while every President for the past two decades had promised to do so, this President did more than promise when, one year ago next week, he delivered on that promise.  And in May of this year, the United States of America opened our embassy in Jerusalem, the capital of the state of Israel.  (Applause.)

He’s a man of his word.  It’s been promises made and promises kept.

Our President made that decision, I want to assure you, in the best interest of the United States.  But he also made it clear that we believe that decision is in the best interest of peace — where peace can only be built on a foundation, not of fiction, but a fact of recognizing what is negotiable and what is not.

As we gather here, our team, Jared Kushner, Jason Greenblatt, and Ambassador Friedman are working hard to craft a plan for a lasting peace in the region to end years of conflict between Israelis and Palestinians.  And while any peace will undoubtedly require compromise, you can be confident of this: The United States of America will never compromise the safety and security of the Jewish state of Israel.  (Applause.)

As we continue to hope and work toward peace, we will continue to stand without apology with Israel and all our allies and partners across the world to confront those who seek war.

Today, as President Trump gathers with leaders around the world in Argentina, we remember a year ago in Saudi Arabia on his very first foreign trip when he convened an unprecedented gathering of leaders from 50 nations at the Arab Islamic American Summit.  He spoke to those leaders boldly about the two great threats to a brighter future in the Middle East: radical Islamic terrorism and the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Together with Israel, we’ve made great strides against the menace of terrorism.  But as we’ve seen in recent weeks, the terrorist threat still festers at Israel’s borders.  Hamas has sent a stream of rockets into Israel, including more than 300 rockets and mortars in a single six-hour span earlier this month.  These attacks against Israel must end, and they must end now.  (Applause.)

But we recognize terrorists across the region, from Hamas to Hezbollah, are really, truth be told, nothing more than proxies of a vile regime.  They’re the pawns of Iran and its ayatollahs, who in recent years have devoted more than $16 billion to spreading violence, sowing chaos and bloodshed across the Middle East and the wider world.

As I mentioned before, this administration has now re-imposed all the sanctions on Iran that were lifted by the last administration in that disastrous nuclear deal, but we’ve also imposed strong new sanctions, as well.  And American sanctions on Iran have never been stronger.  (Applause.)

As we speak, our actions are already cutting off the regime’s ability to support its terrorist minions across the region on an increasing basis.  And while Iran continues to pursue its evil aims, let me make a solemn promise to you, to Israel, and to the world: The United States of America will never allow Iran to obtain a nuclear weapon.  (Applause.)

The United States stands with Israel today, just as we stood with her in that historic vote that we commemorate and remember this week.  And while today we recall the brilliance of that moment, the state of Israel itself has shined brighter every moment since.  Surely it has been a miracle of contemporary history, even as the story of Israel is a miracle in the history of the world.

Think about it: I mean, how unlikely was Israel’s rebirth?  How much more unlikely have been her survival and prosperity?  And how confinding — confounding, rather, and against all odds has been her thriving.

The Jewish people have literally turned the desert into a garden, scarcity into plenty, sickness into health.  They’ve turned hope into a future of security and prosperity.

Israel is like a tree, firmly planted, that has grown deep roots in the soil of your forefathers.  Yet as it grows, it reaches ever closer to the heavens.

And today and every day, the Jewish state of Israel, and all the Jewish people, bear witness to God’s faithfulness, as well as their own.

I’ve seen that faith across this country, from my home state of Indiana to this very gathering today.  I see new signs of how the Jewish people have enriched this nation’s life in extraordinary ways, and we celebrate and acknowledge that today.

Jewish people are one of the most vibrant threads in the American fabric, and that includes the more than half a million Israeli-Americans who now call this land their home.  (Applause.)  You’re a bridge between our two nations.  And even now you’re making the bond between America and Israel stronger every day.

And just know, today, you have a champion in President Donald Trump.  And while you may have heard much that our administration has done — (applause) — to support and stand by our most cherished ally, I believe — I believe there may have been no better example of the President’s love for the Jewish people, and his leadership, than the way this President responded in the wake of the brutal attack that took place at the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.  It broke the heart not just of that community, but of this nation.

What happened that day was not just criminal, it was evil. The 11 members of the Jewish community who perished were victims of one of the oldest hatreds known in the human race.  In the days that followed, President Trump and I made clear that this anti-Semitic attack was an assault not just on the Jewish community, it was an assault on all of us in America.  (Applause.)  And we stand together.  There is no place in America for anti-Semitism and violence, and we will confront and condemn it “everywhere it rears its ugly head.”  (Applause.)

As the President said that very day, we will “stand with our Jewish brothers and sisters,” and “defeat anti-Semitism and vanquish the forces of hate.”  That’s what American leadership looks like from a President who has done more to draw our two nations together than any President in our nation’s history.

But even in the face of such hatred, we take comfort.  We take comfort in the word of the Lord, writing “for the evil have no future; the lamp of the wicked will be put out.”  Even in the darkest of times, we know the Almighty hears us and answers our prayers.  Even in the midst of such tragedy, He offers his grace, He blesses our people.  And I’m confident in the years ahead that the friendship between America and Israel will grow and flourish as never before.  (Applause.)

And it’s on that basis that I close today.  I close with the promise of hope, and the power of faith.  Faith in the good people of Israel and America, and in the immutable bonds of friendship that exists between us.  Faith in the ideals and the principles that both our nations hold dear — principles of liberty and freedom and equality that bind us together, and give us a common purpose.

And finally, with that last kind of faith — the faith that has ever bound the people of this country together from our nation’s founding, people of every background and belief — the faith in Him who watches over us and guides us.  And as Jews the world over will say this Sunday night, I say again here with all of you: Shehecheyanu, v’kiyimanu, v’higiyanu la’z’man ha’zeh.  (Applause.)

So thank you all for the great honor of addressing you today at this 5th Annual National Conference of the Israeli-American Council.  I offer you, on behalf of my wife and myself and our entire administration, the warmest wishes, a few days early, for a happy Hanukkah.  May God bless you.  May God bless Israel.  And may God bless the United States of America.