Amb. Friedman Remarks (as prepared)
2020 AIPAC Policy Conference

How about one more round of applause for our incredible Secretary of State Mike Pompeo.

Thank you so much. It’s so great to be back here on this big stage, now for my third time. Thank you AIPAC for giving me this opportunity.

We came into office in early 2017 on the heels of a great betrayal of Israel by the United States — the failure of the United States to vote against or veto UN Security Council resolution 2334. It was a resolution so virulently hostile to the State of Israel that it literally deemed the Western Wall to be illegally occupied territory.

We also inherited the JCPOA. An agreement in which the last administration released more than 100 billion dollars to the Islamic Republic of Iran, the world’s most lethal state sponsor of terrorism, and gave it a pathway to a nuclear weapon. Iran used those funds to enhance its arsenal of ballistic missiles and expanded its malign activity throughout Yemen, Iraq, Syria and Lebanon, all the while shouting “Death to Israel” and “Death to America.” Incredibly, none of that disgraceful activity was even prohibited under the JCPOA.

We didn’t enter office on the 50-yard line of the US - Israel relationship. No, we found ourselves deep within our own territory and against the wind. And so from that vantage point we set out to work.

You all know what happened next: President Trump fulfilled his campaign pledge, the same pledge made but ignored by his predecessors, and moved the United States Embassy to Israel’s undivided and eternal capital, the city of Jerusalem where it must always remain.

President Trump understood the security imperative of Israel’s permanent retention of the Golan Heights, and he recognized Israel’s sovereignty over that strategic high ground.
And, in a rebuke to our predecessor’s shameful endorsement of resolution 2334, this past year President Trump and Secretary Pompeo reversed 40 years of flawed legal analysis and concluded that Israeli settlements in Judea and Samaria do not violate international law.

I want to put a bit of a finer point on this last issue. When Secretary Pompeo issued his opinion on settlements, hysteria overcame the progressive left. One by one I heard and read of the so-called recklessness of this legal conclusion. “Everyone knows,” they said, “that settlements are illegal.” My friends, this just tells us how far the goalposts moved against Israel during the last administration.

The United States position on settlements was first developed in the immediate aftermath of the Six Day War. Our chief diplomat on this issue was the former Undersecretary of State, Eugene Rostow, who left his position as the Dean of the Yale Law School to serve our country in negotiating United Nations Security Council resolution 242 — the universally acknowledged foundation for the resolution of this conflict. Dean Rostow, the unparalleled expert and the primary fact witness on the subject of the legality of West Bank settlements, stated that Israel’s right to build them was, in his words, not mine, “unassailable.” He was right then, and President Trump and Secretary Pompeo are right now.

On the security front, President Trump exited the JCPOA, imposed crippling sanctions on Iran and killed the world’s most dangerous terrorist, Qasem Suleimani. Iran is still an enemy of the United States and Israel, but it is a far weaker one and there is no doubt that we will prevail in this critical conflict.

Having reached midfield, to return to our football analogy with regard to the US-Israel relationship, we embraced the diplomatic challenge of trying to advance a peaceful resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. On January 28 of this year, President Trump unveiled his Vision for Peace, Prosperity and a Brighter Future.

We’re very proud of this Vision. I think it presents a realistic, viable and achievable two-state solution that protects Israel’s security and gives the Palestinians a pathway to independence, greater dignity and statehood.

Those who accuse this plan of being too pro-Israel haven’t read it carefully enough. Sure, it is pro-Israel on the issue of security — security is not a game and...
it’s not political. Indeed, in this part of the world, security is life or death. We will never compromise Israel’s security, and, in keeping this pledge, we are also ensuring the security of the Palestinians.

By the way, you’ve probably heard every political figure from both sides of the aisle promise you, just as I did, that they will never compromise Israel’s security. When you hear that, don’t be so quick to applaud. The devil is in the details. You should ensure that they will not return us to the disastrous Iran deal. And you should make sure that they will not impose upon Israel their view as to how Israel should defend itself. If you get the wrong answers, then run, don’t walk from these so-called friends. The Trump Administration demonstrates, not just in words but in deeds, and in unprecedented detail, just how committed we are to Israel’s security.

And sure, our plan is pro-Israel on keeping Jerusalem as Israel’s undivided capital — that’s been American law since the Jerusalem Embassy Act passed overwhelmingly in 1995. Anyone who speaks of returning the Embassy to Tel Aviv is rejecting a generation of overwhelming bipartisan consensus.

Jerusalem has been accessible to all major faiths only - only - since 1967 under Israeli control. And I’ll tell you something you may already know: the last thing the Arabs of East Jerusalem want is to be transferred to a separated State of Palestine. Indeed, we just witnessed the Arab communities in Israel’s Northern Triangle protest vehemently about the prospect of becoming part of a Palestinian State. To its credit, the State of Israel said the same thing: it wants to keep its Arab minority intact.

As in every democratic country, there are issues in Israel with the absorption and assimilation of minority populations, especially those who do not accept Israel’s right to exist nor serve in its defense forces. But compare how Israel treats its Arab minority with the rights of minorities in other surrounding nations and lots of other nations worldwide. Frankly, Israel has a lot to be proud of.

The far left won’t say this but the truth is that the Vision offers a tremendous opportunity to the Palestinian people. It represents the first time since the
beginning of the conflict that the State of Israel has agreed to live side by side a Palestinian state under precise terms, conditions and territorial dimensions. It allocates the territory in Judea and Samaria in proportion to the respective sizes of the Israeli and Palestinian populations living there. It creates a platform for massive investment — not the handouts that the Palestinian leadership has embraced for so long with nothing to show for it other than the personal enrichment of the leaders themselves. And it provides a four-year runway for the Palestinians to achieve the necessary conditions of statehood, secure in the knowledge that during that period the territorial integrity of their potential state will be preserved.

When you students on college campuses [pause for shout out] hear Israel castigated as a nation intent on subjugating its oppressed minority, this plan, which has been overwhelmingly endorsed by the Israeli population, conclusively proves just the opposite!

Now, some have challenged the President’s Vision as leaving too much land to Israel. Imagine that! They demand that the Jewish state should surrender places like Hebron, the burial place of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Sarah, Rebecca and Leah, Bet El, where Jacob dreamed of a ladder with angels ascending to the heavens and descending back to earth and where he received the word of God, Shilo, where the ark of the covenant rested for hundreds of years before being moved to the Temple in Jerusalem, or Qasr-al-Yehud, the “castle of the Jews” where Joshua led the Israelite nation across the Jordan River and where John the Baptist baptized Jesus.

We are all familiar with the ugly term “Judenrein” — it was a term used by the Nazis for a place where Jews were not allowed. Well let me make something abundantly clear. Under the Trump Administration, the biblical heartland of Israel in Judea and Samaria will never be Judenrein!

Now, some have accused us of sponsoring a wedding without a bride. We were fully aware of the initial certainty of Palestinian rejection — that strategy has been their standard operating procedure since the days of Camp David and Arafat. But I trust you have listened carefully to all the reactions on the world stage. In many respects they have been unprecedented and incredibly positive.
Two weeks ago, President Abbas went to his favorite move within his playbook and sought condemnation of President Trump’s Vision by the UN Security Council. He went in expecting a 14-1 vote with a US veto. He was confident that he could isolate the US and Israel from the rest of the world. Thanks to the diplomatic efforts of Jared Kushner, Avi Berkowitz and Ambassador Craft, President Abbas couldn’t even muster a majority of votes. He pulled the resolution and returned home empty handed.

The world is changing. The world has grown tired, perhaps even exhausted, of the failed Palestinian leadership — the violence, the corruption, the payment of terrorists, the incitement of hatred and breathtaking disrespect for human rights and basic freedoms. The Palestinian people deserve so much better and we intend to continue to make case – wherever and whenever people of good faith are willing to listen -- for Palestinians to engage on this plan.

To all of us in the pro-Israel community, we need to speak in one voice that this is a realistic plan worthy of serious consideration and negotiation. We do no service to Israel or the Palestinians by criticizing the plan without giving it a fair reading, as I have heard from so many across the aisle.

Just to give you a sense of how disturbing this has become, we have been accused by purportedly serious people of creating a Vision that establishes a Palestinian “Bantustan.” Do you folks know what a Bantustan is? It was created in the 1950’s by the racist regime in South Africa which forcefully evacuated its black population from within racially mixed communities – literally pulled them from their homes -- and drove them into racially segregated slums with virtually no infrastructure or municipal services.

How dare anyone refer to our plan as having that purpose or effect! Not a single Palestinian is being forced or even asked to leave his or her home. Not only are Palestinians not being confined within overcrowded or underserved territory, but their geographic footprint is more than doubling, they are slated for a multi-billion-dollar infusion of investment capital, and they have a pathway to statehood if they can abandon their self-destructive practices.

I have wanted to say this for some time to my friends on the left: Hating Donald Trump is not an Israel policy. If the only reason you don’t like our policy on Israel
is that you don’t like our President, then regrettably we will remain unnecessarily divided and potentially miss a once in a lifetime opportunity. History will not be kind.

Had President Obama, with whom I had profound disagreements, had he moved our embassy to Jerusalem, recognized Israeli sovereignty over the Golan, restored tough sanctions on Iran and authored President Trump’s Vision for Peace — I would have been the first to applaud and I’d still be applauding today.

Of course, none of these things were accomplished by President Obama. In fact, they all were achieved by President Donald J. Trump. And for those achievements we all should be the first to applaud and still be applauding today.

I am prepared to fight for the soul of our nation and how it supports Israel. I think this fight is as important for America as it is for Israel. Our Judeo-Christian values are at stake.

So many of our close relatives died because they were Jews or because they were Zionists. Our task, thank God, is not to die as Jews or Zionists but rather to live as Jews and to live as Zionists. And of course to live as patriotic Americans. Not to define ourselves as perennial victims but rather to seize the miraculous opportunity given us to anchor the US-Israel relationship for our children, our grandchildren and generations beyond. It is a challenge that together we can meet.

We all want peace. But we will not bring peace by failing to hold the Palestinians accountable for malign activity that makes peace impossible. We will not bring peace by indulging Palestinian rejectionism at the UN or elsewhere. We will not bring peace by applying standards to Israel that no other nation facing the same risks would ever observe. That’s not the path to peace.

Work with us to help bring a real peace to this region that has suffered for so long. We can and should unite on the President’s Vision, encourage our elected officials to endorse it and do all we can to induce the Palestinians to come to the table. Let’s do this together regardless of our political stripes, our religious practices or ideological leanings. This is above all that.
The founding document of our Republic, the Declaration of Independence, declared all People to be endowed by their creator with unalienable rights. How did our founders know which rights God deemed to be unalienable – by reading the Bible of course. And from where did these biblical pronouncements come? In the words of Isaiah, “Ki Metzion Tetze Torah Udvar Hashem M’Yerushalayim” – Out of Zion shall go forth the law and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

This is our legacy, and this is our destiny. This is who we are as Americans, and this is who we always must be – proud, patriotic, and always standing with our greatest ally – the State of Israel. Am Yisrael Chai!

Thank you. May God bless you, may God bless Israel and may God bless the United States of America.