Ambassador David Friedman remarks at the Zionist Organization of America (as prepared)

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U.S. Embassy in Israel

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Thank all of you so much for the warm greeting. There are so many people worth mentioning tonight that I could use up all of my allotted time doing nothing else. Between the guests of honor, the presenters and those in attendance, we truly have an all-star line-up which includes many of Israel’s greatest friends. I am truly honored to share this podium among all of you.

I have often said that being appointed the United States Ambassador to the State of Israel is the greatest honor of my life. The United States, the nation of my birth and my citizenship, is simply the greatest and most successful experiment in self-government the world has ever seen. And, for the Jewish people, with some rare and unfortunate exceptions, the United States has offered safe haven and boundless opportunity like nowhere else in the history of the Diaspora.

Israel is the nation of my faith. It is the land of the Holy Bible. It is where Jewish history began and continues to be made as the only democracy and America’s best friend in the Middle East. No loyal American need ever apologize for loving Israel and urging our Government to support it. Support for Israel is a quintessential American value.

And so having the mandate from the President to strengthen the relationship between the United States and Israel is simply the opportunity of a lifetime, and a day does not go by where I do not thank God and seek his guidance regarding this extraordinary mission.

We came into office on the heels of perhaps the greatest betrayal of Israel by a sitting president in American history – the failure by the United States, in December of last year, to veto UN Security Council Resolution 2334. Imagine, a resolution stating that the Western Wall is illegally occupied territory, and, unthinkably, the US abstained, permitting it to pass. And then, a day later, the Secretary of State’s attempts to justify this outrage only compounded the problem and revealed a stunning rejection of America’s most important Middle Eastern ally.

I hope you agree with me that we have turned the page since that dark period last December. Gone are the days where the UN bashes Israel with impunity. Let UNESCO falsely disclaim, once again, the 3500 year connection between the Jewish people and Jerusalem or Hevron. This time around the result was strikingly different – the United States withdrew from UNESCO. In Ambassador Nikki Haley, there truly is a new sheriff in town down the block in Turtle Bay.

But that’s not the only stark change for the better in the Trump Administration:

In May of this year there were two firsts that you may have noticed. Early that month I had the privilege to MC the very first Yom Haatzmaut celebration in the White House, hosted by VP Mike Pence. Later that month, and far more striking, President Trump became the first sitting president to visit the Kotel Hamaaravi – the Western Wall, a visit that resonated throughout the Middle East. I should also note that just a day before that visit, I was the first US Ambassador in history to attend a celebration for Yom Yerushalayim. I think we’re making progress.

And that progress is much more than symbolic. If you ask PM Netanyahu what are his three most important policy issues, he will answer “Iran, Iran and Iran.” This isn’t just a point of emphasis like “location, location, location” in real estate. It’s Iran as a nuclear power that threatens to annihilate Israel, Iran as a state sponsor of terrorism through Hezbollah and other proxies, and Iran as a potential regional superpower expanding through Iraq, Syria and Yemen to fill the vacuum created by the defeat of ISIS.

As the President confronted the decision last month of whether to certify that the JCPOA was in the national interest, so many nations  around the world came out in support of the deal; but there was a single notable exception – the State of Israel. And with whom did the President side on this extraordinarily important issue? The State of Israel. Let me be clear on this important issue – there is no daylight between the United States and Israel on the critical importance of arresting the development of Iran’s arsenal and ending its sponsorship of rogue regimes.

As you know, the President is committed to seeking a peaceful resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. But in a way that never poses a risk to Israel’s security. The President recognizes the critical importance that the West Bank never turns into another failed experiment like the Gaza Strip. He knows that Israel is not situated next to Finland or Costa Rica. And, perhaps most importantly, you will never hear the President make the case, as his predecessor did, that there is a symmetrical relationship between, let’s say, building a house in the Samarian village of Halamish and the brutal murder of a Father, son and daughter in Halamish at a Shabbat table. There is no equivalence – none.

The President has also made clear that he intends to move the United States Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem – it is not a question of IF; only a question of WHEN.  I take him at his word and I personally am committed to do all I can to advocate for this move.

The United States Government treats Israel the way it deserves to be treated as a critical, strategic and trusted ally in one of the world’s toughest neighborhoods.

To emphasize this, let me provide just a partial list of the senior members of the Trump Administration who have visited Israel since I took my post:

President Trump

Secretary of State Rex Tillerson

Defense Secretary James Mattis

Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin

National Security Advisor HR McMaster

Homeland Security Advisor Tom Bossert

CIA Director Mike Pompeo

Director of National Intelligence Dan Coates

NSA Director Mike Rogers

Ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley

Chief Economic Advisor Gary Cohn

Deputy National Security Advisor Dina Powell

Senior Advisor Stephen Miller

And Vice President Pence is coming next month for Chanukah.

Many others have come as well, and, of course, on frequent occasions I am joined by Senior Advisor Jared Kushner and Special Envoy Jason Greenblatt. My friends, Jared Kushner, who leads our negotiations, has a deep commitment to the State of Israel unlike any other official ever tasked with Middle East peace. The grandson of Holocaust survivors, he doesn’t just understand the importance of the US-Israel relationship, he feels it profoundly in his heart.

So you don’t have every senior member of the administration travelling 6000 miles to a tiny state if it’s not a critical ally. The proof is incontrovertible.

I have been committed to the safety, security and prosperity of the State of Israel all of my adult life. President Trump was well aware of that commitment when he formally nominated me – on the day of his inauguration, the earliest possible date. He did all he could to ensure that I was the first bilateral ambassador confirmed by the Senate. And I was.

The PM of Israel and I both agree that we have turned a page on the relationship between Israel and the US. It is a change decidedly for the better. Please join with me in the years to come as we continue to strengthen and enhance the unbreakable bonds between these two great nations.