

Speaker Ryan: Remarks at 2017 AIPAC Policy Conference

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WASHINGTON—Today, House Speaker Paul Ryan (R-WI) addressed the 2017 AIPAC Policy Conference in Washington, D.C. to reaffirm the strategic alliance between the United States and Israel. Below are Speaker Ryan's full remarks as prepared for delivery:

"To Lillian Pinkus, Howard Kohr, and my buddy Howard Friedman: Thank you so much for having me. It is so great to be back at AIPAC, but what happened to the turntable from last year? I liked that thing. Sometimes it feels like politicians are just talking in circles. And last year we really did.

"First of all, how many people do we have here from Wisconsin?"

"I've been coming to this conference nearly every year since I arrived in Congress, and each time I ask myself, 'How could they possibly get more people than last year?' You've done it again. This is really incredible.

"I am inspired to see so many people from all walks of life rally together in support of a strong U.S.-Israel relationship. I am especially encouraged to see so many young activists here from across the country. You are the next generation of leaders, and I can't thank you enough for getting involved. Let's give them a hand.

"Friends, this has been quite a year. When I spoke on this stage last March, I was just a few months into this job. I hadn't even decked out my office in Packers gear before my team asked me where I'd like to go on my first overseas trip as speaker.

To me, the answer was obvious: I would return to the Jewish, democratic state of Israel.

“It was an incredible visit. From the unparalleled security cooperation to the miracle of Iron Dome, I saw first-hand the difference our support for Israel makes. Any American who has ever traveled there has heard the same thing from political leaders to everyday citizens you meet on the street: ‘Thank you.’

“You see, Israel does not take our support for granted. And neither should we. The U.S.-Israel relationship is not a one-way street—it is a strategic partnership rooted in shared values and interests.

“But let’s be frank: These past eight years have been tough. Our friendship has been tested. No single political spat or public disagreement can sever our historic alliance with Israel, but it can erode trust. And I think the actions of this past administration damaged this trust.

“But now, it’s time to turn the page. We have a new president—a president who I’ve gotten to know quite well. And let me assure you right here and now: President Trump’s commitment to Israel is sacrosanct. Congress’s commitment to Israel is sacrosanct. We don’t take Israel for granted. We know that this special relationship is central to our national security. And we believe that words must always be backed up with real, concrete actions.

“Let’s start with Iran. My views on the nuclear agreement struck by President Obama are pretty well known. But we must not forget the failures of the past if we want to do better. Simply put: This deal has been an unmitigated disaster. And I don’t say that lightly. We provided billions of dollars in sanctions relief, sent more than a billion dollars in cold-hard cash, and opened up Tehran to the global markets. Meanwhile, Iran has stepped up its support for terrorism, increased its human rights abuses, and ramped up its ballistic missile program—all while keeping its sights on a nuclear weapon. Republicans in Congress repudiated this deal and for good reason—it is dangerous for the United States and the world.

“So where does this leave us? For starters, I think it is long past time we rigorously enforce this deal and hold the Iranians accountable when they violate it. But that’s not enough. A fatal flaw of this agreement is that, even if Iran cooperates, it provides them with a patient pathway to a nuclear weapons capability. In about seven years, key restrictions on centrifuge advancement and ballistic missile

development begin to sunset, and in nine to fourteen years restrictions on uranium enrichment and plutonium reprocessing mostly disappear. This is unacceptable. So we must tighten the screws on Iranian compliance, and continue to hit the regime with punishing non-nuclear sanctions for its range of illicit activities. The Trump administration already did this in February by swiftly imposing fresh sanctions in response to more illegal missile tests. And just last week, with the help of AIPAC, we introduced new bipartisan sanctions targeting Iran's missile program.

"At the same time, we can't embrace this deal as a fait accompli. We must reserve the right to explore options aimed at addressing its most fatal flaws—the sunset provisions, insufficient inspections, and acceptance of Iran's centrifuge development. So when it comes to preventing a nuclear Iran, all options can and must remain on the table.

"But the problem here extends well beyond a bad nuclear deal and ballistic missile tests. This is a revolutionary and expansionist regime bent on the destruction of Israel and the west. They continue to prop up a genocidal dictator in Damascus, arm an insurgency in Yemen, and bankroll terrorist organizations from Baghdad to Beirut. Their goal is regional hegemony, and it is compounding instability and bloodshed across the globe.

"To combat these threats, we must harness every instrument of American power. We must work with our allies—and Israel in particular—to counter this aggression at every turn. We should expand sanctions on Iran's army of terror—the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps—and consider designating them as a Foreign Terrorist Organization. And we should take steps to stop Iranian airlines like Iran Air and Mahan Air from delivering arms and fighters to terrorists across the Middle East.

"Next, we must fulfill our security commitment to Israel. It wasn't too long ago that suicide bombings felt like a near-daily occurrence in the streets of Jerusalem and Tel Aviv—and rockets from Gaza and southern Lebanon rained down on city centers and schools. Despite all the turmoil and violence in the Middle East, Israel has largely been able to calm its borders and prevent major terrorist attacks.

"But threats still remain. At this very moment, tens of thousands of rockets are pointed directly at Israel from Gaza, Lebanon, and Iran. That's why the United States, with support from Congress, has worked with Israel to deploy Iron Dome, David's Sling, and Arrow 3. And we must continue to develop not only new missile-defense technologies, but also cutting-edge tools to detect and destroy terror

tunnels snaking into Israel from Gaza and potentially Lebanon. We cannot be complacent and let down our guard. That's why I want to pledge right here and now that, so long as I am speaker, we will meet our military assistance commitments to Israel and provide additional funding in times of crisis.

"Israel today also faces a new threat. Their success in fighting terrorism has led enemies to resort to an insidious campaign of political and economic warfare designed to undermine Israel. Many of the college students here have seen this on your campuses, but all of us have seen this on the international stage. It is called the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions—or BDS—movement.

"We know the goal is to delegitimize Israel and isolate her under the thin veil of social justice and human rights. We saw this in December at the United Nations—an organization obsessed with singling out and demonizing Israel. So I want to say to the UN: We will not tolerate your anti-Israel bias. The Trump administration will not tolerate your anti-Israel bias. And our new ambassador, Nikki Haley, will certainly not tolerate your anti-Israel bias.

"Make no mistake, and I want to be very clear about this, the BDS movement is nothing short of another incarnation of anti-Semitism. So do not be fooled by those who tell you this is about peace. This has never been about peace. In fact, it only makes a lasting agreement between Israelis and Palestinians more unlikely. No, this is about one thing and one thing only: Israel's right to exist as a Jewish, democratic state.

"And let me just say a few words about peace. I still believe peace is possible, but it requires leadership. How can we ask Israel to make peace with a Palestinian Authority that forms a unity government with Hamas? How can we ask Israel to make peace with a government that incites anti-Semitism and violence, and names public squares after terrorists? How can we ask Israel to offer painful concessions in the name of peace when the other side still refuses to acknowledge her right to exist? This to me is the crux of the issue.

"We have heard the case that this is all about settlements—that if Israel just ceased building we would have peace tomorrow. But let's look at the facts. When Israel offered the Palestinians 95 percent of the West Bank and 100 percent of Gaza at Camp David in 2000—and even greater concessions in 2008—they were rebuffed. When Israel completely withdrew from Gaza in 2005, they didn't get peace—they got Hamas rockets, terror tunnels, and three wars. And when Prime Minister

Netanyahu instituted an unprecedented 10-month settlement moratorium in 2010, the Palestinians only agreed to direct negotiations in the final month, and then blamed Israel for the talks collapsing.

“And all this is not to say that Israel is perfect. They are not, and neither are we. But they are a free and vibrant democracy. They share our interests. They train alongside our military. They provide critical counterterrorism assistance. And they remain our strongest ally in the Middle East.

“Finally, I would like to address something closer to home for all of us. In recent months, we have seen an uptick in vandalism, acts of desecration, and bomb threats against Jewish communities nationwide. I’ve seen it in my own backyard. In Whitefish Bay, Wisconsin—right outside the district I serve, a community right on the north side of Milwaukee—there have been several threats on the local JCC. I was just there in February. To think about parents getting those calls in the middle of the day, it makes your stomach turn.

“These threats and attacks on Jewish Americans are vile and disgusting. They are rooted in a poisonous ideology of hate, and they must be wholeheartedly rejected. So I just want to say this: You are not alone. I stand with you. My colleagues in Congress stand with you. And the American people stand with you. Together, we will root out this evil wherever it may surface.

“Friends, we are living in dangerous times. ISIS still threatens our troops abroad and inspires terrorism here at home. North Korea continues to spew belligerent anti-American rhetoric while testing long-range missiles and nuclear devices. Iran fans the flames of sectarian warfare in the Middle East while marching towards a nuclear weapons capability. And Russia remains an ever-present threat to the post-Cold War order.

“In the coming years, dictators will rise and fall. Geopolitical landscapes will shift. Threats to our nation will evolve. But as I look out over this vast horizon of uncertainty, I remain optimistic, and so should you. That’s because, for all the challenges we face here and around the globe, one thing—one vital thing—remains constant: Our unbreakable alliance with Israel.

“So with that I want to say a final thank you. Thank you for being here. Thank you for using your voice for good. And, on behalf Congress, thank you for sending a clear and unequivocal message to the world that the United States stands with

Israel now, tomorrow, and always. God bless you. God bless Israel. And God bless the United States of America. Good night.”