

Remarks by Vice President Pence at the Warsaw Ministerial Working Luncheon | Warsaw, Poland

 trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-vice-president-pence-warsaw-ministerial-working-luncheon-warsaw-poland

Remarks

Foreign Policy

Issued on: February 14, 2019

PGE National Stadium

Warsaw, Poland

12:34 P.M. CEST

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Prime Minister Morawiecki, Prime Minister Netanyahu, Secretary Pompeo, Your Excellencies: It's an honor to join you for this first-ever "Ministerial to Promote a Future of Peace and Security in the Middle East," and I'm honored to be here with you all.

As I begin, allow me to bring greetings — bring greetings from a friend to every nation gathered here and a champion of peace and security in the Middle East. I bring greetings from the 45th President of the United States of America, President Donald Trump.

Two years ago, President Trump made his first overseas trip as President of the United States when he traveled to the Middle East. There, the President convened a historic gathering of leaders from 50 nations across the region at what was the Arab Islamic American Summit.

As President Trump said at the time, in his words, "The birthplace of civilization is waiting to begin a new renaissance." He challenged us to work together to meet, as he said, "history's great test to conquer extremism and vanquish the forces" of terrorism.

And I'm here today on the President's behalf, standing before another unprecedented gathering of leaders from more than 50 nations, to say that the United States of America stands ready to work with all those gathered here to answer this great challenge and seize our shared destiny of peace.

We each come from different nations and cultures. Our people speak different languages. They hold fast to different faiths, from the Abrahamic tradition and beyond. But all of us are united in our mission to forge a brighter future of security and prosperity in the Middle East.

For decades, the people of the Middle East have suffered as their homelands have been destabilized and destroyed by security threats that remain with us today — from sectarian-fueled civil wars to murderous dictatorships.

And just last night, for the first time in the history of the modern Middle East, representatives from nearly every major country sat down and openly and publicly discussed matters of joint concern.

The United States and Poland welcome this outward symbol of cooperation as a hopeful sign of a brighter future that awaits the nations of the Middle East.

We gather together today on the promise of a better tomorrow, and we gather together today because of the common threats that we face. And no threat is more dangerous or more urgent than radical Islamist terrorism and the authoritarian regimes that export it across the region and across the wider world.

Radical Islamic terrorism knows no borders. It targets the United States, Israel, and nations across the Middle East and around the world. It respects no creed, stealing the lives of Christians, Jews, and Muslims. And radical Islamic terrorism understands no reality other than brute force.

For nearly 200 years, stretching back to our Treaty of Amity and Commerce with Oman, the United States has been a force for good in the Middle East.

Previous administrations in my country too often underestimated the danger that radical Islamic terrorism posed to the American people, our homeland, our allies, and our partners. Their inaction saw the terrorist attacks from the U.S.S. Cole; to September 11th; to the expansion of ISIS across Syria and Iraq — reaching all the way to the suburbs of Baghdad. But as the world has witnessed over the past two years, under President Trump, those days are over.

Since day one, President Trump has restored American leadership on the world stage. And in implementing our National Security Strategy, we've taken decisive action to protect the American homeland, promote American prosperity, advance American interests, and preserve peace through strength.

Under President Trump's leadership, the United States is once again putting the security and prosperity of America first. But as the past two years have shown, across the Middle East and across the wider world, "America First" does not mean America alone.

And in the Middle East, the United States is working to build, as the President said, "a coalition of nations who share the aim of stamping out extremism and providing our children a hopeful future that does honor to God."

And the winds of change can already be felt across the Middle East. Israel's prime minister openly visits Oman. Just last week, Pope Francis visited the United Arab Emirates. Longstanding enemies are becoming partners. Old foes are finding new

ground for cooperation. And the descendants of Isaac and Ishmael are coming together in common cause as never before. This historic conference is a testament to the truth that a new era has begun.

Together with our allies, the United States has brought the full force of our military to drive radical Islamic terrorism from the face of the Earth.

We've taken the fight to radical Islamic terrorists on their terms, on their soil, and on our terms. President Trump gave our commanders in the field the authority they needed to hit ISIS and drive them back. And thanks to the courage of our armed forces and the efforts of our 78 coalition partners, we've liberated millions of people: Iraqis, Syrians, Arabs, Kurds, Muslims, Christians, men, women, and children. And very soon, the territory of the ISIS caliphate will be no more.

In the wake of these gains, President Trump has announced that the United States will begin to hand off the fight to our partners in the region and to bring our troops home.

This is a change in tactics, not a change in mission. The United States will keep a strong presence in the region. We recognize it will not be enough to simply reclaim the territory of the caliphate. As we enter this new phase, the United States will continue to stand shoulder to shoulder with all of our allies and all those who step up to take a larger role in this campaign.

And working with our coalition partners, we will continue to hunt down the remnants of ISIS wherever and whenever they rear their ugly head. And America will continue to stand strong with all our partners in the region to make the Middle East safe for peace, prosperity, and the advance of human rights.

And under President Donald Trump's leadership, the United States of America remains fully committed to achieving a lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians.

In Syria, President Trump used American military power, together with our French and British allies, to launch precision military strikes, responding to Syria's use of chemical nerve gas against its people. And the United States and our allies will never tolerate the use of chemical weapons against innocent men, women, and children. And we stand ready to deter any further use of chemical weapons by the Assad regime.

With these actions and positions and many others, the United States has been strengthening old alliances and forging new partnerships. President Trump is a leader who seeks to lead the free world through strength. We will always stand with our allies and defend our values.

The United States will never fail to stand with our ally, Israel. We will never fail to call out attacks on innocent civilians or a free and independent press, even as we continue to demand that all those responsible for the murder of Jamal Khashoggi be brought to justice.

But we're here today because of what unites us: Our shared commitment to the advance of security, prosperity, and human rights in the Middle East — and our shared responsibility to confront the single greatest threat to that bright future.

Last night was remarkable. At the outset of this historic conference, leaders from across the region agreed that the greatest threat to peace and security in the Middle East is the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Forty years ago this month, the mullahs seized control of that country. And every year since, they've supported terrorist proxies and militias — Hezbollah and Hamas; exported missiles; fueled conflicts in Syria and Yemen and beyond.

The Iranian regime is the leading state sponsor of terrorism in the world. They have bombed American embassies, murdered hundreds of American troops, and even to this day, they hold hostage citizens of the United States and other Western nations.

Iran has brazenly defied United Nations sanctions, violated resolutions, and plotted terrorist attacks on European soil.

As President Trump has said, "The Iranian regime has funded its long reign of chaos and terror by plundering the wealth of its own people."

The authoritarian regime in Tehran represses the freedom of speech and assembly, it persecutes religious minorities, brutalizes women, executes gay people, and openly advocates the destruction of the State of Israel. The Ayatollah Khamenei himself has said, "It is the mission of the Islamic Republic of Iran to erase Israel from the map."

Later today, my wife and I will lay a wreath at the memorial to the Jewish fighters of the Warsaw Ghetto. And tomorrow, we will pay our solemn respects to the martyrs of the Holocaust as we make our first visit to Auschwitz.

From the dark years of Nazi occupation, the people of Poland know all too well that anti-Semitism is not just wrong; it's evil. And anti-Semitism must be confronted, wherever and whenever it arises, and it must be universally condemned.

But beyond its hateful rhetoric, the Iranian regime openly advocates another Holocaust and it seeks the means to achieve it. Iran seeks to recreate the ancient Persian Empire under the modern dictatorship of the ayatollahs. As we speak, that regime is attempting to carve out a corridor of influence running through Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon, hoping to create an unbroken passage for its armies and its ideology. And it has left a trail of devastation in its wake.

In Syria, Iranian troops have propped up the Assad regime, fueling the dictator's brutal war on his people.

In Lebanon, Iran's proxy, Hezbollah, has built an arsenal of more than 100,000 rockets and missiles, equipped with Iranian-supplied advanced guidance systems.

In Yemen, Houthi rebels fire Iranian-made rockets as they wage war against the government, spreading chaos throughout the country.

And in Iraq, Iranian-backed militias are operating outside of the Iraqi government's control — targeting American interests, threatening minorities, and stealing vital international aid meant to help Iraq recover from the scourge of ISIS.

And of all Iran's meddling, it's only added fuel to an unprecedented humanitarian crisis across the region. In Syria, more than 5.7 million people have been forced to flee their homes.

In Yemen, more than a million people have contracted cholera, and millions more lack access to clean water. Hunger is so widespread that every ten minutes, a child dies an entirely preventable death.

And in Iraq, even though the ISIS caliphate has been decimated, more than 1.8 million Iraqis still haven't returned to their homes.

The plight of the oppressed in the Middle East — and the threat posed by their oppressors — has spurred the United States to action.

Thanks to the courage of our armed forces, more than 5 million people are now free from the grip of ISIS.

And with the generosity of the American people, the United States has provided more than \$9 billion in humanitarian aid and civilian assistance to those affected by the multiple crises across the Middle East — more than any other nation on Earth.

The United States of America has been a force for good in the Middle East. But under the mullahs' regime in Iran, for their people, it's been 40 years of corruption, 40 years of repression, 40 years of terror, and 40 years of failure.

And for too long, America tried wishing away the dangers of a radical Islamism that is poisoning both of Islam's great Sunni and Shia streams; a radicalism that seeks to crush every form of dissent and divergence.

The previous administrations' desire for peace at any price drove them to strike a devil's bargain with our common enemy — the enemy of our allies and partners in the Middle East.

But since day one of this administration, President Trump promised to stand with the good people of Iran and stand up to their oppressors. And that's just what we've done.

President Trump kept his word when he withdrew the United States of America from the disastrous Iran nuclear deal. The so-called Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action did not prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon. It merely delayed the day when that vile regime would gain access to the world's deadliest weapons.

And remarkably, the universal view of those who spoke last night at this very conference was that Iran has actually become more aggressive since the JCPOA was signed, not less.

The United States re-imposed sanctions that should never have been lifted in the first place and we've launched a new campaign to prevent the regime from financing its trademark terror and destruction around the world.

And since then, the UAE has canceled its imports of Iranian condensate. Bahrain is exposing the Iran Revolutionary Guard Corps proxies active in its country, and is working to stop Iran's illicit maritime activities in the region. And countries across the globe are working toward cutting Iranian oil imports to zero.

But sadly, some of our leading European partners have not been nearly as cooperative. In fact, they've led the effort to create mechanisms to break up our sanctions.

Just two weeks ago, Germany, France, and the United Kingdom announced the creation of a special financing mechanism designed to oversee a mirror-image transaction that would replace sanctionable international payments between EU businesses and Iran.

They call this scheme a "Special Purpose Vehicle." We call it an effort to break American sanctions against Iran's murderous revolutionary regime. It's an ill-advised step that will only strengthen Iran, weaken the EU, and create still more distance between Europe and the United States.

Some argue that Iran is in technical compliance with the narrow terms of the deal. But compliance is not the issue; the deal is the issue.

Today, America's economic sanctions on Iran are the toughest in history and will get tougher still unless and until Iran changes its dangerous and destabilizing behavior. As President Trump has said, "There has been enough suffering, death, and destruction. Let it end now."

The time has come for our European partners to stand with us and the Iranian people; to stand with our allies and friends in the region. The time has come for our European partners to withdraw from the Iran nuclear deal and join with us as we bring the economic and diplomatic pressure necessary to give the Iranian people, the region, and the world the peace, security, and freedom they deserve.

We must not let this opportunity slip from our hands. In June 2009, after the Iranian regime stole an election to maintain its grip on power, the previous administration refused to raise its voice when the Iranian people took to the streets in what came to be known as the "Green Movement." It wasn't until the Congress acted that the United States declared its support for the Iranian people.

As a member of Congress, it was my privilege to introduce a bipartisan resolution that passed overwhelmingly that showed the support of the American people, and only then did our administration follow. But soon, the ayatollahs and their henchmen used the cover of the world's timidity to murder, imprison, and terrify freedom-loving Iranians.

The world missed an opportunity last time to confront the regime, but not this time. This time, all of us must stand strong. As Iran's economy continues to plummet, as the people of Iran take to the streets, freedom-loving nations must stand together to hold the Iranian regime accountable for the evil and violence it's inflicted on its people, on the region, and the wider world.

So to all of you gathered here who share this vision for peace and security across the Middle East, I make you a promise on behalf of the President of the United States and the American people: If you stand with us in this noble cause, we will stand with you. Together, we will embrace a shared future, building on the best traditions of the past.

It's remarkable to think that nearly 4,000 years ago, a man was called to leave his home in the Ur of the Chaldeans and make a long journey north. He wore no crown. He commanded no armies. He performed no miracles. He delivered no prophecies. Yet to him was promised, in those ancient words, "descendants as numerous as the stars of the sky."

Today, Jews, Christians, and Muslims — more than half the population of the Earth and nearly all the people of the Middle East — claim Abraham as their forefather in faith. And so he is.

And as we gather at this historic conference, I believe, on that foundation of that Abrahamic tradition, we can find a firm foundation for a brighter future for all the peoples and all the faiths of the Middle East. And it doesn't just simply have to be a part of our imagination. It's actually happening, even as we speak.

We need look no further than the Old City of Jerusalem as an example of what could be true for the region as a whole. There, we see the followers of the three great religions in constant contact with one another. We see each faith come to life in new and renewed ways every day.

At Haram al-Sharif, we see young Muslims' heads bowed in prayer. At the Church of the Sepulchre, we see a Christian child receiving the right of baptism. And at the Western Wall, we see a young Jewish boy being bar-mitzvahed. What we see there, we can achieve and live all across the Middle East. That's the vision that President Trump has. And that's the hope and aspiration of peace-loving people in our nation and around the world.

So it's an honor to be with you all today. To all of Your Excellencies who are gathered here; and to our host country, Poland, we say thanks. Thank you all again for being here.

And to all whoever doubt whether peace could at last come to the Middle East, I think we would do well to look to a promise that was made to that man I referred to who made that journey so many centuries ago. It was a promise in those ancient words, that "I will surely bless you."

I believe with all my heart we can claim that blessing anew for all the people of this region and the world for ourselves and our posterity. If we claim it with faith and we claim it together, I believe God will surely bless us with peace. So let us begin. Thank you and

God bless you. (Applause.)

END

12:58 P.M. CEST