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The White House

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Remarks As Prepared for Delivery at AIPAC Annual Meeting by National Security Advisor

Susan E. Rice

Good evening everyone. It's great to be back at AIPAC. Rosy, thank you so much for your warm introduction.

I want to thank Bob Cohen, Michael Kassen, Lillian Pinkus, my old friend Lee Rosenberg, and all of AIPAC's board and members for welcoming me tonight. I want to thank all the Members of Congress who represent America's strong bipartisan support for the State of Israel; and all the young people here today, some 3,000, who represent the bright future of the U.S.-Israel special relationship.

I brought one of those young people with me, my seventeen year-old son Jake, who insisted he had to come to AIPAC. But, I want to take a moment before I begin, to remember three young men who aren't with us today. I want to call us back to those terrible days last summer, when we were united in grief over the horrifying kidnapping and murder of Naftali Fraenkel, Gilad Shaer, and Eyal Yifrah. As a mother, my heart breaks for such unspeakable loss. Those boys were our boys, and we all continue to mourn their tragic loss.

The last time I spoke at AIPAC, it was to the synagogue initiative lunch. This group tonight is... a little larger. But, when I finished that speech, more than 400 rabbis sang to me. In Hebrew. Now, that is something I will never forget. And the words of their song reflect the spirit that brings me here tonight. Hinei ma'tov uma-nayim, shevet achim gam yachad. "How good it is and how pleasant when we sit together in brotherhood." It's a great psalm—though I will admit that where I first encountered it - in church - it was not in the original Hebrew. That psalm always reminds me how much we can do together when we unite in common purpose. And, it goes to the heart of what AIPAC is all about—what the relationship between Israel and the United States is all about. Brotherhood. Togetherness. Unity.

That's because the U.S.-Israel alliance is not just rooted in our mutual interests, vital as they are. It's also rooted in the values of freedom and democracy that we share. It's in the friendship and fellowship between ordinary Israelis and Americans. And, for me personally, it's a warmth that's rooted in my very first visit to Israel. I was just 14, traveling with my younger brother and my beloved late father. My Dad was on the Board of TWA - some of you are old enough to remember that once-great airline. We arrived on one of the first-ever flights from Egypt to Israel, just after the Camp David Accords were signed. We had an unforgettable visit, the power of which has stayed with me all my life. We bowed our heads in sorrow at Yad Vashem. We walked the lanes of the Old City, climbed Masada, floated in the Dead Sea, and picked fruit at a kibbutz. I learned by heart the words of the sh'ma. My first memories of Israel remain etched in my soul.

Put simply, the relationship between the U.S. and Israel is not just one between states. It is between two peoples and the millions of intimate, personal connections that bind us. Our relationship has deepened and grown through different presidents and prime ministers for nearly 70 years.

It was President Truman, a Democrat, who—just 11 minutes after David Ben-Gurion declared Israel's independence—made the United States the first country to recognize the State of Israel.

It was President Nixon, a Republican, who made sure America stood with Israel as it fought for survival one terrible Yom Kippur, so that its people could declare *am Yisrael Chai* --“the people of Israel live.”

It was President Carter who helped Israel forge an historic peace with Egypt that endures to this day. And, it was President Clinton and President George W. Bush who backed Israel as it took more brave steps for peace, and as it endured terrorist attacks from Hezbollah and Hamas.

The relationship between the United States and the State of Israel is not a partnership between individual leaders, or political parties. It's an alliance between two nations, rooted in the unbreakable friendship between our two peoples. It is not negotiable. And it never will be.

Our alliance grows *l'dor va'dor*, from generation to generation. That's what counts. That's what we have to protect. As John F. Kennedy said, back in 1960, “friendship for Israel is not a partisan matter. It is a national commitment.”

No one knows this better than all of you. For decades, AIPAC has built bipartisan support for America's special relationship with Israel. That's why every President—from Harry Truman to Barack Obama—has begun from a fundamental, unshakable premise: strengthening the security of Israel is in the national interest of the United States of America.

President Obama's commitment to Israel is deep and personal. I know, because I see it every day. I first saw it when I accompanied then-Senator Obama to Israel in 2008. I saw it when he surveyed with horror the stacks of charred rockets that Hamas had fired on Israel, and when he walked through the hollowed out homes of Sderot.

That same year, President Obama came to this conference, still a senator, and he made a promise. He said, “Israel's security is sacrosanct.” And, each day, over the past six years, President Obama has kept that promise. The President is profoundly committed to ensuring that Israel is never alone. That's why, today, security cooperation between our countries is not just strong. It's stronger than it has ever been. Both President Obama and Prime Minister Netanyahu have called it “unprecedented.” And that's the way it's going to stay.

President Obama has met with Prime Minister Netanyahu more times than with almost any other

world leader. As national security advisor, I am in nearly constant communication with Yossi Cohen, my friend and my Israeli counterpart, who I am so pleased is here tonight. Thank you, Yossi. Together, we host the U.S.-Israel consultative group to ensure we're working closely across the highest levels of our governments. Our armed forces conduct extensive exercises together, and our military and intelligence leaders consult continually.

Under this Administration, in times of tight budgets, our security assistance to Israel has increased. Since President Obama took office, the United States has provided Israel with more than \$20 billion in foreign military financing. Last year, we provided Israel with the largest package of security assistance ever. That's money well spent, because it goes directly to bolstering Israel's ability to defend itself in a very tough neighborhood, to protecting Israeli citizens, and to strengthening a vital American ally.

We are maintaining Israel's qualitative military edge with new defense technologies and access to the most advanced military equipment in the world. President Obama is determined to ensure that Israel can defend itself, by itself. So, when Israel receives the F-35 joint strike fighter next year, it will be the only nation in the Middle East with a fifth-generation aircraft.

Since 2009, we've invested hundreds of millions of dollars in developing and producing the David's Sling missile defense program and the Arrow anti-missile system. We've invested more than \$1 billion dollars in the Iron Dome system. When I visited Israel last May, I saw this technology first-hand at Palmachim air force base. And, last summer, as Hamas' terrorist rockets rained down on Israeli cities, the world saw how Iron Dome saved lives, literally, every day.

During the height of that conflict—with sirens wailing and Israeli civilians huddling in bomb shelters—the United States stood up for Israel's right to defend itself against rocket and tunnel attacks, even as we worked with the Israeli government to find a diplomatic resolution to the conflict. And, when the Israeli government made an urgent request for an additional \$225 million to support Iron Dome's batteries, President Obama's response was immediate and clear: "Let's do it." Within days, legislation was drafted, passed through Congress with overwhelming bipartisan support, and President Obama signed it into law. At that critical moment, we replenished Israel's arsenal of Iron Dome interceptor missiles. That's what it means to be an ally.

Our unwavering commitment to Israel's lasting security is why we will also never give up on a just and comprehensive peace between Israelis and Palestinians. It will require hard decisions, but the United States will remain a steadfast partner. Like past administrations, Republican and Democratic, we believe that a truly lasting peace can only be forged by direct talks between the two parties. Like past administrations, we are concerned by unilateral actions that erode trust or assault Israel's

legitimacy. Like every administration, Republican and Democratic, since the Six Day War, we oppose Israeli settlement activity—and we oppose Palestinian steps that throw up further obstacles to peace, including actions against Israel at the International Criminal Court. The only path to ensure Israel's long-term security is to bring about a viable, sovereign Palestinian state living side-by-side in peace and security with a democratic, Jewish State of Israel.

Israel's security—our mutual security—is also at the heart of one of President Obama's most important foreign policy objectives: ensuring that Iran does not obtain a nuclear weapon. As President Obama has repeated many times: we are keeping all options on the table to prevent Iran from developing a nuclear weapon. As he said in Jerusalem: "Iran must not get a nuclear weapon. This is not a danger that can be contained." And he added, "America will do what we must to prevent a nuclear-armed Iran."

President Obama said it. He meant it. And those are his orders to us all.

That is still the way we see the danger of a nuclear Iran today. Given Iran's support for terrorism, the risk of a nuclear-arms race in the region, and the danger to the entire global non-proliferation regime, an Iran with a nuclear weapon would not just be a threat to Israel - it's an unacceptable threat to the United States of America.

We understand the unique concerns of our Israeli friends and partners. In Jerusalem, President Obama made plain: "when I consider Israel's security, I also think about a people who have a living memory of the Holocaust, faced with the prospect of a nuclear-armed Iranian government that has called for Israel's destruction. It's no wonder Israelis view this as an existential threat. But this is not simply a challenge for Israel; it is a danger for the entire world, including the United States."

I want to be very clear: a bad deal is worse than no deal. And, if that is the choice, there will be no deal.

Negotiations continue. And, nothing is agreed until everything is agreed. As of today, significant gaps remain between the international community and Iran. I'm not going to get into details about ongoing negotiations - nor should sensitive details of an ongoing negotiation be discussed in public. But, I do want to make five key points about our approach to the negotiation.

First, with the Joint Plan of Action, we have already succeeded in halting Iran's nuclear program and rolling it back in key areas. Let's recall what has been achieved over the last year. Iran is doing away with its existing stockpile of its most highly enriched uranium. Iran has capped its stockpile of low enriched uranium. Iran has not constructed additional enrichment facilities. Iran has not installed or operated new centrifuges, including its next-generation models. Iran has stopped construction at its potential plutonium reactor at Arak. In short, Iran is further away from a nuclear weapon than it was

a year ago—and that makes the world safer, including Israel.

Moreover, we're not taking anything on trust. What matters are Iran's actions, not its words. That's why, as part of the Joint Plan of Action, we've insisted upon—and achieved—unprecedented access to Iran's nuclear program. Before the Joint Plan, inspections happened only every few weeks, sometimes every few months. Today, the International Atomic Energy Agency has daily access at Iran's key nuclear sites at Natanz and Fordow, verifying that Iran is meeting its commitments. If I can paraphrase, President Reagan, with a twist, our approach is "distrust and verify."

Second, we've kept the pressure on Iran. I know this firsthand because, when I was U.N. ambassador, President Obama personally directed me to make sure that the Security Council's sanctions had bite—and they do. Today, even with limited sanctions relief, Iran's economy remains isolated from the international finance system and cut off from the vast majority of its foreign currency reserves. Iran's oil exports have dropped almost 60 percent since 2012. The rial has depreciated by more than 50 percent. And, Iran's overall GDP has shrunk by almost 10 percent. All told, sanctions have deprived Iran of more than \$200 billion in lost oil revenues.

But sanctions are a tool, not an end in themselves. The question now, after the pressure that we and our partners have brought to bear, is whether we can verify that Iran cannot pursue a nuclear weapon. The question now is whether we can achieve a comprehensive deal. A good deal.

This is my third point—a good deal is one that would verifiably cut off every pathway for Iran to produce enough fissile material for a nuclear weapon. Every single one.

Any deal must prevent Iran from developing weapons-grade plutonium at Arak, or anywhere else.

Any deal must prevent Iran from enriching uranium at its nuclear facility at Fordow—a site we uncovered buried deep underground and revealed to the world in 2009.

Any deal must increase the time it takes Iran to reach breakout capacity—the time it would take to produce a single bomb's worth of weapons-grade uranium. Today, experts suggest Iran's breakout window is just two to three months. We seek to extend that to at least one year.

Any deal must ensure frequent and intrusive inspections at Iran's nuclear sites—including the uranium mills that produce the material fed into Iran's enrichment and conversion facilities—to create a multi-layered transparency regime that provides the international community with the confidence it demands. That's the best way to prevent Iran from pursuing a covert path to a nuclear weapon—to stop Iran from working toward a bomb in secret.

Any deal must address the possible military dimensions of Iran's nuclear program. And, going forward, we will not accept a deal that fails to provide the access we need to ensure that Iran's

program is peaceful.

And, any deal must last more than a decade—with additional provisions ensuring greater transparency into Iran's program for an even longer period of time.

That's what we're working toward—a good, long-term, comprehensive deal that verifiably prevents Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon.

This brings me to my fourth point —we cannot let a totally unachievable ideal stand in the way of a good deal. I know that some of you will be urging Congress to insist that Iran forego its domestic enrichment capacity entirely. But, as desirable as that would be, it is neither realistic nor achievable. Even our closest international partners in the P5+1 do not support denying Iran the ability ever to pursue peaceful nuclear energy. If that is our goal, our partners will abandon us, undermining the sanctions we have imposed so effectively together. Simply put, that is not a viable negotiating position. Nor is it even attainable. The plain fact is, no one can make Iran unlearn the scientific and nuclear expertise it already possesses.

We must also understand what will happen if these negotiations collapse. I know that some argue we should just impose sanctions and walk away. But let's remember that sanctions have never stopped Iran from advancing its program. So here's what's likely to happen without a deal. Iran will install and operate advanced centrifuges. Iran will seek to fuel its reactor in Arak. Iran will rebuild its uranium stockpile. And, we'll lose the unprecedented inspections and transparency we have today.

Congress has played a hugely important role in helping to build our sanctions on Iran, but they shouldn't play the spoiler now. Additional sanctions or restrictive legislation enacted during the negotiation would blow up the talks, divide the international community, and cause the United States to be blamed for the failure to reach a deal—putting us in a much weaker position and endangering the sanctions regime itself. Meanwhile, the Iranians are well aware that if they walk away from a deal, Congress will pass new sanctions immediately—and President Obama will support them.

So, if Iran refuses to resolve this matter diplomatically—and is clearly to blame for that failure—its isolation will only increase. The costs will continue to grow.

Finally, I know that some question a deal of any duration. But, it has always been clear that the pursuit of an agreement of indefinite duration would result in no agreement at all. The question is, what is the best way to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon? A deal that extends for a decade or more would accomplish this goal better than any other course of action – longer, by far, than military strikes, which would only set back Iran's program for a fraction of the time. And, at the end of any deal, Iran would still be required to offer comprehensive access to its nuclear facilities and to provide the international community the assurance that it was not pursuing nuclear weapons.

And, if it failed to do so, we would have the ability to make our own decisions about how to move forward, just as we do today. There's simply no alternative that prevents Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon better—or longer—than the type of deal we seek.

We can always bring consequences to bear for the sake of our shared security—harsh consequences. But, precisely because this is such a serious issue, we must weigh the different options before us and choose the best one. Sound bites won't stop Iran from getting a nuclear weapon. Strong diplomacy – backed by pressure – can. And, if diplomacy fails, let's make it clear to the world that it is Iran's responsibility.

One final word on Iran: even if we succeed in neutralizing the nuclear threat from Iran, we will still face other threats—Iran's sponsorship of terrorism, its gross violations of human rights, its efforts to destabilize neighboring states, its support for Assad and Hamas and Hezbollah, its intolerable threats against Israel. Our sanctions against Iran on these issues will remain in place. We will continue to counter Iran and the full range of threats it poses. Tehran must understand—the United States will never, ever waver in the defense of our security or the security of our allies and partners, including Israel.

The bottom line is simple: we have Israel's back, come hell or high water—and I've been right there with you all through some pretty high waters. I was proud to fight again and again for Israel's security and its basic legitimacy at the United Nations – from leading the charge against the deeply flawed Goldstone report to casting this administration's only veto in the Security Council to block a counter-productive resolution.

As Ambassador Power described to you this morning, when it comes to combating the shameful bias against Israel at the U.N., Israel has no better friend than the United States. Last March, we were the only 'no' vote in the Human Rights Council against anti-Israel measures five separate times. Earlier today, Secretary Kerry told the Human Rights Council in Geneva, point blank, that its obsession with Israel risks undermining the credibility of the entire organization. And last month, with Israel and the European Union, the U.S. organized the first U.N. General Assembly meeting to combat anti-Semitism.

No country is immune from criticism—take it from a former U.N. Ambassador. But when criticism singles out one country unfairly, bitterly, viciously, over and over—that's just wrong, and we all know it. When one democracy's legitimacy is attacked, over and over, uniquely among the U.N.'s member states, that's ugly, and we all know it. And, when anti-Semitism rears its head around the world, when Jews at a kosher supermarket in Paris are singled out and murdered by terrorists, when synagogues are attacked and cemeteries defaced, we have to call it by name. It's hate. It's anti-Semitism. It reminds us of the most terrible chapters of human history. It has no place in a civilized

world, and we have to fight it.

These are big challenges. But the United States and Israel have mastered plenty of big challenges before. Israel and the United States are sister democracies built on the bedrock value that we are all created b'tzelem elokim—in the image of God. And, like the Psalm says, how good it is when we sit in brotherhood together. But God calls us to do more than sit. God calls us to stand up. To act.

This weekend, President Obama will travel to Selma, Alabama, to mark the 50th anniversary of the historic marches there. He'll pay tribute to those brave souls who took enormous risks for civil rights, including Jews and rabbis from across the country—from St. Louis and San Francisco; the Northeast and the Deep South. They faced tear gas and billy clubs, Torahs in hand. They were jailed. They conducted Shabbat services behind bars, and they sang "Adon Olam" to the tune of "We Shall Overcome." They broke the fast of Esther in prison. They even started a trend. Some black marchers, moved by the solidarity of their Jewish brethren, started wearing yarmulkes—they called them "freedom caps."

As you recalled last night, one of those on the front lines in Selma was the great teacher, Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel. After marching across the Edmund Pettus Bridge with Dr. King, he reflected, "our legs uttered songs. Even without words, our march was worship." Our march was our worship.

The Jewish community amplified the rightness and the urgency of the civil rights movement with its own unassailable moral compass—guided by the basic principle that people should be free in their own land. And, I stand before you knowing that I and many others would not be where we are today without all those who fought for equal rights – African Americans and white Americans, including so many Jewish Americans. As we mark that Selma anniversary, as we gather here to celebrate an improbable dream that grew into the great State of Israel, we remember what we can accomplish together, when we're at our best.

In a spirit of brotherhood, we have overcome so many trials to reach where we are—as nations, as peoples. In a spirit of brotherhood, inspired by all those who marched and struggled and sacrificed before us, let us continue the work. Let us never succumb to hopelessness or cynicism, to division or despair. Let our legs utter songs, and let our hands reach out together. That is how we fulfill our common commitment to mend our imperfect world, to do the holy work of tikkun olam. And, as we do, at home and around the world, the United States will always stand with our Israeli friends and allies.

That's our enduring commitment. That's our sacred duty. That's the hope and the future for our children. So, let us keep marching arm in arm together.

Thank you.

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