Rahm Emanuel's 7/8/26 speech at Tel Aviv University

I want to start by saying four words that Israelis don't often hear anymore. I understand your cynicism and I understand your anger. I understand why even if you oppose the Netanyahu government, you're so prone to dismiss criticism from the outside world.

I understand that the corrupt Palestinian leadership has never lived up to the Palestinian people's legitimate right for self-determination and sovereignty. I understand for all of that, everyone acknowledges that the world changed on October 7th. The dynamics that prevail today were born well before Hamas consciously murdered, and sexually abused 1,200 innocent civilians and kidnapped more than 250 innocents. And for those that paraded, celebrated, and cheered on October 8th, what happened on October 7th, your moral bankruptcy speaks louder than my words today.

Before coming here yesterday, I visited my uncle's gravesite on Mount Olives, as I always do upon arriving in Israel. He died as a member of the underground. And as many of you may or may not know, my father, a blessed memory, was born here in Jerusalem and fought in the War of Independence.

I had the honor, when I was working for President Clinton, of inviting my father to witness the moment Prime Minister Rabin and Chairman Arafat shook hands and signed the Declaration of Principles on the South Lawn of the White House. But not only did peace not materialize, Israel's reward for extending the olive branch was a wave of unrelenting violence. Bombings on the streets of Dizengoff, in Ramat Gan, in Yehuda Market, targeting civilians for being Israelis.

I was still advising President Clinton from Chicago when the Prime Minister Ehud Barak offered Chairman Arafat 98 percent of what the Palestinians were seeking, but he refused to sign. And what did Israel earn offering sovereignty in exchange for its own security? The Intifadah, again targeting civilians. Prime Minister Olmert made a similar offer years later to the Palestinians in 2007. But President Abbas once again walked away, sparking another wave of violence, horrific violence, that targeted civilians. Three times in the '90s and 2000, Israel, you have offered the Palestinians sovereignty in exchange for your security. And three times your offer was not only rejected politically, but was answered and met with direct attacks on the people of Israel. In the United States, we have a saying: Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice, shame on me. So I truly understand that.

But even while acknowledging that history: The path forward cannot be shackled to a past defined exclusively, consumed solely by recriminations. I came here from Chicago to tell you directly where things need to head if we are going to maintain the historic alliance between two democracies. Without question, the alliance is at a crossroads. It

cannot stand or survive as it has been. To maintain the strength of our ties, this alliance needs significant changes and a new direction. Let's start by reviewing recent history.

Over the last five years, Israel has evolved from being known as the startup nation to becoming, in the prime minister's own words, a modern-day Sparta. You have turned from being known for your technological prowess to being considered primarily a territorial pariah. You, you in this room, need to think about what that means for your future. The United States has been your foremost and steadfast ally since Israel's birth, and its founding. We are prepared to stand shoulder to shoulder with Israel on the long and difficult journey towards peace, should you choose that path. But the most important thing a friend can do is to tell truth to a friend, even when it's painful. Today is a day for truth.

The prime minister and his government have led Israel into a dead end. For too long, American policy towards Israel operated under the assumption that the best thing Washington can do for Jerusalem is to blindly, to silently stand behind your government without conditions, without demands, without consequences, even when we disagreed.

That has been our mistake, and it's been not a favor to you.

Unconditional support has produced a prime minister who has presumed that his strategic interests would incur no political costs if he ignored America's concerns about settlements and sparked a regional war. Unconditional support has allowed you to deny food and medical relief to innocent Palestinians in Gaza, leaving the world to conclude that Israelis not only want to kill Palestinians, but they are completely indifferent to their death, to their destruction, and completely indifferent to their suffering. Unconditional support has girded a political coalition in the Knesset that learned it can burn Palestinian farmland in the West Bank, terrorize Palestinian families without consequence.

Given all of this, we need fundamentally a new and different approach to this alliance. The new approach must stand on a new common understanding. The road to regional peace and stability depends on military and diplomatic efforts that, far from being at odds, actually complement each other.

This was actually Israel's policy at one time. The late Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, who I had the honor of working with when I worked for President Clinton, admonished the country to fight terrorism as if there's no peace process and to make peace as if there's no terror.

But Prime Minister Netanyahu has done the former to the exclusion of the latter. And as a direct result, support for Israel is plummeting around the world. You've lost Europe, your biggest economic partner and market. Your scientists face exclusion from international conferences and research networks. Your artists and academics are shut out of exhibits and meetings.

In 2022, 55 percent of Americans held a favorable view of Israel. Today, it is 37 percent and it is dropping. And among the youth of both America and Europe, the future of both America and Europe, it's even lower. The only diplomatic gain you've made in the last three years is Somaliland.

As my grandmother would say, you lost America, you lost Europe, and you picked up Somaliland. Such a deal. But that's the consequence and the net result of policy choices.

For years, when I've met with Israeli officials, Iran has consistently been at the top of the agenda. And for good reason. Both Washington and Jerusalem share an interest in keeping the ayatollahs from possessing a nuclear weapon. But the history here is important. As an underscore to the earlier point, whatever anyone might have liked or disliked about President Obama's nuclear agreement, and recall that Prime Minister Netanyahu actively campaigned against it.

Many, though, in your own security services saw merit in the deal. The JCPOA froze Iran's nuclear program, had international support, and placed international inspectors on the ground. That's over. President Trump's decision to shred that agreement licensed Prime Minister Netanyahu to do what he has always desired and advocated: embrace a military-only approach. He encouraged President Trump to abandon the JCPOA in the first term, which was done, and to scuttle all diplomatic efforts and opportunities prior to February 28th, when Iran was weakest at home and in the region.

You cannot achieve regime change, if that's your goal, from the sky, only from the streets. And look what's happened. Israel's lost ground. You're less safe today, not more. And the problem isn't the lack of military strength, but something more fundamental. Israel has failed to convert its military gains into strategic advantages.

The same dynamic extends beyond Iran. You had no day-after plan for Gaza. You had no strategy to make a partner of the Lebanese government against Hezbollah. Sinwar, Nasrallah, Khomeini, all dead—just as many in Israel have long sought, and yet Israel has never been more strategically isolated. It should be obvious that strategic isolation is not a foundation for security. It's a countdown clock.

I haven't been deaf or immune to Prime Minister Netanyahu's arguments. Indeed, he was taken aback when I had the audacity as President Obama's Chief of Staff to forcefully question in 2009 the wisdom of building new housing in the West Bank, provocative housing; a conversation, and I use that term loosely, that later spurred him to publicly label me a self-loathing Jew. He believes that being Sparta is worthwhile, even despite the reality that his own idol, Winston Churchill, once argued that weapons are not sufficient by themselves. We must add to them the power of ideas.

Now here I want to be very clear: The United States cannot continue to finance and support that cynicism whatsoever in silence. You cannot fight indefinitely against a world that has stopped believing you have a right to fight. You must instead find a new sustainable path to peace, to security and prosperity. And America stands ready should you choose that path.

The new path needs to be shared by what has worked and what hasn't in Israel's efforts to become, in the late founding father Ben-Gurion's own words, a nation among nations. Through the decades, Jerusalem has pursued three distinct strategies.

The first is unilateral action, which almost always creates instability. Think Lebanon, or even Gaza, after your withdrawal in 2005, which got you Hezbollah and Hamas, respectively, in the north and the south. These are the places in which Iran, your most potent adversary, has most successfully inserted its talents, where it finds and nurtures its proxies.

Israel thrives working with other nations. Iran thrives working with failed nations and working inside failed nations. We should not be adopting, you should not be adopting their strategy. With unilateral action, even when you win, you lose.

The second approach, which has also proven to be a surefire recipe—I hope that wasn't an editorial comment—for endless conflict is through force and occupation. I want to be very clear about this: The pursuit of a so-called greater Israel is as self-destructive and fanatical as the chant "from the river to the sea." Your government has been complicit in the horrors now being inflicted on innocent families in the West Bank. That undermines your international legitimacy as a small nation at a time when you can least afford it.

The hard truth is that America's silence through the years has engendered the worst of your domestic politics. We've done you no favors by averting our eyes from, in my view, your misjudgments. And to that end, if I have anything to say about this in the future, every Israeli found attacking Palestinian civilians or their property in the future will be sanctioned.

Hold your applause because you may not like this. Every Israeli government official who supports such violence will be sanctioned. Every construction company or bank financing or building illegal settlements will be sanctioned.

I got you. Prime Minister Netanyahu may take offense to these suggestions. Breaking news: It wouldn't be the first time. My commitments are neither radical nor new. They simply reflect how the United States of America applies its national security tools to achieve its goals.

To that end, Israel has at its disposal a third option and a third approach, one that has succeeded repeatedly in your own history. And today I call on you to embrace it once again for both the security of our alliance and the security of the state of Israel.

I will never forget how at the ceremony where Jordan and Israel made their peace in 1994, Israel's military leadership stood at attention during the Jordanian anthem. And Jordan's military leadership returned the honor during the playing of "Hatikvah," the power of that symbol.

And like the 1979 treaty with Egypt, and decades later, the Abraham Accords, the peace agreements with other nations have endured because Israel found their counterparts to be a true partner in the pursuit of both peace and security. And the question today, can the same wisdom apply forward? And the answer comes down to a simple phrase, stability, regional stability.

Even before October 7th, several of Israel's Arab neighbors, most notably Saudi Arabia, had begun to see their own strategic interests in a new light, acknowledging more openly that the corruption of the Palestinian leadership was hindering the Arab world's broad-based prosperity. And that highlights a linchpin that is too often overlooked or ignored.

Regional stability in the Middle East is predicated fundamentally on the Arab world assuming its rightful place and responsibility as the adult in the room with the Palestinian leadership. And here's why that's so important. Unlike during the Oslo process of years ago, they, the Arab League, appear now willing to step into that role.

And in that spirit, I want to propose today a new three-part U.S. policy in the region, which would advance our joint security interests by leveraging the Arab world's desire for stability, Israel's need for its own security, and the Palestinian demands for sovereignty. These three elements can be packed is a singular strategic initiative that benefits all. And let's begin with the naked truth and reality: The Arab leaders, not Israel, must hold the Palestinians responsible and accountable for their actions and for being a true partner in peace.

And to that end, the now discredited path to a two-state solution should be replaced by a 23-state solution. The 21 Arab nations that have exploited Palestinian rights as a slogan for decades now need to roll up their sleeves, stand up a governing authority capable of accepting the historic Jewish connection to the land of Israel.

The new institution must put an end to the heinous practice of financially rewarding terrorists who kill Jews because they're Jews. And they must do the most important thing as well, stop teaching their children the future of their country to hate Israel.

At the same time, Israel must cease and desist from its cynical game of nurturing destructive organizations like Hamas rather than nurturing partners in peace. Your government shouldn't be permitted to take unilateral actions in the West Bank that undermine the possibility, the opportunity of a peace agreement.

With those preconditions met, we wanted to open the door to a new reality. The Arab League would establish full diplomatic recognition of Israel, and Israel with all 21 members of the Arab League, just as they had once proposed. The political benefits for all parties would be far greater than a two-state solution could ever offer the two parties.

But if I can't convince you of that, I want you to think about this: If Israel made peace with 21 members of the Arab nations, that would be your greatest day and Iran's worst nightmare.

I understand why Israelis would be reluctant to engage again. I get it. The terrible atrocities, the unspeakable horrors of the violence and sexual abuse, and the killings on October 7th are seared in your collective consciousness. And they have convinced many Israelis that the Palestinians want only to kill them. And after the last three years of war, the Palestinians are convinced that is all that Israel wants to do to them. We now have two people suffering from deep trauma, incapable of seeing the other's pain and anguish, and empathizing with their pain and anguish.

But I want you to hear me now. Israel will be alone if its leaders choose to attempt to annex the West Bank and pursue the fantasies of a greater Israel. America will not, America cannot, and it will not be complicit or complacent in that endeavor. That said, should you choose to pursue peace and security, we in the United States will be by your side every day, every step.

The end goal of our joint strategy should be a single, 23-state, act of regional integration that establishes full diplomatic relations between Israel and all its Arab neighbors. And if you're not convinced regional stability would be an integral part to Israel's peace and security: You would no longer stand apart, but you would stand as a part of the Mideast.

Second, because the region's prosperity depends on stability, we need to restore the economic promise of what it means to be a start-up nation that once seized the world's imagination. The India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor, IMEC, was announced at the G20 three years ago to connect the rail lines, the ports, the highways, the fiber optic cables, and the energy networks running between India and Europe. By reducing logistical costs by 30 percent and bypassing the Strait of Hormuz, it would make Israel and several Gulf countries indispensable nodes in a new global supply chain and give each country along the corridor a direct financial stake in regional stability.

With a 23-state solution, the economic opportunity of IMEC at long last would ensure that Israel, both politically and economically, is a constituent part of the Middle East rather than an outlier.

And finally, much as America benefits from the alliance, with the Middle East's most dynamic democracy—I've said it before—we should end at long last the American taxpayer subsidy of Israel's defense budget.

Your economy is strong. Your defense budget exceeds $45 billion. We in America would continue to ensure that the IDF maintains its qualitative edge. But Israel should be able to buy American arms under the same financial terms, the same restrictions, and the same requirements as every other trusted ally that abides by America's laws.

This new direction is about a new reality. Those chanting "from the river to the sea" need to hear this. You will never have your way. But those calling for a greater Israel, you need to hear this. You will never have your way either. Both of them are fantasies chanted by fanatics that lead to perpetual, endless conflict.

My three propositions and proposals are about Israel's future. They're about the alliance's future, and they're also about a stable Middle East. They're also about America's interests. An Israel that buys its weapons like an ally, not a dependent. An Israel that has full diplomatic relations with all its Arab neighbors and is no longer the world's pariah. An Israel that is the technological spine of the most important economic corridor on earth.

I have spent 30 years standing up for Israel when it was politically costly, and watching the windows of peace narrow. Not because peace was impossible, but because leaders on both sides found conflict more convenient than compromise. Hamas's goal on October 7th was not just to kill and abuse as many Israelis as possible. It was to extinguish the idea that one day Israelis and Palestinians could live side by side and find common ground.

The tragedy is that Netanyahu has helped Hamas achieve that objective, not by being too soft, but by being so reckless and unwilling to plan for a day after in Gaza, which would have created and offered an alternative beyond occupation and isolation. The Israel I grew up believing in was about making the impossible real, having both the imagination and the tenacity to make the desert bloom.

In the United States, we have a saying: If all you have is a hammer, everything you look at is a nail. Israel will become a prisoner of its own tools. Your military is a hammer, such that to the Prime Minister Netanyahu, every security challenge is a nail.

Today, you may be more militarily secure. However, you're more diplomatically and politically isolated than ever before. That is a choice this government has made. What

we need now is Israel that is not naive, but is also not blind to possibility. An Israel that will work with Arab partners and Palestinian partners alike in a 23-state solution with Palestinian self-determination and Israel's security is the only way forward.

We in America just celebrated our 250-year anniversary (thank you) on a revolutionary idea that sovereignty begins with a people, not a king. The ideas of freedom, liberty, and equality of opportunity were principles that would underpin a new government. And if you took a bet 250 years ago, you wouldn't have taken that bet.

Through thick and thin, right and wrong, turns in the road, we prove the skeptics and the cynics wrong. I speak to you today in 2026. In 22 years, this country will be 100 years old. In public life, it's a blink of an eye. Will that Israel be the Israel that has more Nobel winners per GDP and size of population than any other country in the world? Will it be the country that captured the imagination of the world as a startup nation? Will it be the country that helps on the cures to cancer, finds ways to feed the hungry in a both sustainable and resilient way?

Will it be a world and a country that contributes to the betterment of humanity? Or do you believe in your heart of hearts that in 22 years, what you know today will be tomorrow? That choice is yours. Toda rabba.