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North Africa

“Building a New Regional Security Architecture: The Next Phase of the
Abraham Accords”

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Chairman Lawler, Ranking Member Sherman and Members of the
Subcommittee, thank you for affording me the opportunity to testify on the
subject of the Abraham Accords and their future prospects.

I would note at the outset that this is a subject near and dear to my heart. In
the summer of 2020, I participated in the negotiation and execution of these
historic agreements at the direction of President Trump and assisted by a few
members of his senior foreign policy staff. I take great pride in having been
awarded the National Security Medal by President Trump for my efforts.

Some think that the Abraham Accords spontaneously arose in August 2020 by
sheer providence or luck. The opposite is true. The seeds for the Abraham
Accords were planted on President Trump’s very first foreign visit to Riyadh,
Saudi Arabia in 2017. Speaking to nearly 50 Muslim nations, President Trump
made two things clear: 1) the battle against radical Islamism, in the first
instance, was theirs to fight, and 2) the fantasy of Israel’s demise was
completely counterproductive and needed to end.

Those guiding principles drove extensive discussions among many nations,
leading to the initial Abraham Accords. While the first deal surfaced in August

2020, the concept was in the works for much of the first Trump Administration. A premature leak would have ended the discussions, but our team was very small and closely knit.

Following the signing ceremony on September 15, 2020, on the South Lawn of the White House with regard to the first two of the Abraham Accords (with the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain), I asked the foreign minister of the UAE what he saw as the greatest benefit of these historic agreements. His answer struck me as particularly astute. He said, and I am paraphrasing, that the Middle East had been beset by radicalism for nearly a century, bringing with it enormous suffering to the inhabitants of this troubled corner of the globe, whether Jew, Muslim or Christian. Critically, he said, the Abraham Accords were a victory of the moderates over the extremists. In his view, which I share, the advancement of moderate regimes in the Middle East is at the core of creating a more peaceful and prosperous region.

Several months later I traveled to Bahrain and had a similar conversation with its foreign minister. He put it in similar but more poetic terms. He said the region had been disserved for decades by radicals and fundamentalists causing many to lose hope. The Abraham Accords, he said, was King Hamad's decision to open a light at the end of the tunnel.

The Abraham Accords have brought enormous benefits to the participating nations; benefits that have been the subject of numerous reports and studies. Whether in the fields of trade, tourism, national security or mutual understanding, they are regarded on a bipartisan basis as an enormous success. They represent the courageous decision of all the relevant leaders to prioritize the future of their citizens over the grievances of the past.

Perhaps the best evidence of the strength and durability of the Abraham Accords is the fact that they remain in effect today after nearly three years of violent war in the region. Since October 7, 2023, Israel has been fighting for its existence against at least three Iranian proxies – Hamas, Hezbollah and the Houthis of Yemen. More recently, it has engaged in a war, together with the United States, directly against Iran itself. Public support for Israel unfortunately and unjustifiably has plummeted since then, with violent anti-Israel demonstrations becoming common place in Europe, South America, Australia, Canada and even the United States. Under these circumstances, it would have been understandable for Arab participants in the Abraham Accords to give up on these agreements to cultivate short-term approval from much of the world. But they didn't. Because, more than anyone else, these nations understood that when times get tough, it is even more important to remain aligned with moderate, democratic and powerful nations like the United States and Israel.

As the Biden Administration took over, we anticipated that the Abraham Accords would expand, provided that Trump's essential Middle East policies were maintained. But regrettably, the Abraham Accords have not expanded meaningfully. And the reasons for that are as clear as day. The Biden Administration dramatically shifted our foreign policy, doing violence to the foundational premise of elevating moderation over extremism. This mistake caused the region to plummet into unprecedented chaos, causing further diplomatic advancement to be untenable during the past five years.

At the outset of the Biden Administration, the State Department determined to shelve the term "Abraham Accords" in favor of the more nondescript and uninspiring "normalization agreements between some Middle East nations." Not an auspicious beginning. Over time, the Accords occasionally garnered faint praise from the Biden Administration, but they only became a serious

agenda item as President Biden's first term drew to a close and a diplomatic win was sought.

But far worse than Biden's diplomatic burial of the Abraham Accords were the actions which his administration took to empower terrorism and its sponsors – the very outcome that the parties to the Abraham Accords had sought to avoid.

The most critical example of this malpractice pertains to the Islamic Republic of Iran. To put this in the simplest terms, Iran was on the verge of bankruptcy in 2020, but President Biden came in and threw it a lifeline.

After withdrawing from the JCPOA nuclear deal in 2018, the first Trump Administration reimposed all lifted sanctions and degraded Iranian oil exports to almost zero. The Biden Administration took a different path from its beginning, adopting an extremely lax policy on sanctions enforcement. As a result, Iranian oil exports rose dramatically and Iran's ability to fund its terror proxies strengthened immeasurably. This result was the antithesis of all that motivated the Abraham Accords. Iran's restoration meant that the extremists were back in the lead.

To make matters materially worse, the Biden Administration provided more than \$1 billion in cash to UNRWA, the Hamas-supporting UN agency that was fully cut off by the first Trump administration. Notwithstanding the common knowledge that UNRWA was a supporter of Hamas incitement and extremism well before Trump took over in 2017, UNRWA was for many years the beneficiary of substantial US aid. Trump properly cut off that aid, but Biden restored it. In the aftermath of the October 7, 2023, massacre of Israeli civilians by Hamas, the full extent of UNRWA's depravity has been exposed.

Through UNRWA, the United States under Biden, albeit unintentionally, directly funded a terror organization that facilitated the murder of Jews. That is a harsh but true reality.

Further on the issue of UNRWA, I would like to compliment the bipartisan efforts of Chairman Lawler and Representative Gottheimer who have introduced a bill to dismantle this Hamas-supporting agency.

In addition to lubricating the forces of terror with cash grants or lax sanctions enforcement, when the Biden Administration finally got around to promoting the Abraham Accords, it did so as part of a diplomatic package that required Israel to agree to a Palestinian state – a very challenging sell to Israel before October 7, 2023, and a completely impossible sell thereafter. Why this additional condition was included is mystifying – the existing Abraham Accords do not include such a provision. It made Biden’s diplomatic efforts destined for failure; indeed, an Arab nation willing to enter the Abraham Accords in the absence of a Palestinian state – and I believe that such nations exist - could not refuse a Palestinian state if America itself was demanding one!

Some have criticized the Abraham Accords because they did not resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Some go so far as to argue that the October 7 massacre was planned and executed to prevent Saudi Arabia from joining the Accords. I don’t buy any of this.

In the first place, the October 7 massacre was in the planning stage well before US-Saudi discussions were even considered. In my view, the massacre was motivated solely by the insatiable desire of Hamas and other terror organizations to kill Jews. It could have occurred on any date over the past two

decades if Israel had let its guard down. Unfortunately, Israel indeed let its guard down on that tragic day, and the results speak for themselves.

If there is any lesson to be learned from October 7, it is that Israel has no margin of error when it comes to protecting its citizens. There are no days off and no risky diplomatic experiments to be tried when the consequences of failure are so great – even when those experiments are pushed, in good faith, by Israel’s friends.

The fact that the Abraham Accords did not resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a feature, not a bug, of the deal. The Accords sent a clear message to the Palestinians that the days in which they held the Middle East hostage had ended. The Middle East would embark on a path to peace and prosperity with or without them, and they were well advised to think about how to create a better future for their people.

Regrettably, the Palestinians did not internalize this message. Aided by a compliant Biden Administration, they continued to build terror tunnels, to fire missiles at Israeli civilians, to repress their own people, and even to continue the “pay for slay” program in which large financial rewards were provided by the Palestinian Authority to terrorists who murdered Jews.

I want to emphasize one point as we all struggle with the challenge of expanding the Abraham Accords: Israel already has done the two-state experiment and that folly almost destroyed the Jewish State. Israel left Gaza entirely in 2005. It handed the territory over to the exclusive control of the Palestinians. The world ran to throw money at this Palestinian-only enclave to help it succeed. But the residents of Gaza elected Hamas to power, which proceeded to deploy the Gaza funding for all the wrong malign activity which

has been extensively documented. When Hamas attacked Israel on October 7, the residents cheered and celebrated, as did the Palestinians in Judea and Samaria. Today, Hamas has retained and even expanded its popularity.

Talk of a Palestinian state in the halls of Congress or the palaces of Europe is just wildly out of touch with the realities on the ground. Importantly, all future Abraham Accords partners understand those realities well. As do middle class Palestinians living in Judea and Samaria. I know them. They do not want to be ruled by repressive, violent and corrupt leaders – which are the only leaders currently or foreseeably available.

A Palestinian state will not advance the Abraham Accords, it will destroy them. It will consume the region with even more conflict and violence.

These are some of the realities that impact the future of the Abraham Accords. But there are other realities as well, including the overriding reality that the Abraham Accords remain a lasting and singular example of ancient nations restoring peaceful coexistence with the help and guidance of the United States. Indeed, I believe that the Accords have a bright future with many more participants, provided:

- The United States continues its policy of zero tolerance with regard to radical Islamic terrorism, especially in connection with the Islamic Republic of Iran and its proxies.
- Israel remains, and strengthens, as a regional superpower. Israel's technological prowess is a powerful incentive for Arab nations to normalize.
- There continues to be no daylight between the governments of America and Israel. The Abraham Accords were preceded, and aided, by

unprecedented American diplomatic advancements in favor of Israel, including the move of the United States Embassy to Jerusalem and US recognition of Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights. These advancements did not push Arab partners away; rather, they brought the parties closer together under a “circle of trust.”

- The United States continues to reward moderate Arab nations and to provide appropriate incentives against radicalism.
- The Israeli-Palestinian conflict must continue to be addressed as a separate process, to include proposed solutions beyond the failed notion of a Palestinian state. I believe there are other “win-win” approaches that have merit and I encourage you to read my book on the subject, *One Jewish State: The Last, Best Hope to Resolve the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*.

My final point is that the America’s support for Israel has recently become the subject of intellectually dishonest politicization, in many cases bordering on, or even crossing the line into, antisemitism. For the Abraham Accords to have a future, this needs to stop. The Accords reflect the recognition by the moderate Arab world that Israel is a permanent ally of the United States and critical partner in regional national security. If that recognition is impaired, the Accords have no future.

Thank you for having me this afternoon, and I look forward to your questions.

