



TESTIMONY TO THE PLATFORM DRAFTING COMMITTEE OF THE DEMOCRATIC/REPUBLICAN PARTY

March 19, 2020

AJC, founded in 1906, is the Jewish community's premier global advocacy organization. Its mission is to enhance the security and well-being of the Jewish people and Israel, and to advance human rights and democratic values around the world. In addition to its New York headquarters and its Office of Policy and Diplomatic Affairs in Washington, D.C., AJC has 24 U.S. regional offices, 12 overseas posts, and 37 partnerships with Jewish communities and institutions worldwide.

AJC's platform proposals reflect our priorities of combating global antisemitism and advancing pluralism, promoting Israel's security and its place in the community of nations, and countering the spread of radicalism and extremism throughout the world. Our priorities are underpinned by a profound belief that we must work to ensure the strong leadership of the United States in global affairs as the best protection for our nation's interests, the preservation and promulgation of democratic values and human dignity, and the security of our closest allies.

We respectfully urge the Platform Drafting Committee to incorporate the following language as planks of the Democratic/Republican Party Platform.

Countering Antisemitism and Other Bigotries at Home and Abroad

Earlier this year, AJC released a groundbreaking survey of American Jews' perceptions of, and experiences with, antisemitism in the United States. The study found that 88% of American Jews believe antisemitism is a problem in the U.S. today, and 84% say it has increased over the past five years. Almost a third of American Jews have changed their behavior. They will not publicly wear, carry, or display things that help others identify them as Jewish because they worry about being a target. When citizens of this country report that they hide who they are out of fear, it should serve as a wake-up call.

Antisemitism's surge is not just a Jewish issue; it challenges universal interests and values. What's more, antisemitism is no longer operating on the fringes. It has gained a foothold across the political spectrum and is increasingly prevalent among prominent political parties and leaders. Our party will endeavor to confront antisemitism from the political right and the political left (and emanating from extremist ideologies propagated in the name of religion), encourage leaders to speak out against antisemitism manifesting in ways such as Holocaust denial and distortion, tropes that paint Jews as having undue influence within society, and accusations of Jews demonstrating dual loyalty, as well as through the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement and the demonization of Israel.

Whatever its form, **opposition to antisemitism and hatred in all its forms must be unequivocal.** We must embrace and extol our diversity as a nation, **setting pluralism as the standard rather than tolerance.** Our differences enrich our nation; they are not a liability. In these times, we reaffirm this idea as a core American value.



Adopting and embracing tools to combat antisemitism:

To combat antisemitism, a crucial first step is to define it. Our party endorses, as a non-binding resource, the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) **Working Definition of Antisemitism** – a clear and concise description of antisemitism in its various forms, including discrimination, hatred of Jews, conspiracy theories, Holocaust denial, and the denial of Israel’s right to exist. Utilized by the State Department when monitoring antisemitism internationally and by the Department of Education when assessing the problem of antisemitism on college campuses, this definition can be an essential tool giving state and local governments, law enforcement agencies, and civil society organizations increased capacity to identify, prosecute, and deter antisemitic incidents.

Improving hate crimes reporting

More must be done to improve the reporting and prosecution of hate crimes. According to the latest FBI hate crimes report, Jews were the target of nearly 60% of all religiously-motivated hate crimes—an alarming statistic for a group that makes up less than 2% of the U.S. population. However, hate crime reporting is deeply flawed due to underreporting or complete lack of reporting by state and local law enforcement. There are 80 cities of over 100,000 residents that do not report any hate crimes or simply ignore the FBI request for data. Accurate data is essential to understand the extent of the problem and design responses. State and local governments must be pressed to prioritize reporting hate crimes to the FBI, and the Department of Justice should increase its commitment to work with state and local officials to prosecute hate crimes.

Addressing white nationalism

While the government must address all forms of bias and hate that lead to criminal action, a comprehensive examination into the violence motivated by white supremacist ideology is necessary, as it poses **the most deadly and dangerous threat** to the United States. Experts report that in 2018, the number of white nationalist groups nearly doubled, fueled by three chief causes: toxic political discourse that targets and demonizes certain communities; angst over perceived abrupt demographic transformation in the U.S.; and the unconstrained spread of hate speech, propaganda, and misinformation online. A *New York Times* examination of the subject (“Threat of White Nationalism,” Nov. 3, 2018) made clear that federal and state governments lack sufficient knowledge concerning the presence and threat of white supremacist groups, and of when individuals are likely to act upon their ideology with violence.

Maintaining a Strong U.S.-Israel Relationship and Promoting Israel’s Place in the World

Israel, since its founding and early recognition by President Harry S. Truman, has enjoyed a strong alliance with the American people and its government, based on the unshakable foundation of shared values and goals. These include dedication to democratic principles, the rule of law, religious pluralism, and individual liberty; commitment to achieving an enduring regional peace that assures the security of the Jewish people in their historic homeland and self-determination and expanded opportunity for the Palestinians; and common strategic objectives.

Continued expansion of U.S.-Israel ties advances the strategic interests of both nations. No nation in the world cooperates more fully and reliably with the United States than the State of Israel in strategic planning, intelligence-sharing, military training, and technological development. It is no coincidence that the antidemocratic forces in the world that demonize Israel also view the United States as their enemy. Longstanding **bipartisan support for Israel**, as well as the enduring tradition of providing **U.S. security assistance to Israel**, is critical.



Refuting the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions movement and other efforts to delegitimize Israel

Attempts to isolate Israel diplomatically and economically are thinly disguised attacks on Israel's very legitimacy. The boycott, divestment, sanctions (BDS) movement demonizes and discriminates against Israel through a campaign of disingenuous criticism that too often crosses the line into outright antisemitism. The U.S. and other countries should reject any attempts to exert economic pressure on Israel in lieu of constructive efforts to reach a two-state solution through direct negotiations.

Reaffirming support for a two-state solution

As difficult as it would be to achieve, a negotiated and enduring settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict based on the principle of two states for two peoples is the most feasible and sustainable path to a secure, democratic, Jewish future for Israel, and for the achievement of self-determination for the Palestinian people. A demilitarized and democratic Palestinian state could not only help assure Israel's security, but would also help fulfill the long-awaited national aspiration of the Palestinian people and bolster stability and prosperity throughout the region.

Historically, the U.S. has played a pivotal role—as a facilitator of negotiations—in helping to achieve major breakthroughs in the Middle East peace process, from the Camp David Accords in 1978, through the Peace Treaty between Israel and Egypt in 1979, to the Peace Treaty between Israel and Jordan in 1994. However important the U.S. role, **face-to-face negotiations** are the only realistic path for creating a viable, demilitarized, and democratic Palestinian state existing side-by-side in peace and security with democratic Israel. While the support the “Peace to Prosperity” plan has received among several of Israel's Arab neighbors is encouraging, and while the broader region must be involved in peace efforts, Palestinian leadership must return to the negotiating table. For too long, Palestinian voices have been missing from the table, to their own detriment. We decry Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas's unilateral efforts to seek recognition of Palestinian statehood in the United Nations, or to otherwise promote an internationally imposed solution. Such efforts impede rather than advance a two-state solution. The U.S. must continue its efforts to prevent the UN from being politicized in this way.

Addressing threats posed by Hamas and Hezbollah

A significant barrier to peace is Hamas, a terrorist organization that has ruled Gaza for more than a decade. Rather than joining with the Palestinian Authority to create the institutions necessary for building a prospective and peaceful Palestinian state, Hamas remains committed to using violence to achieve its long-term goal of destroying Israel. Hamas devotes its resources to terrorist activities rather than caring for its civilians. As a result, Gazans suffer and Israelis reasonably question how territorial concessions would further endanger their safety and security. Additionally, the continued presence of Hamas as a political and economic leader in Gaza threatens and undermines the viability of the PA and their legitimacy in being able to negotiate a lasting agreement.

According to intelligence sources, Hezbollah has more than 100,000 increasingly sophisticated rockets and missiles prepared to fire at Israel at any time, giving it a larger arsenal than many national militaries. But Hezbollah's global footprint extends well beyond the Middle East. Its operatives use hubs around the world to recruit members, raise funds, procure weapons, smuggle drugs, conduct surveillance, and, when feasible, instill terror and destruction. All nations, including the European Union, should swiftly designate Hezbollah in its entirety as a terrorist organization.

Recognizing the persistent danger to Israel from terrorist forces such as Hamas and Hezbollah—and the potentially existential threat posed by Iran should it ultimately realize its nuclear ambitions—America's unwavering commitment to the safety and security of Israel is paramount. Israel's right to defend itself



must be recognized unequivocally. Our country must continue to ensure that Israel retains a qualitative military edge, which requires military assistance to Israel as well as scientific research and other non-military programs of shared interest.

Jerusalem has been uniquely connected to the Jewish people and Jewish consciousness for millennia. Although Israel declared Jerusalem its capital soon after the country achieved independence in 1948, neither the U.S. nor much of the rest of the world accepted that designation, making Israel the only nation in the world not permitted to choose its own capital and the only nation whose capital was not recognized by the international community. This changed in 2018 when the U.S. relocated its embassy to Jerusalem, after which several other nations announced that they would follow suit or consider such a move. We reaffirm that Jerusalem is the eternal capital of the Jewish people and commit to maintaining the U.S. Embassy there.

Countering Iran's Nuclear Ideals and Malicious Actions

With its nuclear ambitions, advanced missile program, proxy armies, and support for terror, the Iranian regime poses a profound danger to American interests and allies, and to global peace and security. In its pursuit of regional hegemony, Iran continues to destabilize the region. The United States played a critical role in the negotiations culminating in the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), which undergirded the long-standing premise that we cannot and will not accept a nuclear Iran but failed to address critical factors related to Iran's malicious actions and intent.

The U.S. should only consider rejoining the JCPOA if there is an opportunity to **address the full complement of problematic Iranian actions** that were originally omitted or inadequately addressed, including Iran's intercontinental ballistic missile program; support for terror groups such as the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), Hezbollah, Hamas, and others; atrocious human rights violations; and deceit about its nuclear research activity.

Reasserting Principled American Global Leadership

America must never retreat from its leadership role on the world stage. **Strong and principled U.S. leadership** in global affairs is the best protection for our nation's interests, the preservation and advancement of democratic values and human dignity, and the security of our closest allies. Longstanding diplomatic relationships – with transatlantic allies, neighbors, trans-Pacific partners, moderate Arab states, and stalwart allies like Israel – are essential to any effort to address myriad global threats.

While the United States cannot be the world's policeman, history has amply shown that when the U.S. withdraws—or is perceived to retreat—from the global stage, dangerous vacuums are created, and others—both state and non-state actors—seek to fill them, pursuing goals antithetical to our own. Our nation must be prepared to use all the tools of statecraft to project leadership, vision, strength, and a commitment to human rights.

Buttressing American diplomatic engagement:

The capacity and effectiveness of the State Department, our diplomatic corps, and U.S.-sponsored educational and cultural exchange programs shape America's ability to assert our interests and to promote democratic values abroad. The U.S. government must intensify efforts to swiftly appoint and



confirm qualified diplomats and professionals to crucial posts in domestic agencies and in embassies and international organizations around the globe.

America's commitment to military superiority and strength has enforced American global leadership and must never be neglected. But while strength is an essential ingredient of leadership, it is not a substitute for it. Elements of U.S. soft power – foreign aid in particular – are necessary investments and tools of American global leadership. Our party supports a robust International Affairs budget. Comprising a scant 1 percent of the federal budget, the International Affairs Budget is a strategic investment to advance America's interests throughout the world. Development and diplomacy programs are a cost-effective tool to tackle the root causes of conflict and extremism, build new markets for U.S. goods and services, respond to humanitarian crises, and demonstrate America's proud tradition of goodwill and global leadership. Continued material support for U.S. allies and strategic partners—especially those threatened by aggression from state and non-state actors—is essential.

Advancing democratic values and human rights:

Human rights and democracy are integrally linked—democratic institutions are the best way to ensure respect for human rights. America has a vital role to play in combating the assault on liberal democracy taking place in many countries, which is all too often coupled with a rise in antisemitism and prejudice against minorities. The protection of minorities underlies the fabric of democracies, and our party is committed to being a voice for the voiceless, speaking out when vulnerable communities are threatened, and promoting pluralism.

Our party, and the next administration, will hold governments accountable for upholding universal human rights commitments and norms. Global instability has led to a growing risk of mass atrocities worldwide. We commit to developing clear policy and utilizing coordinated government action to prevent and prosecute mass atrocity crimes.

Exerting leadership and supporting allies within international organizations:

U.S. participation and leadership in international organizations advances global stability. Through multilateral institutions such as NATO and the UN, the United States must work with allies to confront the challenges of terrorism, nuclear proliferation, and unstable regimes; humanitarian emergencies and refugee flows; and other crises. As such, we support full funding to international institutions, consistent with international treaties, U.S. obligations, and law.

Even as we recognize the UN's flaws and work to highlight and redress them, participation in the UN affords the U.S. indispensable opportunities to work with the international community to advance our interests and those of like-minded nations. The U.S. plays an important role in pushing back when the UN singles out Israel for censure, even as many of the world's most egregious human rights abusers are untouched. We will use our position as a permanent member of the UN Security Council to veto resolutions subjecting Israel to standards not applied to any other country. Similarly, in accordance with longstanding U.S. law and treaty obligations, we will take forceful steps to discourage any UN entity from granting full membership to a non-state entity. To fully integrate Israel in the UN, the next administration will support Israel's candidacy for a rotating seat on the UN Security Council.