

# Remarks by Honorable Mike Pence 48th Vice President of the United States

Washington, DC  
October 28, 2021

Thank you all.

Thank you for that warm welcome. And it is my great honor to address the Free Iran 2021 summit. Today, along with all of you, thousands of freedom loving people across the United States and Europe, Iran and nations around the world are joining together in pursuit of a common cause, the liberation of the Iranian people from decades of tyranny and the rebirth of a free and peaceful, and prosperous and democratic Iran.

It is very humbling for me to be here with all of you, and with the distinguished Americans that you'll be hearing from in the balance of this program. And I know I speak for them when I say I want to thank you, I want to thank you for your courageous work, the work you're doing to promote a free Iran. Thank you all for standing for freedom, for the Iranian people.

Now, this is the first opportunity I've had to speak at length about Iran since completing my term as Vice President of the United States. And while I no longer speak on behalf of the United States government, I can assure you, as others, you will hear from today my countrymen. I'm confident I speak for the views of tens of millions of Americans. And I tell you with certainty that the American people support your goal of establishing a democratic, secular, nonnuclear Iranian Republic that derives its powers from the consent of the governed.

Many American citizens trace their family roots to Iran. More than 1.5 million Americans, including many gathered here and looking on across the country, were born in Iran, which means the United States is home to more members of the Iranian diaspora than any other nation on earth. And America has been incredibly enriched by your contributions to our culture, our economy, and our society. Most Iranian Americans came to the United States following the tragic events after the revolution in 1979.

They chose to make the United States their home because they knew that America is and will always remain the land of Liberty.

But for those who were left behind, many of your family members and to those that are looking on from afar, life over those years has been full of misery and hardship.

What the Iranian people have endured since 1979 will be recorded by history as one of the great tragedies of the modern era. As a former elected leader, as an American citizen, as a man of faith who believes that all people are created in the image of God, the Iranian people have always been on my heart throughout my 20 years in public life.

In 2009, like so many other Americans, I remember watching with great hope and anticipation as hundreds of thousands of people across Iran rose up to reclaim their birthright of freedom.

In the 2009 uprising, millions of courageous young men and women filled the streets of Tehran and Tabriz in what seemed like every city and village in between. They denounced a fraudulent election, they demanded an end decades of repression. Those brave protesters looked to America, and they looked to the leader of the free world for support.

But as I saw firsthand as a member of Congress, sadly, for days, our administration remained silent. As a member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, it was my honor to take action, recognizing that in their hour of need there could not be an abdication of American leadership. The American cause is freedom. And in that cause, we must never be silent.

So as a member of the House International Relations Committee, I went to work. I worked with a distinguished Democrat member of Congress named Howard Berman. We authored a resolution that the late Senator John McCain and Senator Joe Lieberman, who is with us here today, introduced in the United States Senate.

We expressed America's support for the courageous young Iranian protesters, and I'm proud to say it passed almost unanimously in the House of Representatives and the United States Senate. And Senator Lieberman, thank you for your strong and decisive leadership on that day. With such strong and overwhelming and bipartisan support on Capitol Hill, happily, the Obama administration joined the chorus of Americans supporting the cause of a free Iran in the days that followed. Unfortunately, the Obama-Biden administration's halfhearted support and refusal to act ultimately emboldened Iran's tyrannical rulers to crack down on that dissent.

The 2009 uprising was ruthlessly put down. As I said at the time, cable television channels were filled with the brutality on the streets of Tehran. We were witnessing a Tiananmen in Tehran.

But the enduring hope of a free Iran, as you approve again today, can never be extinguished. And under the Trump-Pence administration, I'm proud that America did not turn a deaf ear to the pleas of the Iranian people. We did not remain silent in the face of the regime's countless atrocities. We stood with the freedom loving people in Iran.

We stood against their tyrannical regime, as perhaps no administration had done in the modern era.

We canceled the Iran nuclear deal, which had flooded the regime's coffers with tens of billions of dollars with pallets of cash money that it used to repress its own people and support deadly terrorist attacks across the region. We imposed crippling new sanctions on Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard. We launched a campaign of maximum pressure, punishing the regime for its belligerent behavior, its assaults on its own citizens. We enforced sanctions to bring Iran's oil exports to zero and deny the regime its principal source of revenue. And we called on free nations around the world to stand with us.

We encouraged world leaders to condemn Iran's unelected dictators and defend the Iranian people and their unalienable right to chart their own future and determine their own destiny. In no uncertain terms, we told the United Kingdom and Germany and France and Russia and China that the JCPOA was a dangerous mistake for America, for the world and for the people of Iran.

And we made it clear that under no circumstances would the United States ever allow Iran to obtain a nuclear weapon.

When we came into office, Iran was sowing violence all across the region. Even in the wake of international agreements and billions of dollars of international support. We confronted the regime's malign activities and violence in the region, and our administration did not hesitate to take decisive action against the most dangerous terrorist in the world. The head of the Quds Force, Qassem Soleimani is gone.

On the day we left office, the Iranian regime was more isolated than ever before. Truth be told, as many of you know, gathered at this Free Iran Summit 2021, the Iranian regime has never been weaker than it is today. Its economy is in shambles. The inflation rate has skyrocketed. Iranian currency has lost 90% of its value. Four out of five Iranians now live below the poverty line. Corruption is at an all-time high. And by all indications, the Iranian people are ready for change.

And there's every indication that the tyrannical regime in Iran knows their days are numbered. The recent selection of Ebrahim Raisi to service Iran's President, I believe, is a sign of the regime's growing desperation and vulnerability. Thirty years ago, Raisi was in charge of the Ayatollah's death squad, and he's now the President of that country, a brutal mass murderer responsible in 1988 for the massacre of 30,000 political prisoners. His selection as President is clearly intended to quash internal dissent and intimidate the people of Iran into remaining silent.

But we must never remain silent in the face of evil. Many people attending today know well just how evil Raisi is.

Many of you gathered here, and many of you looking on, lost loved ones by Raisi's hand. You lost your homes, your livelihoods. And as I heard in a meeting just before we gathered here, some of you barely escaped his grip with your lives.

So today, with other distinguished Americans, we join you in pledging his crimes must not go unpunished.

Ebrahim Raisi must be removed from office by the people of Iran, and he must be prosecuted for crimes against humanity and genocide.

And today, by all indications, the resistance movement in Iran has never been stronger. Resistance units in Iran are the center of hope for the Iranian people. They're the engine of change from within during the uprisings and continued protests. Let me be clear. And I know I speak on behalf of tens of millions of Americans, of both political parties and of every political philosophy. The American people stand unequivocally on the side of the Iranian people and their Resistance.

One of the biggest lies the ruling regime has sold the world is that there's no alternative to the status quo. But there is an alternative, well organized, fully prepared, perfectly qualified and popularly supported alternative called the MEK.

The MEK is committed to democracy, human rights and freedom for every citizen of Iran, and it's led by an extraordinary woman. Mrs. Rajavi is an inspiration to the world.

Her ten point plan for the future of Iran will ensure freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, and freedom for every Iranian to choose their elected leaders. Our greatest hope must always be for a peaceful, cooperative and harmonious coexistence with Iran and all the sovereign nations of the region and the world. The United States will always be ready to embrace peace with all who seek it.

But peace follows strength.

And with our current administration's embrace with the JCPOA, their hesitation to condemn rockets being fired at our cherished ally Israel, the heartbreaking and disastrous withdrawal from Afghanistan, our adversaries may be sensing weakness in the current American administration. They may be emboldened to test our resolve. And in fact, they've already begun to do so with reports of an Iranian drone attack on a US base in Syria.

Weakness arouses evil.

But whatever the current decisions of the present American administration, let there be no doubt the American people are strong and the American people stand for freedom.

And I know the people of our country will remain committed to defending freedom and standing with oppressed people around the world because we know in our hearts that Iran can be a great nation once again. We know the rich history of Iran, which stretches back in time and memorial. The story of a people who have made great contributions to art, music, literature, science and commerce.

And we know your story is far from over.

As President Ronald Reagan said, there is no arsenal or no weapon in the arsenals of the world, so formidable as the will and moral courage of free men and women.

Iran will someday be free. Because here in America, we know the Iranian people. You've seen all that you've achieved in our country when you've been free to pursue your hopes and your dreams. All free nations of the world must continue to support the Iranian people in their calls for freedom and demand that Iran's leaders cease their dangerous and destabilizing actions at home and abroad. We stand with the proud people of Iran because it is right, because the regime in Tehran threatens peace and security in the world, and no oppressive regime can last forever. I believe in all of my heart that the day will come when the Ayatollah's ironfisted grip on Iran is ended.

I believe that a new glorious day will dawn. A bright future will begin, ushering an era of peace, stability, prosperity and freedom for the good people of Iran. And so I pray with all my heart that that day will come soon. And looking at all of your shining faces and seeing the broad support so well represented by distinguished Americans here, I believe that day of a free Iran will come soon.

Thank you.

God bless the people of Iran and God bless the United States.

# **Moderated Discussion with the Honorable Mike Pence, the 48th Vice President of the United States by Vice President's Chief of Staff, Mr. Marc Short**

## **2021 Free Iran Summit**

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**Marc Short:** Good afternoon and thank you for hosting us. It's a great honor to be here with the Iranian American communities. We thank you for your resolve and for your resistance. And before we took the stage today, the vice President was remarking that hopefully one day we'll be able to join you in the [Free Iran summit](#) in Iran in the very near future. Before jumping in with a few questions for the vice President, I think we certainly want to acknowledge a few people in the audience who have given so selflessly in their own public service to our country.

Senator Torricelli, former Attorney General and Judge Mukasey, the champion of your cause for many years, Senator Joe Lieberman and someone who served so selflessly in uniform as commander on the United States Marine Corps General Conway, Mr. Vice President, thank you for those remarks. I know the audience clearly enjoyed it, so let me try and keep it going at a fast pace. But clearly the Obama Biden administration and Trump Pence administration has very contrasting approaches to how we deal with Iran. I think there's great concern that the Biden Harris administration, perhaps will be following more closely to the Obama Biden approach.

And as you mentioned remarks just this week, there are reports of an attempted drone attack on a United States base in Syria by Iranians. Can you address the different approaches and why we believe maximum pressure was more effective in isolating Iran?

**Vice president Pence:** Well, thank you, Marc. You could give Marc Short a round of applause. He was my chief of staff. It was a fundamentally different approach that President Trump and our administration took with regard to Iran. When we came in, Iran had benefited by the Biden Obama administration's approach, the JCPOA delivering pallets literally pallets of cash for the Mullahs in Iran, sanctions relief. And yet the day we were inaugurated in 2017, Iran was sowing violence all across the region, it was almost difficult to count every country where Iran was supporting terrorist activity.

And the president's first international trip was to travel to Saudi Arabia and to bring together Arab Nations against common cause, to confront radical Islamic terrorism in the region. But we all knew from early on that the chief state sponsor of terrorism in the world was Iran. And recognizing that by bringing nations together, committing to a common cause, we need to marry that to action. And so the President made the decision that we put into effect before the end of our first year in office to withdraw from the Iran nuclear deal in its entirety and to issue a whole new range of sanctions, believing that peace follows strength.

And as we all witnessed, we were in the midst of a global pandemic. We were in the midst of a presidential campaign. We made history in the fall of 2020 when two Arab Nations came to the South Lawn of the White House and signed the Abraham Accords, recognizing Israel's right to exist in normalizing relations. It was evidence of the fact that we had managed to isolate Iran diplomatically and economically as never before. And in so doing, we emboldened Arab Nations who were being victimized by the violence that Iran was supporting and sowing across the region to come together around us in common cause, not just with regard to our support for our cherished ally, Israel, but in a common purpose to confront terrorism in the region.

And I believe it confirmed President Trump's approach that peace comes through strength, that weakness arouses evil. And I must say, as I said before, Marc, that I have great concern with this administration's decision to reenter negotiations with the JCPOA, that the air strike that we saw in Syria attributed to Iran against the US outpost may just simply be the beginning of a return to what we saw before. And my hope is that this administration or future leaders will put us back on the path of strength because that was creating an environment that was isolating Iran and creating the conditions for peace in the region.

**Marc Short:** Let's stay on the JCPOA for just a minute. As I recall, both you and the President received many calls from European leaders asking you to please stay in the JCPOA and candidly in a tense pressure campaign within their own State Department to say, please stay within. Can you give the audience a little bit more of your observations at that time what the pressure campaign was like, but also why your administration felt so strongly that this was the correct path to withdraw from JCPOA?

**Vice President Pence:** Well, to say that every leader in the world opposed us, withdrawing from the Iran nuclear deal would be an understatement. The truth is, I was there for many of those phone calls in the Oval Office and one leader after another came attempting to persuade the President to change course to change path. If you'll remember, in the early months of our administration, we created room to see if there would be any change in direction, if there would be a willingness to renegotiate the deal and when there wasn't by October, we were out.

And I think that it is a real testament to President Trump's determination to follow a posture of strength, to confront the malign activity of Iran in the region, to abandon the politics of appeasement toward the Ayatollahs and also ultimately to keep a promise that we made to the American people and to the world.

**Marc Short:** In remarks, you commented on a very important moment when the administration made the decision to militarily take out General Soleimani during the Obama years. The United States Department Defense estimated that General Qasem Soleimani is responsible for the death of more than 500 American servicemen and women. He was a known terrorist. He was traveling to Iraq to cement more unrest and planned more attack on innocent civilians. But when the Trump Pence administration acted to eliminate them, it did evoke some significant criticism from Capitol Hill, Congresswoman Ocasio-Cortez commented that the attack was, quote, an act of war.

Senator Murphy said the question is, did America just assassinate with any congressional authorization, the second most powerful person, Iran knowingly setting off a potential massive regional war? It did not set off a massive regional war. Can you share again with the audience a little bit more of the deliberations that occurred within the administration about that opportunity and why the administration felt it was merited to conduct that attack?

**Vice President Pence:** Well, Marc, as you know, when we came into office, we were determined to take the fight to terrorists on our terms, on their soil, to no longer yield to outside timetables. And that's what we did. And from early on, we gave our military the ability. And I will tell you, I'm not a general. I'm the proud father of a United States Marine who is currently deployed in the service of the United States. And I'm a proud father-in-law of a Navy pilot. And I couldn't be more proud of what our service men and women accomplished in the four years of our administration.

We took down the ISIS caliphate. We took down their leader. But to your point, Marc, from early on, President Trump also recognized the ongoing threat and the impact that Qasem Soleimani had had the loss of some 500 service members in Iraq directly tied to his efforts in the Quds Force, there was a prior Republican administration that had the opportunity to move against Qasem Soleimani. And I remember in the early days of our administration reading sincere regret and reflections about that because of the Americans that were lost because of this ruthless and brutal terrorist who was equipped and supported by Iran and his role.

His reach in the Quds Force was across the region, and it's hard to describe not just what he did with American forces, but the thousands and thousands of innocent lives that were lost. What I can tell you all here and any looking on is from early on, bringing Qasem Soleimani to justice was a priority of the Trump Pence administration.

President, and I often took our security briefings together, and from early on, President Trump made it clear that we wanted to know when we would have an opportunity to bring Qasem Soleimani to justice.

And when the time came, as I told a smaller group gathered before here today, we received word Qasem Soleimani was moving across the region, that he was headed in the direction of Baghdad with intentions to organize more attacks on Americans. And I can tell you, I was there hour by hour, when that decision was made was implemented, our forces acted, and I couldn't have been more proud to serve alongside a President who took down Qasem Soleimani without hesitation and brought him to justice.

**Marc Short:** Despite some of the perhaps political criticism from Capitol Hill, there were many Americans and particularly servicemen and women grateful for that action. I believe as well our hosts have a quick video that they wanted to show the reaction in Iran when General Soleimani was taken out. [short video clip of young Iranian women and men taking down Qasem Soleimani's pictures is shown]. The world is a safer place because of your actions. So thank you, Mr. Vice President.

You mentioned as well in one of your answers, one of the enduring achievements of the Trump-Pence administration is the Abraham Accords. Can you share your viewpoint? Because I think some people have heralded this as a diplomatic success, but I think more broadly, others have observed that it was made possible because of the maximum pressure campaign, the removal of Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi, the removal of Iran's top nuclear scientist as the removal of Qasem Soleimani that paved the way for these diplomatic achievements.

Can you give commentary about the element that this wasn't just a diplomatic success, that it was made possible because of that more aggressive approach toward Iran?

**Vice President Pence:** Well, I truly believe that when our administration commenced with the maximum pressure campaign, when we took the fight to ISIS, when we took the action against Qasem Soleimani, when we took down Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi without one American casualty, when Syria crossed a red line and President Trump, unlike prior administration, sent 58 cruise missiles into Syria, said the American people would not tolerate these chemical weapons against innocent civilians. I think each of those steps sent an unambiguous message across the Arab world that the United States of America was prepared to confront the tyrants in Iran or in Syria and that we were a reliable partner for security and peace.

And I truly believe, Marc, that it created the conditions where our team was able to achieve the historic accomplishments of the Abraham Accords. And I've urged this administration in other international forums to continue to build on the Abraham Accords. We were able to add several other European countries who joined us in common cause. But we truly do believe that isolating Iran economically and diplomatically and combining that with continued outreach across the Arab world, transformed the region. And I believe with all of my heart, empower people that believe in freedom and democracy in Iran to reclaim their nation. I believe it.

I thought the brilliance of naming it the Abraham Accords is deeply inspiring. I'm a man of Christian faith, and my faith is deeply important to me as yours is to you. But I've been to the Chaldean where the Ziggurat stands in Southern Iraq, where a man named Abraham was called by God to leave his homeland and to travel north. And he was told by God that his descendants would be more numerous than the sand on the shore and the stars in the sky. And there was birth of three great religions of the world.

And I believe peace is possible for the region and the world on the foundation of that Abrahamic tradition, I believe it. I pray for it. And I work for it all the time.

**Marc Short:** Let's stay on religious Liberty for just a minute. Some of the people I'm told in today's audience and likely many of those who reviewing from afar, lost family members in the genocide of 1988 and the persecution and killing of religious prisoners. Support of religious Liberty across the globe was a priority of yours in the last administration. Can you share why that was personally important to you, but also in 2009, when there was a revolution or people protesting you and Congressman Berman stood up and defended those protesters. Can you talk about in the midst of our kind of polarized environment today, why it was important to work in a bipartisan manner in your relationship with Congressman Berman at the time?

**Vice President Pence:** Well, and as I mentioned in my remarks, we introduced a resolution in the House. And moments later, Senator Lieberman and the late Senator John McCain introduced and passed it in the Senate. And I think it's because of commitment to freedom, especially the freedom of religion. It is a foundation for every American. Religious Liberty is our first freedom. The atrocity of 1988, the fatwa that was issued by the Ayatollah, resulting in the murder of 30,000 members of the MEK was ultimately about religion and a belief that people who believed in liberty and in freedom for Iran did not have the religion that was acceptable to the tyrants in Tehran.

And I want to say to anyone looking on, that you have our deepest sympathies for your loss in what was many years ago, but probably seems like it wasn't. But it's one of the reasons why this movement, the summit, this gathering is so important because ultimately, the key for the success of Iran and all that explains the unprecedented prosperity of our nation. Now for coming up on 250 years, it's freedom. And I just encourage each and every one of you with the words that the American people, I believe, will continue to call on our leadership to stand firm against tyranny. But the people of Iran should know that the American people long for you to have the same freedoms, the freedom of religion, the freedom of speech, the freedom to choose those that will govern your nation as we have throughout these generations.

**Marc Short:** President Raisi is known for being directly involved in that massacre of 30,000 political prisoners. Now that he's ascended to the presidency, how should that impact America's policy toward Iran? And what advice would you have for this administration?

**Vice President Pence:** Well, my advice to this administration is to understand who they're dealing with, but also to understand what the selection of Raisi as President says about the opportunity that everyone gathered for this summit recognizes. All the world, for me, feels like desperation, an attempt to install someone who has brutalized the people of Iran for decades in a position as President of the country. Clearly, simply, my Midwest common sense just tells me that it's an effort to send a message to push back on a movement that they know is happening all across their country.

And it would come as no surprise. I'd like to see America stay right on the track that we were on in the Trump-Pence administration. Stay out of the Iran nuclear deal, continue to isolate Iran diplomatically and have no dealings with the Ayatollahs or with Raisi or any of those in the government that is terrorizing its people.

**Marc Short:** Thank you, Mr. Vice President. We have time for just one more question. And it's always been on our mind to have a chance to serve you because I think one of your greatest gifts is you've always been an optimist in advocating for freedom and liberty across the globe. And you've been a champion for that. Help our audience understand proud nation of Iran what its future can look like?

**Vice President Pence:** Well, thank you, Marc. And again, I want to say thank you to you. I want to say thank you to our hosts. It's a great honor for us to be with you today and very humbling to be included among such a distinguished group of Americans. I was reading the Bible on the plane on the way from Indiana this morning, and there's a great verse of long cherished. It says,

Where the spirit of the Lord is, there is Liberty. And I would just say to each and every one of you, I believe with all of my heart that when we make liberty our cause, when you make freedom, our cause, when we're defending the unalienable rights that come, as we Americans have said since our founding, not from government but from our Creator, that we make his work on this Earth our own.

I want to say to all of you, keep believing, keep working, keep standing for freedom and a boundless future of prosperity and security and peace for the people of Iran and know that the American people will be with you. And I believe God will be with you.