

Ambassador David Friedman has Presented His Credentials

After presenting his diplomatic credentials to Israeli President Reuven Rivlin Tuesday in Jerusalem, new U.S. Ambassador to Israel David Friedman expressed his gratitude to President Donald Trump for an “unequivocal and unambiguous mandate to support the state of Israel in every way, and in all ways.”

Rivlin welcomed Friedman and called for “the whole world to recognize Jerusalem as the official capital of the state of Israel,” ahead of next week’s celebrations marking 50 years since the reunification of Jerusalem.

“As a seventh-generation Jerusalemite, you continue the connection to Jerusalem that began with King David some 3,000 years ago,” Friedman told Rivlin.

He added, “Serving the U.S. as its ambassador to the state of Israel is the greatest honor of my life, and I pledge to you to do all that I can to strengthen and enhance the relations between our two great nations—that you accurately described as unbreakable and, I would add, without limits.”

Following his meeting with Rivlin, Friedman met with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who expressed his deep appreciation for Friedman’s visit to the Western Wall immediately upon the envoy’s arrival in Israel Monday. The ambassador replied, “There was no other place to go.”

Friedman immediately went to the Western Wall to pray for the president after the envoy arrived in Israel for the first time in his new post. He was greeted there by Rabbi Shmuel Rabinovitch, the Western Wall’s official rabbi.

“Well, it was a long trip. We’re a bit tired, but we wanted to

come straight to the holiest place in the entire Jewish world, the 'Kotel Hamaaravi,' the Western Wall, so we came straight here," Friedman said, according to a video posted by the U.S. Embassy in Israel.

"I had the opportunity to say some prayers," Friedman said. "I prayed for the president, and I wished him success, especially on his upcoming trip. I hope we all wish him success. We hope it's going to be an amazing trip."

Trump is scheduled to stop in Israel May 22-23 after he visits Saudi Arabia. But that trip is getting off to a bumpy start in no small part due to the efforts of Obama administration holdouts in the Department of State.

The White House Monday disavowed reported comments that had stirred tension between Israeli and American officials a week ahead of the president's official visit to Israel.

Israel's Channel 2 reported Monday that a senior White House official, who was in Israel in advance of the Trump visit, told his Israeli counterparts the Western Wall was part of the West Bank and not Israel. In a follow-up report Tuesday, Channel 2 identified the White House official as David Berns, political counselor at the U.S. Consulate in Jerusalem.

"The Western Wall is not in your territory," the official reportedly said.

The exchange reportedly came as Israeli and American officials were discussing Trump's planned stop at the Western Wall. No sitting U.S. president has ever visited the holy site.

According to Channel 2, the White House official told members of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's team that Trump's visit to the Western Wall would be a private visit.

When asked by Netanyahu's team if the prime minister could join Trump at the Western Wall, the Trump official reportedly

said, "No way, why is this your business?"

A senior Trump administration official later told the Times of Israel, "The comments about the Western Wall were not authorized communication and they do not represent the position of the United States and certainly not of the president."

Itay Hod of The Wrap, an entertainment news website, tweeted that White House Press Secretary Sean Spicer "tells me over email, 'That is not the position of this Administration.'"

The Western Wall (also known as the Kotel), regarded as one of the holiest sites in Judaism, is the outer retaining wall of the Second Temple destroyed by the Romans in the 1st century A.D. Israel gained control over the Western Wall during the 1967 Six-Day War as it captured the eastern half of Jerusalem from Jordan. Despite the Kotel's significance to Judaism and Israel's control over a united Jerusalem, the international community—including the U.S.—does not officially recognize the Western Wall as part of Israel.

Leaders of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations said they welcome the "prompt statement by the Trump administration" disavowing the reported comments, while noting that the incident "underscores the terrible damage caused by serial U.N. resolutions, including U.N. Security Council Resolution 2334, denying the more than 3,000 years of the Jewish connection to Israel and the holiest sites in the Jewish religion, which the Trump administration has said it will work to reverse."

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