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Remarks Prior to a Meeting With Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel

November 9, 2015

President Obama. Well, it is very good to welcome once again Prime Minister Bibi Netanyahu to the Oval Office. There's no foreign leader who I've met with more frequently, and I think that's a testimony to the extraordinary bond between the United States and Israel.

Shootings at the King Abdullah II Special Operations Training Center in Amman, Jordan

Before I get started, I just want to say a brief word about the Jordanian attack that we discovered earlier, the fact that someone who dressed in military uniform carried out an attack at a training facility in which it appears that there may have been two or three U.S. citizens killed and a number of other individuals injured. Obviously, a full investigation is taking place. We take this very seriously, and we'll be working closely with the Jordanians to determine exactly what happened. But at this stage, I want to just let everyone know that this is something we're paying close attention to. And at the point where the families have been notified, obviously, our deepest condolences will be going out to them.

Death of Former President Yitzhak Navon of Israel

I also want to extend my condolences to the Israeli people on the passing of former President Navon. Obviously, he was an important figure in Israeli politics. And we extend heartfelt condolences to his family.

Israel-U.S. Relations

This is going to be an opportunity for the Prime Minister and myself to engage in a wide-ranging discussion on some of the most pressing security issues that both our countries face. It's no secret that the security environment in the Middle East has deteriorated in many areas. And as I've said repeatedly, the security of Israel is one of my top foreign policy priorities. And that has expressed itself not only in words, but in deeds.

We have closer military and intelligence cooperation than any two administrations in history. The military assistance that we provide we consider not only an important part of our obligation to the security of the State of Israel, but also an important part of U.S. security infrastructure in the region, as we make sure that one of our closest allies cannot only protect itself, but can also work with us in deterring terrorism and other security threats.

In light of what continues to be a chaotic situation in Syria, this will give us an opportunity to discuss what's happening there. We'll have an opportunity to discuss how we can blunt the activities of ISIL, Hizballah, other organizations in the region that carry out terrorist attacks. A lot of our time will be spent on a memorandum of understanding that we can potentially negotiate. It will be expiring in a couple of years, but we want to get a head start on that to make sure that both the United States and Israel can plan effectively for our defense needs going forward.

We'll also have a chance to talk about how implementation of the Iran nuclear agreement is going. It's no secret that the Prime Minister and I have had a strong disagreement on this

narrow issue, but we don't have a disagreement on the need to making sure that Iran does not get a nuclear weapon, and we don't have a disagreement about the importance of us blunting destabilizing activities that Iran may be taking place. And so we're going to be looking to make sure that we find common ground there.

And we will also have an opportunity to discuss some of the concerns that both of us have around violence in the Palestinian Territories. I want to be very clear that we condemn in the strongest terms Palestinian violence against innocent Israeli citizens. And I want to repeat once again, it is my strong belief that Israel has not just the right, but the obligation to protect itself.

I also will discuss with the Prime Minister his thoughts on how we can lower the temperature in—between Israelis and Palestinians, how we can get back on a path towards peace, and how we can make sure that legitimate Palestinian aspirations are met through a political process, even as we make sure that Israel is able to secure itself.

And so this is going to be a lot of work to do, with too little time, which is why I will stop here and just once again say, welcome.

Prime Minister Netanyahu. Thank you.

President Obama. Thank you.

Prime Minister Netanyahu. Thank you.

President Obama. Thank you.

Prime Minister Netanyahu. Mr. President, first let me express the condolences of the people of Israel for the loss of American lives. We're with you. We're with each other in more ways than one. And I want to thank you for this opportunity to strengthen our friendship, which is strong; strengthen our alliance, which is strong. I think it's rooted in shared values. It's buttressed by shared interests. It's driven forward by a sense of a shared destiny.

We are obviously tested today in the instability and insecurity in the Middle East, as you described it. I think everybody can see it: with the savagery of ISIS, with the aggression and terror by Iran's proxies and by Iran itself. And the combination of turbulence has now displaced millions of people, has butchered hundreds of thousands. And we don't know what will transpire.

And I think this is a tremendously important opportunity for us to work together to see how we can defend ourselves against this aggression and this terror; how we can roll it back. It's a daunting task.

Equally, I want to make it clear that we have not given up our hope for peace. We'll never give up our hope for peace. And I remain committed to a vision of peace of two states for two peoples, a demilitarized Palestinian state that recognizes the Jewish State.

I don't think that anyone should doubt Israel's determination to defend itself against terror and destruction, but neither should anyone doubt Israel's willingness to make peace with any of its neighbors that genuinely want to achieve peace with her. And I look forward to discussing with you practical ways in which we can lower the tension, increase stability, and move towards peace.

And finally, Mr. President, I want to thank you for your commitment to further bolstering Israel's security in the memorandum of understanding that we're discussing. Israel has shouldered a tremendous defense burden over the years, and we've done it with the generous

assistance of the United States of America. And I want to express my appreciation to you and express the appreciation of the people of Israel to you for your efforts in this regard during our years of common service and what you are engaging in right now: how to bolster Israel's security, how to maintain Israel's qualitative military edge so that Israel can, as you've often said, defend itself, by itself, against any threat.

So for all of these reasons, I want to thank you again for your hospitality, but even more so for sustaining and strengthening the tremendous friendship and alliance between Israel and the United States of America.

President Obama. Good.

Prime Minister Netanyahu. Thank you very much, Mr. President.

President Obama. You're welcome. Good. Thank you very much, everybody.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:34 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Anwar Abu Zaid, suspected gunman in the shootings at the King Abdullah II Special Operations Training Center in Amman, Jordan; and James "Damon" Creach and Lloyd "Carl" Fields, Department of State contractors who were killed in the shootings in Amman. He also referred to the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) terrorist organization, also known as ISIS.

Categories: Meetings With Foreign Leaders and International Officials : Israel, Prime Minister Netanyahu.

Locations: Washington, DC.

Names: Creach, James "Damon"; Fields, Lloyd "Carl"; Navon, Yitzhak; Netanyahu, Benjamin; Zaid, Anwar Abu.

Subjects: Deaths : Navon, Yitzhak, former President of Israel; Iran : Nuclear program, Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action; Iraq : Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) terrorist organization; Israel : Former President, death; Israel : Political unrest and violence in Jerusalem; Israel : Prime Minister; Israel : Relations with Palestinian Authority and Palestinians; Israel : Relations with U.S.; Israel : Security cooperation with U.S.; Jordan : Security cooperation with U.S.; Jordan : Shootings at King Abdullah II Special Operations Training Center in Amman; Lebanon : Hizballah political-paramilitary organization; Middle East : Arab-Israeli conflict, peace process; Palestinian Authority and Palestinians: Relations with Israel; Syria : Civil war and sectarian conflict; Syria : Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) terrorist organization; Terrorism : Counterterrorism efforts.

DCPD Number: DCPD201500790.