

Remarks on Being Awarded the Presidential Medal of Honor by President Isaac Herzog of Israel in Jerusalem, Israel

July 14, 2022

President Biden. Well, President Herzog, it's wonderful to be with you again and an honor to be with so many familiar faces out in this garden.

You know, if anyone should understand my inclination to enthusiasm, you should be. With a—with a grandfather who thought Sinn Féin was the future of Ireland, you should understand that. [Laughter]

You all think I'm kidding; I'm not.

President Herzog. It's a great day for the Irish. [Laughter]

President Biden. I've known many of you for a long time. And all of you, you know that my love for Israel is deep rooted. I was raised, as we say and you say, by a righteous Christian—my dad.

And I've had the honor—it's hard to say these words—for over 50 years—it can't be that long—but for over 50 years in the Federal Government to helping build the relationship. Fifty years ago, we never had this audience before. We would not have this audience out here. We have so many people represented, representing so many different nations and faiths as well. And it's important.

But you know, seeing Israel thrive, seeing the wildest dreams of Israel's founding fathers and mothers grow into a reality that Israel children enjoy today, to me is close to miraculous. You're always—there's a—we use, in the Catholic Church, a hymn that's based on one of the Psalms. And it says: "May He raise you up on eagle's wings and bear you on the breath of dawn. Until we meet again, may God hold you in the palm of his hand."

Well, every time I've come over these years, thank God, God seems to be holding us in the palm of his hand, because we get stronger, not weaker. And to me, it's pretty miraculous.

The Torah tells a story of the prophet who described the ancient Israeli—Israelis as the people that "dwell alone"—in the Torah portion that will be read in services across the United States this week. You know, I know, President Herzog, that your uncle also wrote a book with that title.

President Herzog. Mm-hmm.

President Biden. But as I look out on these proud, strong Israelis in the audience, at the nation that made the desert bloom and built the Iron Dome, I see people who are growing more secure, more integrated, more confident, and more—have greater relations with their neighbors; a nation that has forged peace before and can do it again; and a nation that will never dwell alone. Because as long as we're the United States, you will never, ever be alone.

And as you know, there's still so much more work to be done. That's why America's commitment to Israel's security remains ironclad. Today and in the future, that commitment is not about me or any other American President. It springs from the deep affinity and enduring connection between our peoples. And it is our responsibility as leaders to nurture that bond, to ensure that it grows stronger, deeper, and broader as we navigate the challenges ahead—and they will continue to be profound, and they will change.

And as a leader, I can say without hesitation that being known as a friend of Israel and receiving this award today is among the greatest honors of my career. And I mean that from the bottom of my heart. In fact—[applause].

And thank you, Mr. President. Since I know that you and I share a connection, as I said, to Ireland, I hope you forgive me for ending by quoting an Irish poet, Seamus Heaney. And he wrote—in "The Cure at Troy," he said: "History says, don't hope on this side of the grave. But then, once in a lifetime, that longed-for tidal wave of justice rises up, and hope and history rhyme." I truly believe that we're at one of those moments, if we get lucky and work hard, where we can make "hope and history rhyme."

Israel and the United States are both places built on hope, grit, and determination. And I believe, together, we will stay always true to our founding values and that we can help make hope and history rhyme once more. But this time—this time—in one of the most dysfunctional, in the past, regions of the world where you, again, will be fully integrated and will be one of the leaders.

So, Mr. President, it's an incredible honor. And, as some of you heard me say, if my mother were here, she'd say, "Joey, hush up, and let the man get on with his job." [Laughter]

So thank you, thank you, thank you.

President Herzog. Thank you, Mr. President. So, Mr. President—

[At this point, the moderator spoke in Hebrew and no translation was provided. He then spoke in English as follows.]

Moderator. President of the State of Israel, Isaac Herzog, will bestow the Presidential Medal of Honor upon the President of the United States of America, Joe Biden.

President Herzog. So, the Honorable President Joseph R. Biden, Jr., in recognition of the strong support for Israel you have consistently demonstrated, and the depth of the friendship our nations share, I wish to present you with the highest honor bestowed by an Israeli President, the Presidential Medal of Honor. This tradition was instituted by the late President and your good friend, Shimon Peres.

The accompanying certificate reads, and I begin with quoting the Bible:

[President Herzog recited the verse in Hebrew. He then recited it in English as follows.]

"With Him are wisdom and strength. He has counsel and understanding."

The Presidential Medal of Honor is hereby awarded to the Honorable President Joseph R. Biden, Jr., of the United States of America for his true friendship with the State of Israel, the people of Israel, and the Jewish people; his uncompromising, decades-long commitment to Israel's security; his contributions to deepening, strengthening, and enhancing the strong and unwavering alliance between Israel and the United States of America; and his struggle against anti-Israeli and anti-Semitic hatred around the world."

[President Herzog presented the medal to President Biden.]

President Biden. What a great honor. Thank you very, very much.

President Herzog. A pleasure.

President Biden. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 6:08 p.m. in the garden of Beit HaNassi, the official residence of the President of Israel.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Presidential Medal of Honor, awarding by President Isaac Herzog of Israel in Jerusalem, Israel; Meetings With Foreign Leaders and International Officials : Israel :: President Herzog.

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