

Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2023

Remarks Prior to a Meeting With Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel in New York City
September 20, 2023

President Biden. Well, my friend, welcome.

Prime Minister Netanyahu. Thank you.

President Biden. Welcome, welcome, welcome. And I hope we'll see each other in Washington by the end of the year here.

One of the things that always stuck in my mind—and we've had a lot of discussions over the years, you and I. How long has it been?

Prime Minister Netanyahu. Who can count?

President Biden. I can't. I tell you what, I gave up counting, because he worked for the Embassy and I was a freshman Senator. And we were both very important then. *[Laughter]*

At any rate, 75 years ago, the first Israeli Prime Minister, David Ben-Gurion, after declaring independence, used a phrase that I've quoted all—very often. He said that the world stands—if the world stands with Israel, the dream of generations will be fulfilled—the dream of generations. And together, Israel and the United States have been working together to make that dream a reality for a long time.

You've heard me say many times: Were there no Israel, we'd have to invent one. And I mean it.

It includes building a more stable and prosperous Middle East—that, over time, is beginning to occur—and through historic initiatives that have begun in the previous administrations. Including, most recently, the India-Middle East-European Economic Corridor—which, I think, has enormous promise after the G-20 meeting in India—which is going to connect India and Europe through Saudi Arabia, the U.A.E., and Israel. I think it's a big deal.

And we're working on a lot more together. Today we're going to discuss some of the hard issues, and that is: upholding democratic values that lie at the heart of our partnership, including the checks and balances in our systems; and preserving the path to a negotiated two-state solution; and ensuring that Iran never—never—acquires a nuclear weapon.

Because even where we have some differences, my commitment to Israel, as you know, is ironclad. I think without Israel, there's not a Jew in the world that's secure. I think Israel is essential.

And I look forward to discussing all of this with you and working together with your team to fulfill those—as Ben-Gurion said, the dream of generations.

I think we have a chance to—you know, I suffer from an oxymoron: Irish optimism. *[Laughter]* And I think that—you look at the—if you and I, 10 years ago, were talking about normalization with Saudi Arabia, and I think we'd look at each other like, "Who's been drinking what?" *[Laughter]* But we're——

Prime Minister Netanyahu. Good Irish whiskey. *[Laughter]*

President Biden. Good Irish whiskey. That's the reason why I've never had a drink. *[Laughter]*

At any rate, so, welcome, Bibi. And I hope we can get some things settled today.

Prime Minister Netanyahu. Thank you, Mr. President.

Joe, we've been friends for—I've checked it—over 40 years, and our friendship goes a long way and can take us a long way. I'm delighted to see you.

I think we live at a time of great promise, but also grave danger. You just spoke about that great promise.

In the G-20 meeting that you participated and led, you spoke about an economic corridor that would link Asia, the Middle East, and Europe together. And such a corridor will make Israel a very important hub on a highway of unprecedented prosperity, but I think and you think that it can do something much bigger than that.

I think that under your leadership, Mr. President, we can forge a historic peace between Israel and Saudi Arabia. And I think such a peace would go a long way, first, to advance the end of the Arab-Israeli conflict, achieve reconciliation between the Islamic world and the Jewish state, and advance a genuine peace between Israel and the Palestinians. This is something within our reach.

I believe that, working together, we can make history and create a better future for the region and beyond. And also, by working together, we can confront those forces that threaten that future, none more so than Iran.

I appreciate, Mr. President, your continuous commitment to prevent Iran from achieving nuclear weapons capability. I think that's critical. And that shared goal of ours can be best achieved by a credible military threat, crippling sanctions, and supporting the brave men and women of Iran who despise that regime and who are our real partners for a better future.

So I look forward to working with you and your team to realize the promise and confront the threat. As I said, we live in a—and you said—we live in uncertain times, rapidly changing times.

So I want to reassert here before you, Mr. President, that one thing is certain and one thing will never change, and that is Israel's commitment to democracy. We will continue to uphold the values that both our proud democracies cherish. And I think that, working together, we'll realize the promise, roll back the dangers, and bring a better future for our region and the world.

We can make history. Mr. President, with your leadership, we can make history.

President Biden. Together.

Prime Minister Netanyahu. Together.

President Biden. Together. Okay.

Q. What are the prospects for a normalization—[*inaudible*]?

Q. Mr. President, what do the Palestinians need to—[*inaudible*]?

Q. Are you worried about democracy in Israel, Mr. President?

President Biden. I'm surprised they haven't asked me about the auto strike. They usually ask about things that have nothing to do with what we're talking about, so I was surprised they're not asking about the auto——

[*At this point, the press was escorted out of the meeting room.*]

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:51 a.m. at the InterContinental New York Barclay hotel.

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

Locations: New York City.

Names: Netanyahu, Benjamin.

Subjects: Arab-Israeli conflict, peace process; Group of Twenty (G–20) nations; India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor; Iran, nuclear weapons development; Israel, Prime Minister; Israel, relations with U.S.; New York, President's visit.

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