

Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2023

Remarks at a Community Engagement With Israeli Citizens Impacted by or Involved in the Response to the Hamas Attacks Against Israel and an Exchange With Reporters in Tel Aviv, Israel

October 18, 2023

The President. Folks, there is an Irish poet named William Butler Yeats, and he wrote a line—he said: Too long a suffering makes a stone of the heart. Too long a suffering makes a stone of the heart.

The thing that I found at just this real quick meeting with all of you is none of your hearts have turned to stone yet. Every one of you talked about what you have to do—every one I talked to—about having to reach out, talked about, whether or not they were a Jew or a Muslim, reach out.

And you know, I've often said how I remember the first time that I was in Israel with Golda Meir. She was—just before the Six-Day War. And she was telling me how terrible everything was, which it was.

She kept flipping the maps up and down behind her. And all of the sudden, she looked at me, and she said, "Would you like a photograph?" And I thought, "That's unusual." And when—she just got up and walked out that door outside her office.

And we're standing there having a photograph taken like you and I are standing, looking at the press. And she—without looking at me, she turned, and she—like this, and she said, "You look worried, Senator." I said, "I am." She said: "Don't worry, we Jews have a secret weapon in our fight. We have no place else to go."

Well, the truth of the matter is, if there weren't an Israel, we'd have to invent one. The truth of the matter is that I believe that you—as I went home and said—I got in trouble at the time, but it was true: You don't have to be a Jew to be a Zionist. You don't have to be a Jew to be a Zionist.

And I think the security and safety of Jews worldwide is anchored in the continued vibrance of the State of Israel. That's what I think it's about at its core.

And so I've admired you all—this country—for so long. And I'm convinced that the more people know the—your responses to what's happening as opposed to just what war and peace is about, the more they're going to be inclined to embrace Israel.

And—but I have a lot more to say. But I'd like to talk to you in private, if I can.

Explosion at the Al Ahli Arab Hospital in Gaza, Palestinian Territories

Q. What evidence have you seen—[inaudible]?

The President. The data I was shown. The data I was shown by my Defense Department.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:57 p.m. at the David Kempinski Tel Aviv hotel.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Israelis impacted by or involved in response to Hamas attacks against Israel, community engagement in Tel Aviv, Israel; Interviews With the News Media : Exchanges with reporters, Tel Aviv, Israel.

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