

Remarks on the Hamas Attacks Against Israel in Tel Aviv, Israel
October 18, 2023

Good afternoon. Please have a seat.

I come to Israel with a single message: You are not alone. You are not alone. As long as the United States stands—and we will stand forever—we'll not let you ever be alone.

Most importantly, the—I know the recent terrorist assault on the people of this nation has left a deep, deep wound. More than 1,300 innocent Israelis killed, including at least 31 American citizens, by the terrorist group Hamas. Hundreds—hundreds—of young people at a music festival of—the festival was for peace—for peace—gunned down as they ran for their lives. Scores of innocents—from infants to elderly grandparents, Israelis and Americans—taken hostage.

Children slaughtered. Babies slaughtered. Entire families massacred. Rape, beheadings, bodies burned alive. Hamas committed atrocities that recall the worst ravages of ISIS, unleashing pure unadulterated evil on—upon the world. There is no rationalizing it, no excusing it. Period.

The brutality we saw would have cut deep anywhere in the world, but it cuts deeper here in Israel. October 7, which was sacred to—a sacred Jewish holiday, became the deadliest day for the Jewish people since the Holocaust. It has brought to the surface painful memories and scars left by millennia of anti-Semitism and the genocide of the Jewish people.

The world watched then, it knew, and the world did nothing. We will not stand by and do nothing again. Not today, not tomorrow, not ever.

To those who are living in limbo waiting desperately to learn the fate of a loved one, especially to families of the hostages: You're not alone. We're working with partners throughout the region, pursuing every avenue to bring home those who are being held captive by Hamas. I can't speak publicly about all the details, but let me assure you: For me, as the American President, there is no higher priority than the release and safe return of all these hostages.

To those who are grieving a child, a parent, a spouse, a sibling, a friend, I know you feel like there's that black hole in the middle of your chest. You feel like you're being sucked into it.

The survivor's remorse, the anger, the questions of faith in your soul. Starting at—staring at that empty chair, sitting Shiva. The first Sabbath without them. They are the everyday things, the small things that you miss the most: the scent when you open the closet door; the morning coffee you shared together; the bend of his smile, the perfect pitch of her laugh, the giggle of your little boy—the baby.

For those who have lost loved ones, this is what I know: They'll never be truly gone. There's something that's never fully lost: your love for them and their love for you.

And I promise you, you'll be walking along some days and say, "What would she or he want me to do?" You'll smile when you pass a place that reminds you of them. That's when you know—when a smile comes to your lips before a tear to your eye—that's when you know you're going to fully make it.

That's what will give you the fortitude to find light in the darkest hours when terrorists believed they could bring down—bring you down, bend your will, break your resolve. But they never did, and they never will.

Instead, we saw incredible stories of heroism and courage, of Israelis taking care of one another. Neighbors forming watch groups to protect their kibbutz, opening their homes to shelter survivors. Retired soldiers running into danger once again. Civilian medics flying across rescue—flying rescue missions. And off-duty medics at the music festival caring for the wounded before coming victim—before becoming a victim themselves. Volunteers retrieving bodies of the dead so families could bury their loved ones in accordance with Jewish tradition. Reservists leaving behind their families, their honeymoons, their studies abroad without hesitation. And so much more.

The State of Israel was born to be a safe place for the Jewish people of the world. That's why it was born. I have long said: If Israel didn't exist, we'd have to invent it.

And while it may not feel that way today, Israel must again be a safe place for the Jewish people. And I promise you: We're going to do everything in our power to make sure that it will be.

Seventy-five years ago, just 11 minutes after its founding, President Harry S. Truman and the United States of America became the first nation to recognize Israel. We have stood by your side ever since, and we're going to stand by your side now.

My administration was in close touch with your leadership from the first moments of this attack, and we are going to make sure we have—you have what you need to protect your people, to defend your nation.

For decades, we've ensured Israel's qualitative military edge. And later this week, I'm going to ask the United States Congress for an unprecedented support package for Israel's defense. We're going to keep Iron Dome fully supplied so it can continue standing sentinel over Israeli skies, saving Israeli lives.

We've moved U.S. military assets to the region, including positioning the USS *Ford* carrier strike group in the Eastern Mediterranean, with the USS *Eisenhower* on the way, to deter—to defer further aggression against Israel and to prevent this conflict from spreading.

The world will know that Israel is stronger than ever. And my message to any state or any other hostile actor thinking about attacking Israel remains the same as it was a week ago: Don't. Don't. Don't.

Since this terrorist attack took place, we have seen it described as Israel's 9/11. But for a nation the size of Israel, it was like fifteen 9/11's. The scale may be different, but I'm sure those horrors have tapped into so—some kind of primal feeling in Israel, just like it did and felt in the United States: Shock, pain, rage—an all-consuming rage. I understand, and many Americans understand.

You can't look at what has happened here to your mothers, your fathers, your grandparents, sons, daughters, children—even babies—and not scream out for justice. Justice must be done.

But I caution this: While you feel that rage, don't be consumed by it. After 9/11, we were enraged in the United States. And while we sought justice and got justice, we also made mistakes.

I'm the first U.S. President to visit Israel in time of war. I've made wartime decisions. I know the choices are never clear or easy for the leadership. There's always cost.

But it requires being deliberate. It requires asking very hard questions. It requires clarity about the objectives and an honest assessment about whether the path you are on will achieve those objectives.

The vast majority of Palestinians are not Hamas. Hamas does not represent the Palestinian people. Hamas uses innocents—innocent families—in Gaza as human shields, putting their command centers, their weapons, their communications tunnels in residential areas.

The Palestinian people are suffering greatly as well. We mourn the loss of innocent Palestinian lives. Like the entire world, I was outraged and saddened by the enormous loss of life yesterday in the hospital in Gaza. Based on the information we've seen to date, it appears the result of an errant rocket fired by a terrorist group in Gaza.

The United States unequivocally stands for the protection of civilian life during conflict, and I grieve—I truly grieve—for the families who were killed or wounded by this tragedy.

The people of Gaza need food, water, medicine, shelter. Today I asked the Israeli cabinet—who I met with for some time this morning—to agree to the delivery of lifesaving humanitarian assistance to civilians in Gaza. Based on the understanding that there will be inspections and that the aid should go to civilians, not to Hamas, Israel agreed that humanitarian assistance can begin to move from Egypt to Gaza.

But let me be clear: If Hamas diverts or steals the assistance, they will have demonstrated once again that they have no concern for the welfare of the Palestinian people, and it will end. As a practical matter, it will stop the international community from being able to provide this aid.

We're working in close cooperation with the Government of Egypt; the United Nations and its agencies, like the World Food Programme; and other partners in the region to get trucks moving across the border as soon as possible.

Separately, I ask Israel that the global community demand that the International Red Cross be able to visit hostages. I just demanded that the United States fully—a just demand that the United States fully supports.

Today I'm also announcing \$100 million in new U.S. funding for humanitarian assistance in both Gaza and the West Bank. This money will support more than 1 million displaced and conflict-affected Palestinians, including emergency needs in Gaza.

You are a Jewish state. You are a Jewish state, but you're also a democracy. And like the United States, you don't live by the rules of terrorists. You live by the rule of law. And when conflicts flare, you live by the law of wars.

What sets us apart from the terrorists is, we believe in the fundamental dignity of every human life—Israeli, Palestinian, Arab, Jew, Muslim, Christian—everyone. You can't give up what makes you who you are. If you give that up, then the terrorists win. And we can never let them win.

You know, Israel is a miracle, a triumph of faith and resolve and resilience over impossible pain and loss. Think about October 7, the Jewish holiday where you read about the death of Moses, a tragic story of a profound loss to an entire nation; a death that could have left help—a helpless—hopelessness in the hearts of the entire—of an entire nation.

But though Moses died, his memory, his message, his lessons have lived on for generations of the Jewish people as well as many others—and just as the memory of your loved ones will live on as well.

After reading the story of Moses' death, those who observe the holiday begin reading the Torah from the very beginning. The story of creation reminds us of two things. First, that when we get knocked down, we get back up again and we begin anew. And second, when we are faced with tragedy and loss, we must go back to the beginning and remember who we are.

We are all human beings created in the image of God with dignity, humanity, and purpose. In the darkness, to be the light unto the world is what we're about. You inspire hope and light for so many around the world. That's what the terrorists seek to destroy. That's what they seek to destroy, but—because they live in darkness—but not you, not Israel.

Nations of conscience like the United States and Israel are not measured solely by the example of their power. We're measured by the power of our example. That's why, as hard as it is, we must keep pursuing peace. We must keep pursuing a path so that Israel and the Palestinian people can both live safely, in security, in dignity, and in peace.

For me, that means a two-state solution. We must keep working for Israel's greater integration with its neighbors. These attacks have only strengthened my commitment and determination and my will to get that done.

I'm here to tell you that terrorists will not win. Freedom will win.

So let me end where I began. Israel, you are not alone. The United States stands with you.

I've told the story before—and I'll tell it again—of my first meeting with an Israeli Prime Minister 50 years ago as a young Senator. I was sitting across from Golda Meir at her desk in her office. And she had a guy named—a guy who later became Prime Minister sitting next to me, just before the 1973 Yom Kippur War.

And she flipped the maps up and down, telling me how bad things were and how terrible they were. All of a sudden, she looked at me, and she said, "Would you like a photograph?" And I looked at her—she got up from her desk and walked out into that hallway—I think it's marble flooring—walked out in the hallway.

We walked out, and there were a bunch of photographers standing in front of us. We were standing shoulder to shoulder. Without her looking at me, she said to me, knowing I'd hear her, "Why do you look so worried, Senator Biden?" And I said, "Worried?" Like, "Of course, I'm worried." And she looked at me and—she didn't look, she said: "We—don't worry, Senator, we Israelis have a secret weapon: We have nowhere else to go."

Well, today I say to all of Israel: The United States isn't going anywhere either. We're going to stand with you. We'll walk beside you in those dark days, and we'll walk beside you in the good days to come. And they will come.

As you say in Hebrew, which I'm not going to attempt to do because I'm such a terrible linguist, I'll say it in English, "The people of Israel live." "The people of Israel live." Israel will be a safe, secure, Jewish, and Democratic state today, tomorrow, and forever.

May God protect all those who work for peace. God save those who are still in harm's way.

Thank you very much.

Q. Mr. President, what is your red line that would prompt U.S. military involvement in this war?

Q. Mr. President, your team said you had tough questions——

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:06 p.m. at the David Kempinski Tel Aviv hotel. In his remarks, he referred to the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) terrorist organization.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Hamas attacks against Israel in Tel Aviv, Israel.

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Subjects: Anti-Semitism; Gaza, conflict with Israel; Gaza, explosion at Al Ahli Arab hospital; Gaza, humanitarian situation; Gaza, U.S. assistance; Hamas political-paramilitary organization; International Red Cross; Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) terrorist organization; Israel, attacks by Hamas; Israel, President Biden's visit; Israel, relations with U.S.; Israel, security cooperation with U.S.; Israel, U.S. assistance; September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks; World Food Programme.

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