

Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2023

Remarks on the Release of Hostages Held by Hamas in Gaza, Palestinian Territories, and an Exchange With Reporters in Nantucket, Massachusetts
November 24, 2023

The President. Hey, folks. We all set?

White House aide. Yes, sir.

The President. All right. Yesterday families all across America gathered together with their loved ones and to give thanks. We have much to be thankful for in America: the food on our tables, the family and loved ones in our homes, and the many blessings that come from living in the greatest nation on Earth.

And today we can also be thankful of families being recruited and reunited with loved ones who have been held hostage for nearly 50 days.

Beginning this morning, under a deal reached by extensive U.S. diplomacy, including numerous calls I've made from the Oval Office to leaders across the region, fighting in Gaza will halt for 4 days.

This deal also is structured to allow a pause to continue for more than 50 hostages to be released. That's our goal. This morning I've been engaged with my team as we began the first difficult days of implementing this deal.

It is only a start, but so far, it's gone well. Earlier this morning 13 Israeli hostages were released, including an elderly woman—a grandmother—and mothers with their young children, some under the age of 6 years old.

Separately, several Thai nationals and Filipino nationals who were also kidnapped by Hamas on the 7th, they were released as well.

All of these hostages have been through a terrible ordeal, and this is the beginning of a long journey of healing for them.

The teddy bears waiting to greet those children at the hospital are a stark reminder of the trauma these children have been through and at such a very young age. Jill and I—and Jill is with me here—are keeping them all in our prayers today.

Today—today—has been the product of a lot of hard work and weeks of personal engagement. From the moment Hamas kidnapped these people, I, along with my team, have worked around the clock to secure their release.

We saw the first results of this effort with the release of two American hostages in late October followed by the release of two Israeli hostages.

I have consistently pressed for a pause in the fighting for two reasons: to accelerate and expand the humanitarian assistance going into Gaza and, two, to facilitate the release of hostages.

And, over the past several weeks, I've spoken repeatedly with the Amir of Qatar, the President Elsisi of Egypt, and Prime Minister Netanyahu of Israel to help secure this deal, to nail it down. And I want to thank all three leaders for their personal partnership to get this done.

I spoke with the Amir and President Elsisi and the Prime Minister Netanyahu again on Wednesday to confirm the elements of the engagement.

As I said, today's release are the start of a process. We expect more hostages to be released tomorrow and more the day after and more the day after that. Over the next few days, we expect that dozens of hostages will be returned to their families.

We also remember all those who are still being held and renew our commitment to work for their release as well. Two American women and one 4-year-old child, Abigail, who remains among those missing. We also will not stop until we get these hostages brought home and an answer to their whereabouts.

I remain in personal contact with the leaders of Qatar, Egypt, and Israel to make sure this stays on track and every aspect of the deal is implemented.

You know, this extended pause in the fighting brings a critical opportunity to deliver much-needed food, medicine, water, and fuel to the civilians in Gaza, and we are not wasting one single minute. Since my trip to Israel last month, I've been focused on accelerating the delivery of humanitarian assistance to Gaza in coordination with the United Nations and the Red Cross.

I just spoke with my Special Envoy for the Middle East Humanitarian Issues, David Satterfield, for an update, and I've asked him to monitor our progress hour by hour and keep me personally informed. From the beginning, we've put in place mechanisms to prevent Hamas from diverting these supplies, and we're continuing that effort to make sure aid gets to the people who need it.

More than 200 trucks arrived at the crossing point in Egypt into Gaza today. These trucks carry food and medicine, as well as fuel and cooking gas. The fuel will be used not only to power the trucks delivering these lifesaving supplies, but the—for desalinization, for water wells, for hospitals, and for bakeries.

And hundreds more trucks are getting in position as well, ready to enter Gaza over the coming days to support the innocent Palestinians who are suffering greatly because of this war that Hamas has unleashed. Hamas doesn't give a damn about them.

We also look to the future. As we look to the future, we have to end this cycle of violence in the Middle East. We need to renew our resolve to pursue this two-state solution where Israelis and Palestinians can one day live side by side in a two-state solution with equal measure of freedom and dignity.

Two states for two peoples. And it's more important now than ever. Hamas unleashed this terrorist attack because they fear nothing more than Israelis and Palestinians living side by side in peace. You know, to continue down the path of terror and violence and killing and war is to give Hamas what they seek. And we can't do that.

So today let's continue to be thankful for all the families who are now and those who will soon be brought together again.

And I want to one—once again thank the Amir of Qatar, President Sisi of Egypt, and Prime Minister Netanyahu for their partnership to make what we've done so far possible and for their continued leadership as we all keep working to implement this deal.

And, over the coming days, I'll remain engaged with leaders throughout the Middle East as we all work together to build a better future for the region: a future where this kind of violence is unthinkable; a future where all children in the region—every child—Jewish, Muslim, Christian, Israeli, Palestinian, Arab—grow up knowing only peace. That's what we do.

We're waiting now—it will be just a matter of—I thought maybe even as soon as by the time I got here. But in the next hour or so, we'll know what the second wave of releases are. And I'm hopeful that it's as we anticipate.

So thank you all for listening. I'll take a few questions.

U.S. Citizens Among the Hostages Held by Hamas in Gaza

Q. Mr. President, when will the first American hostages be released, since none were included today?

The President. We don't know when that will occur, but we're going to be—expect it to occur. And we don't know what the list of all the hostages are and when they'll be released, but we know the numbers that are going to be released. So it is my hope and expectation, it will be soon.

Q. And of the 10 Americans that are unaccounted for, do you know all of their conditions? Are they all alive?

The President. We don't know all their conditions.

Gaza Conflict/Israeli Military Operations

Q. Mr. President, how long do you expect this war is going to take? And have you encouraged Prime Minister Netanyahu to set a timeline, say, by the end of this year?

The President. I've encouraged the Prime Minister to focus on trying to reduce the number of casualties while he is attempting to eliminate Hamas, which is a legitimate objective he has. That's a difficult task, and I don't know how long it will take.

My expectation and hope is that, as we move forward, the rest of the Arab world and the region is also putting pressure on all sides to slow this down, to bring this to an end as quickly as we can.

Q. Mr. President, do you trust Hamas to uphold their end of the deal?

Humanitarian Pause in the Gaza Conflict

Q. Mr. President, what are the chances of this truce could be extended by a few days or more?

The President. I think the chances are real.

U.S. Assistance to Israel

Q. Mr. President, there are members of your party who would like to see conditions placed on aid to Israel. What is your view on that? They would like to see, you know, a reduction in the bombing and that sort of thing.

The President. Well, I think that's a worthwhile thought, but I don't think if I started off with that we'd ever gotten to where we are today.

Q. Mr. President——

The President. We have to take this a piece at a time.

Hamas

Q. Mr. President, do you trust Hamas to uphold their end of the deal?

The President. I don't trust Hamas to do anything right. I only trust Hamas to respond to pressure.

Arab-Israel Conflict/Peace Process/Hamas Attacks Against Israel

Q. Mr. President, you said you were hoping to get cooperation from Arab leaders. What are you hearing from them when you talk to them? What would you like to see them do?

The President. I'm hearing a lot, but I'm not going to speak to it right now. There's an overwhelming desire on the part of the region to—let me back up. I'm—I cannot prove what I'm about to say, but I believe one of the reasons why Hamas struck when they did was they knew that I was working very closely with the Saudis and others in the region to bring peace to the region by having recognition of Israel and Israel's right to exist.

You may recall when we did the G-20 about—a little while ago, I was able to get a resolution—I—a statement passed through there saying we were going to build a railroad from Riyadh all the way through the Middle East into Saudi Arabia, Israel, et cetera, and all the way up to Europe. Not the railroad, but it would be an underground pipeline and then railroad.

The whole idea is, there's overwhelming interest—and I think most Arab nations know it—in coordinating with one another to change the dynamic in their region for a longer term peace. And that is what I'm going to continue to work on.

Thank you all very, very much. I appreciate it.

Q. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President. Thank you.

Q. Happy Thanksgiving.

The President. Happy Thanksgiving to you all. *[Laughter]* I hope you enjoyed it.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:16 p.m. at the White Elephant Nantucket hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Evanston, IL, residents Judith Raanan and her daughter Natalie Raanan, U.S. citizens who were released on October 20 after being taken hostage by Hamas during the October 7 assault against Israel; Israeli citizens Nurit Cooper and Yocheved Lifshitz, who were released on October 23; Amir Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani of Qatar; and Abigail Mor Edan, a 4-year-old Israeli-American who was abducted during the October 7 Hamas attacks.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Release of hostages held by Hamas in Gaza, Palestinian Territories, remarks in Nantucket, MA; Interviews With the News Media : Exchanges with reporters, Nantucket, MA.

Locations: Nantucket, MA.

Names: Biden, Jill T.; Cooper, Nurit; Edan, Abigail Mor; Elsis, Abdelfattah Said; Lifshitz, Yocheved; Netanyahu, Benjamin; Raanan, Judith; Raanan, Natalie; Satterfield, David M.; Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, Amir.

Subjects: Arab-Israeli conflict, peace process; Egypt, President; Gaza, conflict with Israel; Gaza, hostages held by Hamas; Gaza, humanitarian situation; Gaza, international assistance; Group of Twenty (G-20) nations; Hamas political-paramilitary organization; India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor; Israel, military operations in Gaza; Israel, Prime Minister; Israel, U.S. assistance; Qatar, Amir; Thanksgiving; U.S. diplomatic efforts, expansion; U.S. Special Envoy for Middle East Humanitarian Issues.

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