

Remarks Following a Meeting With King Abdullah II of Jordan
February 12, 2024

President Biden. Good afternoon.

Q. Good afternoon.

President Biden. Let me start by welcoming His Majesty, the King of Jordan. He's been a good friend. Abdullah, welcome back to the White House, man. Welcome back. And by the way, Barack is looking at you in the corner over there. *[Laughter]*

And along with Queen Riana *[Rania; White House correction]*, who is meeting with Jill now, and the Queen—and the Crown Prince Hussein. Where—is the Prince out here? I thought he was coming out. Any rate.

We've known each other for many years. And His Majesty has been a good friend all those years, a steadfast partner alongside the Queen, and a beloved leader to their people. The partnership between the United States and our ally Jordan is strong, and it is enduring.

Today the King and I discussed with our senior foreign policy staffs what—the issue that's front and center in the Middle East and well beyond: the war between Israel and the terrorist organization Hamas. Over 4 months ago, on October the 7th, Hamas attacked Israel in an act of sheer evil, massacring more than 1,200 innocent women, men, and children, the deadliest day for the Jewish people since the Holocaust.

More than 250 hostages were taken. A hundred and thirty-four are still being held hostage by Hamas. We don't know how many are still alive. The anguish that their families are enduring week after week, month after month is unimaginable. And it's a top priority for the United States to bring them home.

I've made clear the United States shares the goal of seeing Hamas defeated and ensuring long-term security for Israel and its people.

After October 7 attacks, Hamas retreated back into Gaza, where its leaders live in underground tunnels, stretching for over a hundred miles beneath civilian infrastructure, including—including—schools, playgrounds, and neighborhoods.

The past 4 months, as the war has raged, the Palestinian people have also suffered unimaginable pain and loss. Too many—too many—of the over 27,000 Palestinians killed in this conflict have been innocent civilians and children, including thousands of children. And hundreds of thousands have no access to food, water, or other basic services.

Many families have lost not just one, but many relatives and cannot mourn for them or even bury them because it's not safe to do so. It's heartbreaking. Every innocent life *[lost; White House correction]* in Gaza is a tragedy, just as every innocent life lost in Israel is a tragedy as well. We pray for those lives taken—both Israeli and Palestinian—and for the grieving families left behind.

Not only do we pray for peace, we are actively working for peace, security, and dignity for both the Palestinian people and the Israeli people. And I'm working on this day and night with the King and others in the region to find the means to bring all these hostages home, to ease the humanitarian crisis, and to end the terror threat and to bring peace to Gaza and Israel, an enduring peace with a two-state solution for two peoples.

As the King and I discussed today, the United States is working on a hostage deal between Israel and Hamas, which would bring immediate and sustained period of calm into Gaza for at least 6 weeks, which we could then take the time to build something more enduring.

Over the past month, I've had calls with Prime Minister Netanyahu, as well as the leaders of Egypt and Qatar, to push this forward. The key element of the deals are on the table. There are gaps that remain, but I've encouraged Israeli leaders to keep working to achieve the deal. The United States will do everything possible to make it happen.

The King and I also discussed the situation in Rafah. As I said yesterday, our military operation in Rafah—their—the major military operation in Rafah should not proceed without a credible plan—a credible plan—for ensuring the safety and support of more than 1 million people sheltering there. Many people there have been displaced—displaced multiple times—fleeing the violence to the north, and now they're packed into Rafah, exposed and vulnerable. They need to be protected.

And we have also been clear from the start: We oppose any forced displacement of Palestinians from Gaza.

Today the King and I also discussed in detail how to get more humanitarian aid into Gaza. From the very beginning, my team and I have relentlessly worked to get more aid in. I urged Congress for months to make sure that our Nation's support for Israel and—also includes urgently needed aid for Palestinians. And I've spoken repeatedly with partners across the region, including the King, to help facilitate the flow of such aid into Gaza as much as possible and that will actually get to the people that there—that are—need it.

We worked to get the Rafah crossing open. We worked to get Kerem Shalom open. And we insist that we remain—it remain open—both remain open. We're working to open other routes as well. And we're also working relentlessly to make sure aid workers can get the aid where it's needed once it gets through.

I want to recognize Jordan and the King specifically for all he has done to provide humanitarian aid to Gaza, including just a few days ago. He personally got in a plane and helped conduct an air drop of urgently needed medical supplies into Gaza.

I understand that two of his children have also joined those air drops. They helped fly humanitarian supplies in. And for years, the Queen has been passionate—a passionate advocate for the Palestinian people, particularly women and children. Your family's leadership, Your Majesty, and humanitarian commitment are commendable.

And at the same time, we're working to create the conditions for a lasting peace, as we talked a lot about upstairs, with the Israeli security guaranteed and Palestinian aspirations for their own state fulfilled. I say this as a long—lifelong supporter of Israel. That's the only path that guarantees Israel's security for the long term. To achieve it, the Palestinians must also seize the opportunity.

As I discussed with the King today, the Palestinian Authority must urgently reform so it can effectively deliver for the Palestinian people in both the West Bank and Gaza. Once Hamas's control of Gaza is over, they must prepare to build a state that accepts peace, does not harbor terrorist groups like Hamas and Islamic Jihad.

And together, we will keep working to complete what has—what we started: to integrate the region, to bring about peace between Israel and all its Arab neighbors, including a Palestinian state. That effort was already underway before the October 7 attacks. It's even more urgent today.

No one—no one—understands better than our allies and partners in the region, including the King, what we need. I'm grateful to him for his friendship, including his and Jordan's unique role—unique role: custodian of the holy sites in Jerusalem.

We're grateful for this friendship. We saw that again just 2 weeks ago when three brave American servicemembers were killed in an attack at a military outpost in Jordan, close to the Syrian border, by radical militant groups backed by Iran, operating in Syria and Iraq. Since then, U.S. military forces have struck targets in Iraq and Syria, and our response will continue.

We're grateful for our partners and allies like the King who work with us every single day to advance security and stability across the region and beyond. It's difficult times like these when the bonds between nations are more important than ever.

And Jill and I are pleased to welcome him and the Queen and the Crown Prince to the White House today.

Your Majesty, over to you.

King Abdullah. Thank you, sir.

[At this point, President Biden moved from one side of the podium to the other.]

Mr.——

President Biden. I switched sides on you.

King Abdullah. Sorry. *[Laughter]*

Mr. President, thank you for your gracious hospitality accorded to me and my delegation today. My visit today carries an added meaning as our countries this year mark 75 years of exemplary strategic partnership. However, we had hoped we would be marking this major milestone during better circumstances in my region and the world.

Unfortunately, one of the most devastating wars in recent history continues to unfold in Gaza as we speak. Nearly 100,000 people have been killed, injured, or are missing. The majority are women and children.

We cannot afford an Israeli attack on Rafah. It is certain to produce another humanitarian catastrophe. The situation is already unbearable for over a million people who have been pushed into Rafah since the war started.

We cannot stand by and let this continue. We need a lasting cease-fire now. This war must end. We must urgently and immediately work to ensure the sustainable delivery of sufficient aid to Gaza through all possible entry points and mechanisms. And I thank you, Mr. President, for your support on this.

Restrictions on vital relief aid and medical items are leading to inhumane conditions. No other U.N. agency can do what UNRWA is doing in helping the people of Gaza through this humanitarian catastrophe.

Its work in other areas of operation—especially in Jordan, where 2.3 million are registered—is also vital. It is imperative that UNRWA continues to receive the support it needs to carry out its mandate.

The potential threat of Palestinian displacement beyond the borders of Gaza and the West Bank is something we view with extreme concern and cannot be allowed.

At the same time, we must ignore—we must not ignore the situation in the West Bank and in the holy sites in Jerusalem. Nearly 400 Palestinians have been killed in the West Bank since October 7, including almost 100 children, and over 4,000 injured.

Continued escalations by extremist settlers in the West Bank and Jerusalem's holy sites and the expansion of illegal settlements will unleash chaos on the entire region.

The vast majority of Muslim worshippers are not being allowed to enter Al-Aqsa Mosque. Christian churches have also voiced concerns about increasing and unprecedented restrictions and threats.

It is also important to stress that the separation of the West Bank and Gaza cannot be accepted. Seven decades of occupation, death, and destruction have proven beyond any doubt that there can be no peace without a political horizon.

Military and security solutions are not the answer. They can never bring peace. Civilians on both sides continue to pay for this protracted conflict with their lives.

All attacks against innocent civilians—women and children—including those of October 7, cannot be accepted by any Muslim, as I have previously stressed. We must make sure the horrors of the past few months since October 7 are never repeated nor accepted by any human being.

We must together, along with Arab partners and the international community, step up efforts to reach a cease-fire in Gaza and immediately start working to create a political horizon that leads to a just and comprehensive peace on the basis of the two-state solution: an independent, sovereign, and viable Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital but living side by side with Israel in peace and security. This is the only solution that will guarantee peace and security for the Palestinians and the Israelis, as well as the entire region.

Your leadership, my dear friend, Mr. President, is key to addressing this conflict. And Jordan is ready to work, as always, with you towards peace.

Thank you.

President Biden. Thank you.

[Several reporters began asking questions.]

Q. [Inaudible]—Mr. President, your message to NATO?

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:22 p.m. in the Cross Hall at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to former President Barack Obama; Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel; President Abdelfattah Said Elsisi of Egypt; Amir Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani of Qatar; and Princess Salma of Jordan, daughter of King Abdullah.

Categories: Meetings With Foreign Leaders and International Officials : Jordan, King Abdullah.

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Names: Abdullah II, King; Al Hussein bin Abdullah, Crown Prince; Biden, Jill T.; Elsisi, Abdelfattah Said; Netanyahu, Benjamin; Rania, Queen; Salma, Princess; Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, Amir.

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