

Remarks Prior to a Meeting With President Isaac Herzog of Israel

November 12, 2024

Q. President Biden, do you think we can get a hostage deal by the end of your term?

President Biden. Do you think you can keep from getting hit in the head by a camera behind you?

All right. Well, thank you all.

Well, Mr. President, welcome back to the Oval Office and the White House. You've been a friend for a long time, a personal friend. And you know my commitment to Israel is ironclad, and we share a deep friendship.

We want to thank you again for being here, and the floor is yours.

President Herzog. Thank you, Mr. President. It's always a great honor to be here in the Oval Office and be—to be with a friend such as you, Mr. President.

I will start, of course, with the sad news of the day. In the last 2 hours, two Israelis were murdered by rocket attacks from Lebanon in the town—northern town of Nahariya, a beautiful seashore town in the northern part of Israel. Early in the day, a kindergarten teacher of a kindergarten of special needs—childrens with special needs—rescued, bravely and wisely, the toddlers in the kindergarten from a drone attack. A drone exploded in the kindergarten.

This is what we're going through from Lebanon, Mr. President, and you know it all too well. We are fighting hard. We're defending our people, our brave soldiers and pilots. And I know that you're working very hard to make sure that this war will end and that will—there will be, first and foremost, security for the people of Israel as well as for the people of Lebanon.

And, in Gaza, we have 101 hostages. Over 400 days, I know, Mr. President, that you know you—you are day in, day out, actively seeking their safe return home as they are going through hell in the dungeons of Gaza.

Clearly, you're thinking and working about the day after as well, which perhaps should be a trajectory of hope to the people of the region and the ability to have our neighbors, as well as us, live in security and peace.

But first and foremost, we have to get the hostages back home.

President Biden. I agree.

President Herzog. And it all starts in Tehran. It's—all starts in the empire of evil, where in Tehran, with its proxies, they are doing whatever they can to derail stability and security and peace, calling for the annihilation of the State of Israel and seeking nuclear weapons.

And, Mr. President, this has to be a major objective all throughout your term and the next term of the next President because we have to make sure that they cannot fulfill their evil intentions.

They're also a major engine of anti-Semitism, Mr. President. And I know how much you put a focus on fighting and combating anti-Semitism.

But most importantly, I'm here on behalf of the people of Israel and the nation of Israel and the State of Israel to say to you, Mr. President, thank you very much. As we say in Hebrew, *toda raba*.

You've been an incredible friend of Israel and the Jewish people for decades, and we will never forget, ever in history, how you stood up with us in our darkest hour, which became our finest hour; how you came to Israel a few days after the barbaric attack of October 7; how you helped us and supported us with words and deeds.

And I want to express my—our heartfelt thanks to you, Mr. President, which is a great legacy that you stood up with the Jewish people and the State of Israel, as you always did.

So I brought you a little gift——

[At this point, President Herzog gestured toward an artifact on a small table to his left.]

President Biden. It's a magnificent gift.

President Herzog. ——which is an archeological artifact from the foot of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, which has the word "Joseph"—Yosef. And, as you know, in the Bible, it is—says that Joseph will strengthen Israel. And clearly, Mr. President, you've done it.

Thank you very much.

President Biden. Well, I hope my father heard that. He'd be—my father was what we call a righteous Christian. He couldn't understand why we didn't move more rapidly back in World War II—*[inaudible]*. And—any rate. I——

President Herzog. I think that was a great legacy with—of your father.

President Biden. Well, it was. And I remember how I got in trouble—we were friends even back then—when I said—years ago, as a Senator, I said, "You don't have to be a Jew to be a Zionist." I'm a Zionist.

President Herzog. And I know you are.

President Biden. And it's really——

President Herzog. You're clearly a Zionist, Mr. President.

President Biden. Well, God love you.

President Herzog. Thank you very much.

President Biden. Thanks for being here, pal.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:55 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, President Herzog referred to Ziv Belfer and Shamoun Najm, who were killed in a rocket attack in Nahariya, Israel; Sarah Yasour, a kindergarten teacher who protected students by guiding them to a bomb shelter shortly before a drone strike near their classroom in Nesher, Israel; and President-elect Donald J. Trump.

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