

Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2025

Remarks on Reaching a Cease-Fire and Hostage-Release Deal Between Israel and Hamas and an Exchange With Reporters

January 15, 2025

The President. Good afternoon. And it's a very good afternoon, because at long last, I can announce a cease-fire and a hostage deal has been reached between Israel and Hamas.

For more than 15 months of conflict that began with Hizballah's [Hamas's; White House correction] brutal massacre on October the 7th; more than 15 months of terror for the hostages, their families, the Israeli people; and more than 15 months of suffering by the innocent people of Gaza, fighting in Gaza will stop, and soon the hostages will return home to their families.

The elements of this deal were what I laid out in detail this past May, which was embraced by countries around the world and endorsed overwhelmingly by the U.N. Security Council.

The deal is structured in three phases. Phase one will last 6 weeks. It includes a full and complete cease-fire, a withdrawal of Israeli forces from all the populated areas of Gaza, and—and—the release of a number of hostages held by Hamas, including women and elderly and the wounded.

And I'm proud to say Americans will be part of that hostage release in phase one as well. And the Vice President and I cannot wait to welcome them home.

In exchange, Israel will release hundreds of Palestinian prisoners.

And during phase one, the Palestinians can also return to their neighborhoods in all the areas of Gaza, and the surge of humanitarian assistance into Gaza will begin, and the innocent people can have a greater access to these vital supplies.

You know, during the next 6 weeks, Israel will negotiate the necessary arrangements to get phase two, which is a permanent end of the war. Let me say that again: a permanent end of the war.

There are a number of details to negotiate to move from phase one to phase two, but the plan says if negotiations take longer than 6 weeks, the cease-fire will continue, as long as the negotiations continue.

I've spoken to the Amir of Kuwait [Qatar; White House correction] and the President of Egypt, and we have pledged to make sure the negotiations will keep moving forward for as long as it takes.

Then, when phase two begins, there will be an exchange of—for a release of the remaining living hostages, including male soldiers, and all remaining Israeli forces will be withdrawn from Gaza, and the temporary cease-fire will become permanent.

And finally, phase three. Any final remains of hostages who have been killed will be returned to their families and a major reconstruction plan for Gaza will begin.

This is the cease-fire agreement I introduced last spring. Today Hamas and Israel have agreed to that cease-fire agreement and the whole—ending the war.

You know, those of you who have followed the negotiations can attest, the road to this deal has not been easy. I've worked in foreign policy for decades. This is one of the toughest negotiations I've ever experienced. And we reached this point because—because—of the pressure that Israel built on Hamas, backed by the United States.

Hamas's longtime leader, Sinwar, was killed. Hamas's strongest supporter, Iran, launched attacks in Israel. And those attacks failed after my administration organized a coalition of nations to stop them.

And after I ordered the U.S. ships and planes to come to Israel's defense, we also shaped Israel's strong and calibrated response, destroying Iran's air defenses, but avoiding an escalatory cycle of an all-out war.

The United States also organized a coalition of 20 countries to stand up to attacks by the Houthis, including their missile attacks in Israel.

Then, Hizballah, another of Hamas's strongest backers, was significantly weakened on the battlefield, and its leadership was destroyed.

With our support, Israel negotiated a cease-fire with them. And after that, Lebanon finally elected a new President who's not—who's not—beholden to Hizballah, and he can begin a new chapter for the Lebanese people.

All told, these developments in the region, which the United States helped to shape, changed the equation. And so now the terror network that once protected and sustained Hamas is far weaker. Iran is weaker. Iran is weaker than it's been in decades. Hizballah is badly degraded.

And, after more than 15 months of war, Hamas's senior leaders are dead, thousands of Hamas fighters are dead, and the military formations have been destroyed. With nowhere to turn, Hamas finally agreed to releasing hostages.

You know, there was no other way for this war to end than with a hostage deal, and I'm deeply satisfied this day has come—finally come for the sake of the people of Israel and the families waiting in agony and for the sake of the innocent people in Gaza who suffered unimaginable devastation because of the war.

The Palestinian people have gone through hell. Too many innocent people have died. Too many communities have been destroyed. In this deal, the people of Gaza can finally recover and rebuild. They can look to a future without Hamas in power.

You know, the Bible says, "Blessed are the peacemakers." Many peacemakers helped make this deal happen, including an extraordinary team of American diplomats who have worked nonstop for months to get this done. Secretary Blinken led the effort. Secretary Jake Sullivan—not—National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan, Bill Burns, Jon Finer, Brett McGurk, Amos Hochstein, and the Vice President worked relentlessly as we worked to deliver this deal.

I'd also note this deal was developed and negotiated under my administration, but its terms will be implemented, for the most part, by the next administration. In these past few days, we've been speaking as one team. This has been time of real turmoil in the Middle East, but as I prepare to leave office, our friends are strong, our enemies are weak, and there's a—genuine opportunities for a new future.

In Lebanon, there's an opportunity for a future free from the grip of Hizballah; in Syria, a future free from the tyranny of Assad; and for the Palestinian people, a credible—a credible—pathway to a state of their own; and for the region, a future of normalization, integration of Israel and all its Arab neighbors, including Saudi Arabia.

At the G-20 in Delhi in September '23, I rallied key countries behind a vision of an economic corridor from India across the Middle East to Europe. That vision can now become a reality.

There are risks as well, including ISIS and Iran, even in a badly weakened state, but—but—we're handing off the—to the next team a real opportunity for a better future for the Middle East. I hope they will take it.

Let me close with this. My friend for years in the United States Senate, former Senator George Mitchell, who did so much to forge peace in Northern Ireland, once said about diplomacy—said it is a "700 days of failure and 1 day of success." "Seven hundred days of failure and 1 day of success."

Well, we've had many difficult days since Hamas began its terrible war. We've encountered roadblocks and setbacks, but we've not given up. And now, after more than forty—400 days of struggle, a day of success has arrived.

God bless all the hostages and their families, and may God protect the troops of all those who work for peace.

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Q. Mr. President, how can you see the future of Gaza now—as you are saying, the implementation of this deal will be in the hands of the next administration, and basically, they will shape the future of Gaza. So how do you see this future?

And also, how much credit do you give to give to the Trump team for this deal? Trump is already taking credit for it.

The President. Well, you know, this is the exact framework of the deal I proposed back in May—exact—and we got the world to endorse it.

Secondly, it's America's support for Israel that helped them badly weaken Hamas and its backers and create the conditions for this deal.

And thirdly, I knew this deal would have to be implemented by the next team, so I told my team to coordinate closely with the incoming team to make sure we're all speaking with the same voice, because that's what American Presidents do.

[*At this point, several reporters spoke at once.*]

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Q. Mr. President, can you tell us how many—

The President. Thank you.

Q. —Americans will be in the—how many Americans will be released when the hostages are being released?

The President. All the exact detail of how many of—people are being held and how many bodies will be returned and all this will all be forthcoming—all of it, all of it.

Thank you.

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Q. Mr. President, what's your level of confidence that this deal will hold?

The President. I'm confident.

Thank you.

Former President Donald J. Trump

Q. Who does the history books credit for this, Mr. President, you or Trump?

The President. Is that a joke?

Q. No.

The President. Oh.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:02 p.m. in the Cross Hall at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Amir Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani of Qatar; President Abdelfattah Said Elsisy of Egypt; President Joseph Aoun of Lebanon; Principal Deputy National Security Adviser Jonathan Finer, National Security Council Coordinator for the Middle East Brett H. McGurk, Senior Adviser for Energy and Investment Amos J. Hochstein; and former President Bashar al-Asad of Syria. He also referred to the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) terrorist organization. The transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on January 19.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Cease-fire and hostage-release deal between Israel and Hamas; Interviews With the News Media : Exchanges with reporters, White House.

Locations: Washington, DC.

Names: Aoun, Joseph; Asad, Bashar al-; Blinken, Antony J.; Burns, William J.; Elsisy, Abdelfattah Said; Finer, Jonathan; Harris, Kamala D.; Hochstein, Amos J.; McGurk, Brett H.; Mitchell, George J.; Sullivan, Jacob J.; Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, Amir.

Subjects: Central Intelligence Agency; Egypt, President; Gaza, conflict with Israel; Gaza, hostages held by Hamas; Gaza, humanitarian situation; Gaza, international assistance; Hamas political-paramilitary organization; Iran, missile and drone attacks on Israel; Iran, regional involvement; Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) terrorist organization; Israel, attacks by Hamas of October 7, 2023; Israel, Iranian missile and drone attacks; Israel, military operations in Gaza; Israel, security cooperation with U.S.; Lebanon, Hizballah political-paramilitary organization; Lebanon, President; Middle East, regional integration and security; National Security Adviser; National Security Council Coordinator for the Middle East; Principal Deputy National Security Adviser; Qatar, Amir; Secretary of State; Senior Adviser for Energy and Investment; Syria, ouster of President Bashar al-Asad; Vice President; Yemen, Houthi rebel group.

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