

Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2025

Remarks on Implementation of the Cease-Fire and Hostage-Release Deal Between Israel and Hamas and an Exchange With Reporters in North Charleston, South Carolina

January 19, 2025

The President. Hey, folks. It's going to be quick because I've got to be downstairs, but thank you very much for being here.

This morning the deal that I first put forward last May for the Middle East has finally come to fruition.

The cease-fire has gone into effect in Gaza, and today we're seeing hostages being released: three Israeli women, held against their will in the dark tunnels for 470 days. Four more women will be released in 7 days; three additional hostages every 7 days thereafter, including at least two American citizens, in this first phase.

We pray for them and their families for their—going to be a long recovery ahead.

By the 16th day of the deal, talks will begin in the second phase. This phase includes the release of Israeli soldiers and a permanent end to the war without Hamas in power or able to threaten Israel.

Hundreds of trucks are entering Gaza as I speak. They're carrying assistance for civilians, who have suffered enormously from the war that Hamas started on October 7, 2023, nearly 15 months ago. Today alone we anticipate several hundred trucks will enter the Gaza Strip as I'm—probably as I'm speaking.

And after so much pain, destruction, and loss of life, today, the guns in Gaza have gone silent.

This was the deal that I outlined for the world back on May 31; many of you covered it at the time. I was endorsed—I—it was endorsed overwhelmingly by folks around the world, including the U.N. Security Council unanimously endorsed the deal. And developed a—in coordination with—I developed it in coordination with Egypt, Qatar, and Israel.

I've worked in foreign policy for decades, and this is one of the toughest negotiations I've been part of.

Many of you who have followed these negotiations will attest that the road to this deal has been not easy at all and a long road. But we've reached this point today because of the pressure Israel built on Hamas, backed by the United States.

Some said my policy of a firm support for Israel is relentlessly pursuing diplomacy risked drawing America into a wider war in the region. I listened to those voices, many of whom I respected a great deal. But I concluded abandoning the course I was on would not have led us to the cease-fire we're seeing today, but instead, it would have risked the wider war in the region that so many feared.

Now the region has been fundamentally transformed. Hamas's long-time leader, Sinwar, is dead. Hamas's sponsors in the Middle East have been badly weakened by Israel, backed by the United States. Hizballah, one of Hamas's biggest backers, was significantly weakened on the battlefield, and its leadership was destroyed.

Even as we worked for diplomatic solutions in Lebanon, we provided ongoing assistance and support to Israel's military campaign against Hizballah, including its efforts to take out the terror infrastructure along the border between Israel and Lebanon.

Israel's campaign was extensive—extremely successful. So much so that by the end of November, the United States had brokered a cease-fire in Lebanon. Hizballah did what it said it would never do: It cut its—cut its deal and abandoned Hamas.

And today, Lebanon—in Lebanon, there's finally a new President and Prime Minister, both of whom support a sovereign Lebanon without Hizballah ruling the show—running the show or playing any part in it.

The Assad regime next door in Syria is gone, removing Iran's ready access to Lebanon.

Iran is in the weakest position in decades after the U.S. military helped defend Israel from Iranian missiles and supported Israel's military response inside Iran.

Just look across the region. In Lebanon, there's an opportunity for a future free from the grip of Hizballah. In Syria, a future free from the Assad—the tyranny of Assad. For the Palestinian people, a credible path to a state of their own. And for the region—and the future of normalization and integration of Israel with all its Arab neighbors, including Saudi Arabia, with whom I've spoken with.

You know, we've had many difficult days since Hamas began this terrible war. We've encountered roadblocks and setbacks, but we haven't given up.

And a special thanks to my team, particularly Brett McGurk, who many of you know, who spent weeks and months working nonstop to reach this deal, many of those weeks and months out of the country.

Today's cease-fire in Gaza and the release of hostages is a result of a principled and effective policy that we presided—I presided over for months. And we got it—we got here without a wider war in the Middle East many predicted.

And now it falls on the next administration to help implement this deal. I was pleased to have our teams speak as one voice in the final days. It was both necessary and effective and unprecedented. But success is going to require persistence and continuing support for our friends in the region and the belief in diplomacy backed by deterrence.

So, as we reflect on the news from Gaza today, we also remember all the victims of this war. They were—we are mindful—we are mindful—that the pursuit of a lasting peace, while never easy or quick, must always be our calling.

So thank you all for listening. May God bless you all, and may God protect our troops. I'm looking forward to this deal being fully implemented.

And I'm sorry I'm not going to take any questions now because I'm waiting—there's a whole congregation waiting for me, and I'm sure the remainder of the day I'll have an opportunity to speak with you.

Thank you very much.

Release of Hostages Held by Hamas

Q. Can you say anything about the condition of the hostages that were released today and the others that are yet to be released?

The President. Yes, I've just got a call saying the three are released into Gaza to the—out of the hands of the—of their captors, and they appear to be in good health, but it's early to tell.

They're literally being—they may be across the border, out of the Gaza Strip into Israel now; I'm not certain.

Thank you.

Hamas

Q. Sir, any concerns about Hamas regrouping?

The President. No.

Cease-Fire and Hostage-Release Deal Between Israel and Hamas

Q. Will you remain in the—involved in the deal as it moves forward?

The President. No way out. [*Laughter*] I'm proud of the deal.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:53 a.m. at the Royal Missionary Baptist Church. In his remarks, he referred to Israeli hostages Emily Damari and Doron Steinbrecher, who were abducted from their home in Kibbutz Kfar Aza, and Romi Gonen, who was abducted from the Nova music festival near Kibbutz Re'im, during the Hamas attacks on October 7, 2023; Israeli hostages Naama Levy, Liri Albag, Daniella Gilboa, and Karina Arieiv, who were set to be released by Hamas on January 25; U.S. citizens Sagui Dekel-Chen, originally from Connecticut, who was kidnapped from his home in Kibbutz Nir Oz, and Keith Siegel, originally from North Carolina, who was kidnapped from his home in Kibbutz Kfar Az, during the October 7 attack; President Joseph Aoun and Prime Minister Nawaf Salam of Lebanon; former President Bashar al-Asad of Syria; and National Security Council Coordinator for the Middle East Brett H. McGurk.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Cease-fire and hostage-release deal between Israel and Hamas, remarks on implementation in North Charleston, SC; Interviews With the News Media : Exchanges with reporters, North Charleston, SC.

Locations: North Charleston, SC.

Names: Albag, Liri; Aoun, Joseph; Arieiv, Karina; Asad, Bashar al-; Damari, Emily; Dekel-Chen, Sagui; Gilboa, Daniella; Gonen, Romi; Levy, Naama; McGurk, Brett H.; Salam, Nawaz; Siegel, Keith; Steinbrecher, Doron.

Subjects: Arab-Israeli conflict, peace process; 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; Israel, Iranian missile and drone attacks; Israel, military operations in Gaza; Israel, military operations in Lebanon; Lebanon, Hizballah political-paramilitary organization; Lebanon, Israeli military operations; Lebanon, President; Lebanon, Prime Minister; National Security Council Coordinator for the Middle East; South Carolina, President's visit; Syria, ouster of President Bashar al-Asad; United Nations Security Council.

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