

Administration of Donald J. Trump, 2025

Remarks in an Exchange With Reporters Aboard Air Force One En Route to Doha, Qatar

May 14, 2025

The President. Hello, everybody. The jet fighters will be surrounding the plane in about 7 minutes.

Oh, I heard they threw you out of the press conference, no?

Q. They tried, but Karoline stopped them.

The President. Oh, Karoline saved you. You're lucky. You're lucky. You were a little out of control.

The President's Meetings in Saudi Arabia/Security Measures for the President's Travel

Q. How's the trip going so far? Well, I was asking——

The President. It's going very well.

Q. ——about your meeting with the Syrian President.

The President. I think it's really going well. Great relationships.

And now we're meeting with a group that's fantastic. The Amir is a great guy. I know him. I know them all very well.

Who are you?

Q. Good. Thank you.

The President. You're going to be surrounded by eight fighters, you know, in about 7 minutes. And you say, "Do we need them?" And when they say, "Yes," that doesn't make me feel good, right?

Q. What's the threat? Did they tell you what the threat is?

The President. No, there's—let's assume there's no threat. We have to assume that, but——

President Ahmad Husayn al-Shara' of Syria

Q. How did you find the Syrian President?

The President. Great. Great. I think very good. Young, attractive guy. Tough guy, you know? Strong past. Very strong past. Fighter.

Q. Does that worry you at all?

The President. But he's got a real shot at pulling it together. I spoke with President Erdoğan, who I'm very friendly with, and he feels he's got a shot of doing a good job. It's a torn-up country.

Middle East Peace and Integration Efforts

Q. Do you think Syria will join the Abraham Accords?

The President. Yes, but I think they have to get themselves straightened out. I told him, "I hope you're going to join when it's straightened out." He said, "Yes." But they have a lot of work to do.

Lebanon/Israel

Q. What about Lebanon? Do you think there's a path for Lebanon to normalize relations with Israel?

The President. You know, a friend of mine is the new Ambassador to Lebanon, and I didn't even know—you know, I never knew his relationship, but he was born in Lebanon. And he said, "I'd like to be the Ambassador." He's a very successful guy. And I said, "You know, that's very dangerous." He said: "I don't care. I love my country, and it's worth it to do." It's sort of a beautiful story. You may want to go and interview him sometime—Michel. He's a great guy. But he's—I think he's approved or almost approved.

But you know, there's a danger there for a very successful man to go and do that. I said, "You sure you know what you're doing?" It's like Doug [Doug Mills, New York Times] taking pictures, right?

So how—you got some good shots, I guess, huh?

Q. Yes, sir.

The President. It was a beautiful scene. The last scene at the airport, I thought, was beautiful. We rode out together, and they generally don't do that. They don't generally meet Presidents—[inaudible].

President Ahmad Husayn al-Shara' of Syria

Q. There have been some reports of the Syrian President wanting a Trump Tower in Damascus. Did that come up at all in your——

The President. No, that I haven't heard. I think we'll have to wait a little while. Let things calm down a little while with the—you know, the country. I think he's going to do—he's got the potential to do—he's a real leader. And you know, he led a charge, and he's pretty amazing.

But did you see him? Did you get to see him?

Q. No.

The President. Well, he was there. You know, he was with us at the event.

Professional Golf

Q. Did the PGA Tour or LIV Golf come up at all in your conversations with the Crown Prince?

The President. No. No. You mean the—LIV?

Q. Yes.

The President. No, it didn't. We didn't discuss it.

Q. Mr. President——

Saudi Arabia

Q. One about that Saudi Arabia—the Saudi intelligence agent. The 9/11 families want the Saudi intelligence agent to be extradited to the United States to face charges for 9/11.

The President. Yes, I heard that.

Q. Did that come up in conversation?

The President. No, it didn't.

Q. No?

The President. But I know all about it, but it didn't come up.

The President's Travel to the Middle East

Q. On Israel. You're not going to Israel. Is—does this trip sideline Israel at all?

The President. No, not at all. No. This is good for Israel. Having a relationship like I have with these countries, the Middle Eastern countries—essentially, all of them—it will—I think it's very good for Israel.

Cease-Fire and Hostage-Release Deal Between Israel and Hamas/Hostages Held in Gaza, Palestinian Territories

Q. Can I ask you, again, on Israel? The—on the hostage deal. Did you—did any of your people speak with Israel about the release of the American hostage—I'm sorry, on the sanctions lifting of Syria.

The President. Edan? Edan?

Q. On—well, let me ask on Edan first. What credit does Israel deserve, if any, for that release of the hostage?

The President. Well, they've been fighting a long time. They've been—you know, they're—they're warring, and I think they deserve a lot of credit. I think my people deserve a lot of credit—maybe the most credit. Look, he wouldn't be there. If it weren't for us, he wouldn't be living right now. Probably none of the hostages would be living right now, and we probably have 20 that are living that we'll be getting out step by step.

A lot of progress—you know, we've gotten a lot of them out. And last time, a couple of weeks ago, the—10 people walked into my office—the Oval Office—and they said—they had a "59" on their—on their shirt—on their front. And I said, "What does that represent?" "The number of hostages." I said, "Wow, that's a lot." They said, "Well, 24 are living," and now it's 20. The number is 20 that are living. Four have died. And they're young people. Young people don't die. You know, young people are killed; they don't die.

So they—the 24 living of the 59—24 living is now down to 20. And we got Edan out, who's great. His family was so thankful. But we did a good job with that. We'll continue to do it.

Russia/Ukraine

Q. What happens on Thursday if President Putin doesn't show up in Turkey for the talks with Ukraine? What will you do?

The President. Well, I don't know if he's showing up. I know he would like me to be there, and that's a possibility. If we could end the war, I'd—be thinking about that.

Now, tomorrow we're all booked out. You understand that. We're all set.

Q. But you'd go if he goes?

The President. We're going to go to U.A.E. tomorrow. And so, we have a very full situation.

Now, that doesn't mean I wouldn't do it to save a lot of lives and come back. But yes, I think they're thinking about something.

I don't know that he would be there if I'm not there. We're going to find out. Marco is going, and Marco has been very effective.

President Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin of Russia

Q. How are you feeling about how Putin is handling this? I know you had said a few weeks ago you thought maybe——

The President. About who?

Q. How Putin is handling this. You said a few weeks ago you thought maybe he was tapping you along.

The President. I don't know. I'll let you know in a week. I'll let you know in a few days.

Israel/U.S. Sanctions on Syria

Q. Mr. President, on—Israel again. Has any of your team been in touch with Israel—you, your team—about lifting the sanctions on Syria? What's their—reaction?

The President. Well, "in touch"—I mean, we told them we're doing it. The reason I did it, and I think it's been very popular, actually—certainly, in the Middle East, it's been popular with virtually everybody—but the reason I did it is because I spoke with President Erdoğan, who I get along with very well, and I spoke to Muhammad, as you know—just with him—and they thought it was very important to do. It gives them a much better chance of survival as a country.

Q. Can you share what Netanyahu thinks about it?

The President. Well, I think what's happened is Turkey feels we should do it, and other countries—[inaudible].

If you looked at my speech last night, which I assume most of you were at, I think the biggest applause was when I said that we're lifting these sanctions on Syria, and that's because they want to give Syria a chance to live and to be great, you know, et cetera.

Digital Finance and Crypto Currency

Q. Mr. President, an Emirate Government-backed firm did a \$2 billion deal.

The President. What?

Q. An Emirate Government-backed firm did a \$2 billion deal using the Trump—digital coins. How did that deal come about?

The President. I don't know anything about it. I really don't know anything about it.

But I'm a big crypto fan, I will tell you. I've been that from the beginning, right from the campaign. I'm a believer in crypto, and if we're not going to do it, China is going to do it. The way I look at it, it's like AI. I'm a believer in AI because we have to have it. We're leading China by a lot. And in crypto, we're leading China by a lot. So I'm a big crypto fan.

Q. But you didn't know about that deal?

The President. No. No.

Senate Minority Leader Charles E. Schumer

Q. Senator Schumer said he wants to block your Justice Department political appointees until he gets answers about questions about the——

The President. Schumer—well, Schumer is——

Q. —the Qatari plane. What's your response?

The President. Schumer is—you know, he's become a Palestinian. There's something wrong with him. I don't know. I've known him a long time, and there's something wrong. He's lost his

confidence, totally. And there's just something wrong with him. I don't know what it is with Schumer.

Yes, did you have a question? Go ahead.

Iran/Russia

Q. Oh, I've got two questions on Iran and Russia.

The President. Yes.

Q. Are you still considering secondary sanctions on Iran's oil exports?

The President. Let's see what happens over the next week. I don't really want to answer it, because I want to see what happens over the next week.

Go ahead.

Q. Okay. And then on Iran and Russia. Are you considering sanctions on Russia for supporting Iran and for the continued war in Ukraine?

The President. Well, again, I don't want to talk about it, but I'm always considering the secondary sanctions. I had the secondary sanctions on Iran and drove them into bankruptcy. And there would have been no October 7. There would have been no money for Hamas or Hizballah or anybody else.

So I'm always—and, as you know, I put secondary sanctions on Iran again. And hopefully, they're going to make the right decision, because something's going to happen one way or the other. It's very simple. It's going to happen one way or the other. They can't have a nuclear weapon. So we'll either do it friendly, or we'll do it very unfriendly, and that won't be pleasant.

Thank you very much, everybody.

Q. On the Qatari——

The President. Thank you.

Q. On the Qatari plane, Mr. President.

Q. Why no FLOTUS?

Q. Thank you, Mr. President.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:13 p.m. in the press cabin. In his remarks, he referred to White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt; President Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey; Michel Issa, the President's nominee to be U.S. Ambassador to Lebanon; Edan Alexander, a U.S. citizen who was captured during the October 7, 2023, Hamas attacks on Israel and released on May 12; Secretary of State Marco A. Rubio; and Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman bin Abd al-Aziz Al Saud of Saudi Arabia. A reporter referred to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel.

Categories: Interviews With the News Media : Exchanges with reporters, Air Force One.

Locations: Air Force One.

Names: Alexander, Edan; Erdogan, Recep Tayyip; Issa, Michel; Leavitt, Karoline; Muhammad bin Salman bin Abd al-Aziz Al Saud, Crown Prince; Putin, Vladimir Vladimirovich; Rubio, Marco A.; Schumer, Charles E.; Shara', Ahmad Husayn al-; Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, Amir.

Subjects: Artificial intelligence and other emerging technologies; Crypto currency and digital finance; Gaza, hostages held by Hamas; Golf; Hamas political-paramilitary organization; Iran, U.S. sanctions; Israel, attacks by Hamas of October 7, 2023; Lebanon, Hizballah political-

paramilitary organization; Middle East, regional integration and security; News media, Presidential interviews; Qatar, Amir; Russia, President; Saudi Arabia, Crown Prince; Secretary of State; Senate minority leader; Syria, President; Syria, U.S. sanctions; Turkey, President; White House Press Secretary.

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