

## The President's News Conference With Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel in Jerusalem *March 20, 2013*

*Prime Minister Netanyahu.* Mr. President, Barack, it's a great pleasure for me to host you here in Jerusalem. You've graciously hosted me many times in Washington, so I'm very pleased to have this opportunity to reciprocate. I hope that the good will and warmth of the people of Israel has already made you feel at home.

*President Obama.* Very much so.

*Prime Minister Netanyahu.* We had an opportunity to—today to begin discussing the wide range of issues that are critical to both our countries. And foremost among these is Iran's relentless pursuit of nuclear weapons. Mr. President, you have made it clear that you are determined to prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons. I appreciate your forthright position on this point. I also appreciate that you have noted—that you have acted to thwart this threat both through determined diplomacy and strong sanctions that are getting stronger yet.

Notwithstanding our joint efforts and your great success in mobilizing the international community, diplomacy and sanctions so far have not stopped Iran's nuclear program. And as you know, my view is that in order to stop Iran's nuclear programs peacefully, diplomacy and sanctions must be augmented by a clear and credible threat of military action.

In this regard, Mr. President, I want to thank you once again for always making clear that Israel must be able to defend itself, by itself, against any threat. I deeply appreciate those words because they speak to the great transformation that has occurred in the life of the Jewish people with the rebirth of the Jewish state. The Jewish people only two generations ago were once a powerless people, defenseless against those who sought our destruction. Today, we have both the right and the capability to defend ourselves.

And you said earlier today, the essence of the State of Israel, the essence of the rebirth of the Jewish state is we've fulfilled the age-old dream of the Jewish people to be masters of

our fate in our own state. And I think that was a wonderful line that I will cherish because it really gets down to the essence of what this state is about. That is why I know that you appreciate that Israel can never cede the right to defend ourselves to others, even to the greatest of our friends. And Israel has no better friend than the United States of America. So I look forward to continuing to work with you to address what is an existential threat to Israel and a grave threat to the peace and security of the world.

Mr. President, we discussed today the situation in Syria. We share the goal of seeing a stable and peaceful Syria emerge from the carnage that we have witnessed over the last 2 years. That carnage has already resulted in the deaths of over 70,000 people and the suffering of millions. We also share a determination to prevent the deadly arsenal of weapons within Syria from falling into the hands of terrorist hands. And I have no doubt that the best way to do that is to work closely with the United States and other countries in the region to address this challenge. And that is what we intend to do.

Finally, Mr. President, your visit gave us an opportunity to try to find a way to advance peace between Israelis and Palestinians. My government—new government was sworn in 2 days ago. I know there have been questions regarding what the policy of the new government will be towards peace with the Palestinians. So let me be clear: Israel remains fully committed to peace and to the solution of two states for two peoples. We extend our hand in peace and in friendship to the Palestinian people.

I hope that your visit, along with the visit of Secretary of State Kerry, will help us turn a page in our relations with the Palestinians. Let us sit down at the negotiating table. Let us put aside all preconditions. Let us work together to achieve the historic compromise that will end our conflict once and for all.

Let me conclude, Mr. President, on a personal note. I know how valuable the time and the energies of the American President, of yourself. This is the 10th time that we have met since you became President and since I became Prime Minister. You've chosen Israel as your first venue in your visit—your foreign visits in your second term. I want to thank you for the investment you have made in our relationship and in strengthening the friendship and alliance between our two countries. It is deeply, deeply appreciated.

You've come here on the eve of Passover. I've always considered it as our most cherished holiday. It celebrates the Jewish people's passage from slavery to freedom. Through the ages, it has also inspired people struggling for freedom, including the founders—the Founding Fathers of the United States. So it's a profound honor to host you, the leader of the free world, at this historic time in our ancient capital.

Mr. President, welcome to Israel. Welcome to Jerusalem.

*President Obama.* Thank you.

Well, thank you, Prime Minister Netanyahu, for your kind words and for your wonderful welcome here today. And I want to express a special thanks to Sara as well as your two sons for their warmth and hospitality. It was wonderful to see them. They are—I did inform the Prime Minister that they are very good-looking young men who clearly got their looks from their mother. [*Laughter*]

*Prime Minister Netanyahu.* Well, I can say the same of your daughters. [*Laughter*]

*President Obama.* This is true. Our goal is to improve our gene pool by marrying women who are better than we are.

Mr. Prime Minister, I want to begin by congratulating you on the formation of your new government. In the United States, we work hard to find agreement between our two major parties. Here in Israel, you have to find consensus among many more. And few legislatures can compete with the intensity of the Knesset. But all of this reflects the thriving nature of Israel's democracy.

As Bibi mentioned, this is our 10th meeting. We've spent more time together, working together, than I have with any leader. And this speaks to the closest—the closeness of our two nations, the interests and the values that we share, and the depth and breadth of the ties between our two peoples.

As leaders, our most solemn responsibility is the security of our people; that's job number one. My job as President of the United States, is—first and foremost, is to keep the American people safe. Bibi, as Prime Minister, your first task is to keep the people of Israel safe. And Israel's security needs are truly unique, as I've seen myself. In past trips, I've visited villages near the Blue Line. I've walked through Israeli homes devastated by Hizballah rockets. I've stood in Sderot and met with children who simply want to grow up free from fear. And flying in today, I saw again how Israel's security can be measured in mere miles and minutes.

As President, I've therefore made it clear America's commitment to the security of the State of Israel is a solemn obligation, and the security of Israel is nonnegotiable.

Today, our military and intelligence personnel cooperate more closely than ever before. We conduct more joint exercises and training than ever before. We're providing more security assistance and advanced technology to Israel than ever before. And that includes more support for the missile defenses like Iron Dome, which I saw today and which has saved so many Israeli lives.

In short—and I don't think this is just my opinion; I think, Bibi, you would share this—America's support for Israel's security is unprecedented, and the alliance between our nations has never been stronger.

That's the sturdy foundation we built on today as we addressed a range of shared challenges. As part of our long-term commitment to Israel's security, the Prime Minister and I agreed to begin discussions on extending military assistance to Israel. Our current agreement lasts through 2017, and we've directed our teams to start working on extending it for the years beyond.

I'm also pleased to announce that we will take steps to ensure that there's no interruption of funding for Iron Dome. As a result of decisions that I made last year, Israel will receive approximately \$200 million this fiscal year, and we will continue to work with Congress on future funding of Iron Dome. These are further reminders that we will help to preserve Israel's qualitative military edge so that Israel can defend itself, by itself, against any threat.

We also discussed the way forward to a two-state solution between Israelis and Palestinians. And I very much welcomed Bibi's words before I spoke. I'll be meeting with President Abbas tomorrow, and will—and I will have more to say on this topic in the speech that I deliver to the Israeli people tomorrow. But for now, let me just reiterate that a central element of a lasting peace must be a strong and secure Jewish state, where Israel's security concerns are met, alongside a sovereign and independent Palestinian state.

In this regard, I'd note that last year was a milestone: the first year in four decades when not a single Israeli citizen lost their life because of terrorism emanating from the West Bank. It's a reminder that Israel has a profound interest in a strong and effective Palestinian Authority. And as the Prime Minister's new government begins its work, we'll continue to look for steps that both Israelis and Palestinians can take to build trust and confidence upon which lasting peace will depend.

We also reaffirmed the importance of ensuring Israel's security given the changes and uncertainty in the region. As the United States supports the Egyptian people in their historic transition to democracy, we continue to underscore the necessity of Egypt contributing to regional security, preventing Hamas from rearming and upholding its peace treaty with Israel.

With respect to Syria, the United States continues to work with allies and friends and the Syrian opposition to hasten the end of Assad's rule, to stop the violence against the Syrian people, and begin a transition toward a new government that respects the rights of all its people.

Asad has lost his legitimacy to lead by attacking the Syrian people with almost every conventional weapon in his arsenal, including Scud missiles. And we have been clear that the use of chemical weapons against the Syrian people would be a serious and tragic mistake. We also share Israel's grave concern about the transfer of chemical or other weapon systems to terrorists—such as Hizballah—that might be used against Israel. The Asad regime must understand that they will be held accountable for the use of chemical weapons or their transfer to terrorists.

And finally, we continued our close consultation on Iran. We agree that a nuclear-armed Iran would be a threat to the region, a threat to the world, and potentially, an existential threat to Israel. And we agree on our goal. We do not have a policy of containment when it comes to a nuclear Iran. Our policy is to prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon.

We prefer to resolve this diplomatically, and there's still time to do so. Iran's leaders must understand, however, that they have to meet their international obligations. And meanwhile, the international community will continue to increase the pressure on the Iranian Government. The United States will continue to consult closely with Israel on next steps. And I will repeat: All options are on the table. We will do what is necessary to prevent Iran from getting the world's worst weapons.

Now, meeting none of these challenges will be easy. It will demand the same courage and resolve as those who have preceded us.

And on Friday, I'll be honored to visit Mount Herzl and pay tribute to the leaders and soldiers who have laid down their lives for Israel. One of them was Yoni Netanyahu. And in one of his letters home, he wrote to his family, "Don't forget, strength, justice, and staunch resolution are on our side, and that is a great deal."

Mr. Prime Minister, like families across Israel, you and your family have served and sacrificed to defend your country and to pass it, safe and strong, to your children just as it was passed on to you. Standing here today, I can say with confidence that Israel's security is

guaranteed because it has a great deal on its side, including the unwavering support of the United States of America.

### *Syria*

*Moderator.* The first question, Israel Channel 2, Udi Segal.

*Q.* Mr. President, may I ask you about Syria a practical question and a moral one? Morally, how is it possible that for the last 2 years, tens of thousands of innocent civilians are being massacred and no one—the world, the United States, and you—are doing anything to stop it immediately? On a practical level, you have said today and also in the past that the use of chemical weapons would be a crossing of a red line. It seems like this line was crossed yesterday. What specifically do you intend to do about it?

*President Obama.* I'll answer the question in reverse order, if you don't mind. I'll talk about the chemical weapons first and then the larger question.

With respect to chemical weapons, we intend to investigate thoroughly exactly what happened. Obviously, in Syria right now you've got a war zone. You have information that's filtered out, but we have to make sure that we know exactly what happened: what was the nature of the incident, what can we document, what can we prove. So I've instructed my teams to work closely with all other countries in the region and international organizations and institutions to find out precisely whether or not this red line was crossed.

I will note, without at this point having all the facts before me, that we know the Syrian Government has the capacity to carry out chemical weapon attacks. We know that there are those in the Syrian Government who have expressed a willingness to use chemical weapons, if necessary, to protect themselves. I am deeply skeptical of any claim that, in fact, it was the opposition that used chemical weapons. Everybody who knows the facts of the chemical weapon stockpiles inside Syria as well as the Syrian Government's capabilities, I think, would question those claims. But I know that they're floating out there right now.

The broader point is, is that once we establish the facts, I have made clear that the use of chemical weapons is a game changer. And I won't make an announcement today about next steps because I think we have to gather the facts. But I do think that when you start seeing weapons that can cause potential devastation and mass casualties and you let that genie out of the bottle, then you are looking potentially at even more horrific scenes than we've already seen in Syria. And the international community has to act on that additional information.

But I—as is always the case when it comes to issues of war and peace, I think having the facts before you act is very important.

More broadly, as I said in my opening statement, I believe that the Asad regime has lost all credibility and legitimacy. And I think Asad must go, and I believe he will go. It is incorrect for you to say that we have done nothing. We have helped to mobilize the isolation of the Asad regime internationally. We have supported and recognized the opposition. We have provided hundreds of millions of dollars in support for humanitarian aid. We have worked diligently with other countries in the region to provide additional tools to move towards a political transition within Syria.

If your suggestion is, is that I have not acted unilaterally militarily inside of Syria, well, the response has been—or my response would be that, to the extent possible, I want to make sure that we're working as an international community to deal with this problem because I think it's a world problem, not simply a United States problem or an Israel problem or a Turkish problem. It's a world problem when tens of thousands of people are being slaughtered, including innocent women and children.

And so we will continue to work in an international framework to try to bring about the kind of change that's necessary in Syria. Secretary Kerry has been working nonstop since he came into his current position to try to help mobilize and organize our overall efforts, and we will continue to push every lever that we have to try to bring about a resolution inside of Syria that respects the rights and the safety and

security of all people, regardless of whatever sectarian lines currently divide Syria.

Last point I'll make, which is probably obvious, is this is not easy. When you start seeing a civil war that has sectarian elements to it, and you've got a repressive Government that is intent on maintaining power, and you have mistrust that has broken out along sectarian lines, and you have an opposition that has not had the opportunity or time to organize itself both politically as well as militarily, then you end up seeing some of the devastation that you've been seeing. And we're going to do everything we can to continue to prevent it. And I know that the vast majority of our international partners feel the same way.

### Iran

*White House Press Secretary James F. "Jay" Carney.* From the White House press corps, Matt Spetalnick of Reuters.

*Q.* Yes, thank you. There was some friendly banter between you two gentlemen on the tarmac today about red lines, and I'm wondering how much of a serious matter that actually became in your talks and will be in your talks to come tonight. President Obama has said it will take Iran at least a year to build a bomb. That's months longer than the Prime Minister believes.

Mr. President, are you asking the Prime Minister to be more patient, to hold off for at least a year on any kind of military action against Iran?

Mr. Prime Minister, has President Obama's words, have they convinced you that he is putting forth the credible military threat that you have repeatedly asked for, or does he need to go further? Thank you.

*President Obama.* Bibi, why don't you go—take a first swing at this.

*Prime Minister Netanyahu.* Well, first of all, there are so many strips of different colors on the tarmac that we—[laughter]—we had a—we did have a joke about that. But obviously, this matter is no joke. It relates to our very existence and to something also that the President correctly identified as a grave strategic

threat to the United States and to the peace and security of the world.

I'm absolutely convinced that the President is determined to prevent Iran from getting nuclear weapons. I appreciate that. And I also appreciate something that he said, which I mentioned in my opening remarks, that the Jewish people have come back to their own country to be the masters of their own fate. And I appreciate the fact that the President has reaffirmed—more than any other President—Israel's right and duty to defend itself, by itself, against any threat. We just heard those important words now, and I think that sums up our, I would say, our common view.

Iran is a grave threat to Israel, a grave threat to the world—a nuclear Iran. The United States is committed to deal with it. Israel is committed to deal with it. We have different vulnerabilities obviously and different capabilities. We take that into account. But what we do maintain—and the President, I think, is the first to do so—is that Israel has a right to independently defend itself against any threat, including the Iranian threat.

*President Obama.* I think the only thing I would add is that our intelligence cooperation on this issue—the consultation between our militaries, our intelligence—is unprecedented, and there is not a lot of light—a lot of daylight between our countries' assessments in terms of where Iran is right now.

I think that what Bibi alluded to, which is absolutely correct, is each country has to make its own decisions when it comes to the awesome decision to engage in any kind of military action, and Israel is differently situated than the United States. And I would not expect that the Prime Minister would make a decision about his country's security and defer that to any other country, any more than the United States would defer our decisions about what was important for our national security.

I have shared with Bibi, as I've said to the entire world, as I've said to the Iranian people and Iranian leaders, that I think there is time to resolve this issue diplomatically. The question is, will Iranian leadership seize that opportunity? Will they walk through that door?

And it would be in everybody's interests—not just Israel's interests, not just the United States interests—it would be in the interest of the Iranian people if this gets resolved diplomatically. Because the truth of the matter is, is that the most permanent solution to the Iranian situation is ultimately going to be their decision that it is not worth it for them to pursue nuclear weapons. That will be the lasting change. If we can get that, that's good for everybody, including Iran, because it would allow them to break out of the isolation that has hampered their society and their economic development for many years.

But I don't know whether they're going to be willing to take that step. And obviously, their past behavior indicates that, in the words of—or a play on words on what Ronald Reagan said, we can't even trust yet, much less verify. But we do have to test the proposition that this can be resolved diplomatically. And if it can't, then I've repeated to Bibi what I've said publicly, and that is, is that we will leave all options on the table in resolving it.

Q. Mr. Prime Minister, do you agree or disagree with the President's 1-year assessment?

*Prime Minister Netanyahu.* We have another question.

*Moderator.* Channel 1 Israel, Ayala Hasson.

*President Obama's Visit to Israel/Arab-Israeli Peace Process*

Q. Thank you. Welcome, Mr. President. On your way back to Washington on Friday, what will you consider a successful visit? Convincing the Israeli leaders that they can rely on you on the Iranian issue, especially that they learned that there are differences between Israel and the United States concerning the enrichment of the uranium, or convincing both sides—Israelis and the Palestinians—to revive the floundering negotiation, reviving the peace process, the floundering peace process?

*President Obama.* Well, my main goal on this trip has been to have an opportunity to speak directly to the Israeli people at a time when obviously what was already a pretty tough neighborhood has gotten tougher and let them know that they've got a friend in the

United States, that we have your back; that we consider Israel's security of extraordinary importance to us, not just because of the bonds between our peoples, but also because of our own national security interests.

In that context, what I have also sought to achieve here is further consultations, building on what we've already discussed—as Bibi has just formed a new government, as I am entering my second term—that we continue to have close consultation around these—some of these shared interests that we've already discussed, Iran being obviously a prominent shared concern. I want to make sure that the Israeli people and the Israeli Government consistently understand my thinking and how I'm approaching this problem. And I want to understand how the Israeli Government and the Prime Minister is approaching this problem to make sure that there are no misunderstandings there.

With respect to the peace process, as I said, I'll have more to say about this tomorrow. But I think you are absolutely right that over the last year, year and a half, 2 years, 2½ years, we haven't gone forward. We haven't seen the kind of progress that we would like to see.

There's some elements of good news. I mean, the fact of the matter is, is that even with all that's been happening in the region, the Palestinian Authority has worked effectively in cooperation with the international community—in part, because of some of the training that we, the United States, provided—to do its part in maintaining security in the West Bank. We have seen some progress when it comes to economic development and opportunity for the Palestinian people.

But the truth of the matter is trying to bring this to some sort of clear settlement, a solution that would allow Israelis to feel as if they've broken out of the current isolation that they're in, in this region, that would allow the incredible economic growth that's taking place inside this country to be a model for trade and commerce and development throughout the region at a time when all these other countries need technology and commerce and jobs for their young people; for Palestinians to feel a sense

that they, too, are masters of their own fate; for Israel to feel that the possibilities of rockets raining down on their families has diminished—that kind of solution we have not yet seen.

And so what I want to do is listen, hear from Prime Minister Netanyahu—tomorrow I'll have a chance to hear from Abu Mazen—to get a sense from them, how do they see this process moving forward. What are the possibilities and what are the constraints, and how can the United States be helpful? And I purposely did not want to come here and make some big announcement that might not match up with what the realities and possibilities on the ground are. I wanted to spend some time listening before I talked, which my mother always taught me was a good idea.

And so, hopefully, I'll consider it a success if when I go back on Friday, I'm able to say to myself, I have a better understanding of what the constraints are, what the interests of the various parties are, and how the United States can play a constructive role in bringing about a lasting peace and two states living side by side in peace and security. Thank you.

#### *Arab-Israeli Peace Process*

*Press Secretary Carney.* Chuck Todd, from NBC.

Q. Thank you, Mr. President, Mr. Prime Minister.

Mr. President, I want to follow up a little bit on the peace process. You began your term, your first term, big fanfare: the Cairo speech to talk to the Muslim world, the decision to have a Middle East envoy early. You said you weren't going to let this slip to your second term. We're in your second term with the Middle East peace process. What went wrong? Why are we further away from a two-state solution? I know you said you want to talk more about this tomorrow, but I am curious to—what do you believe went wrong? Did you push Israel too hard? What do you wish you would have done differently?

And, Mr. Prime Minister, I want to help out my colleague over here on the follow-up that he had, which had to do with, do you accept

the President's understanding that Iran is a year away when it comes to nuclear weapons? And a question—another question I had for you—

*President Obama.* How many have you got? Do you guys do this in the Israeli press? You say you get one question, and then you add, like, five?

Q. Well, I'm helping him. I'm helping him with his follow-up.

*President Obama.* You see how the young lady from Channel 1, she had one question. She was very well behaved, Chuck.

Q. I had that one for you and—[laughter].

*Prime Minister Netanyahu.* These are computed questions they have. [Laughter]

Q. Apparently. I thought I had four questions.

*Prime Minister Netanyahu.* Reiterations.

Q. Passover starts in a couple of days. [Laughter] I get four questions, right?

*Prime Minister Netanyahu.* Look, this is not a kosher question, but don't hog it. [Laughter]

Q. I guess my question to you was going to be, why do you believe the Israeli people have not embraced President Obama the same way they embraced our last two U.S. Presidents? Thank you.

*President Obama.* Oh, so you had to get a polling question in there right at the end? [Laughter] Chuck, I mean, you're just incorrigible. [Laughter]

Well, look, the opening premise of your question was that having failed to achieve peace in the Middle East in my first term, that I must have screwed up somehow. And I will tell you I hope I'm a better President now than when I first came into office, but my commitment was not to achieve a peace deal in my first year or in my second year or my third year. That would have been nice. What I said was I was not going to wait to start on the issue until my second term, because I thought it was too important. And that's exactly what I did.

I'm absolutely sure that there are a host of things that I could have done that would have been more deft and would have created better optics. But ultimately, this is a really hard problem. It's been lingering for over six decades. And the parties involved have some

profound interests that you can't spin, you can't smooth over. And it is a hard slog to work through all of these issues.

I will add that both parties also have politics, just like we do back home. There are a whole bunch of things that I'd like to do back in the United States that I didn't get done in my first term. And I'm sure I could have been more deft there as well. But some of it's just because it's hard, and people disagree, and it takes, I think, a confluence of both good diplomatic work, but also timing, serendipity, things falling into place at the right time, the right players feeling that this is the moment to seize it.

And my goal here is just to make sure that the United State is a positive force in trying to create those opportunities as frequently as possible and to be as clear as possible as to why we think that this is an important priority, not only because of some Pollyannaish views about can't we all get along and hold hands and sing "Kumbaya," but because I actually believe that Israel's security will be enhanced with a resolution to this issue. I believe that Palestinians will prosper and can channel their extraordinary energies and entrepreneurship in more positive ways with a resolution to this issue. The entire region, I think, will be healthier with a resolution to this issue.

So I'm going to keep on making that argument. And I will admit that, frankly, sometimes, it would be easier not to make the argument and to avoid the question, precisely because it's hard. That's not the approach that I've tried to take.

And there have probably been times where, when I've made statements about what I think needs to happen, the way it gets filtered through our press, it may be interpreted in ways that get Israelis nervous, just like there are folks back home who sometimes get nervous about areas where they aren't sure exactly where I stand on things. That's why I always like the opportunity to talk directly to you guys. Hopefully, you'll show the live film, as opposed to the edited version.

With that, I think you've got four questions to answer, Bibi. [*Laughter*]

*Prime Minister Netanyahu.* I think that there's a misunderstanding about time. If Iran decides to go for a nuclear weapon—that is, to actually manufacture the weapon—then it probably—then it would take them about a year. I think that's correct. They could defer that a long time, but still get through the enrichment process. That is, to make a weapon, you need two things; You need enriched uranium of a critical amount, and then you need a weapon. You can't have the weapon without the enriched uranium, but you can have the enriched uranium without the weapon.

Iran right now is enriching uranium. It will—it's pursuing it. It hasn't yet reached the red line that I had described in my speech at the U.N.; they're getting closer though.

And the question of manufacturing the weapon is a different thing. The President said correctly that we have—on these issues that are a little arcane; they sound a little detailed to you—but on these matters we share information and we have a common assessment. We have a common assessment.

In any case, Iran gets to an immunity zone when they get through the enrichment process, in our view—in our view—and whatever time is left, there's not a lot of time. And every day that passes diminishes it. But we do have a common assessment. On these schedules, on intelligence, we share that intelligence, and we don't have any argument about it. I think it's important to state that clearly.

I think that people should get to know President Obama the way I've gotten to know him. And I think you've just heard something that is very meaningful. It may have escaped you, but it hasn't escaped me. And that is, the President announced that in addition to all the aid that his administration has provided—including Iron Dome, including defense funding for Israel during very difficult times—he has announced that we are going to begin talks on another 10-year process arrangement to ensure American military assistance to Israel. I think this is very significant.

And I want to express my thanks for everything that you have done. And I want to thank

you also for that statement you just made. I think it's very, very important.

So I think Israelis will judge this by the unfolding events and by what is happening, what is actually taking place. And for this, you know, there's a very simple answer to your question—the gentleman from NBC, right? Yes. Well, for this, you need, you see, a second term as President and a third term as Prime Minister. That really fixes things. [Laughter]

*President Obama.* All right, thank you very much, everybody.

NOTE: The President's news conference began at 8:30 p.m. on the patio of the Prime Minister's Residence. In his remarks, the President referred to Yair and Avner Netanyahu, sons of Prime Minister Netanyahu; President Mahmoud Abbas of the Palestinian Authority; and President Bashar al-Asad of Syria. A reporter referred to former U.S. Special Envoy for Middle East Peace George J. Mitchell.

## The President's News Conference With President Mahmoud Abbas of the Palestinian Authority in Ramallah, West Bank March 21, 2013

*President Abbas.* In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate.

Mr. President Barack Obama, I wish to warmly welcome you and the accompanying delegation to Palestine.

Mr. President, during your visit to our country, you will meet a people proud of their history, heritage, culture, and symbols; a young, creative, and entrepreneurial people who have made the miracle and arose from the calamities of the Nakba and continue the path of their ancestors, extending since the ancient times over this land, their land; a people who adhere to their rights and are in harmony and keep abreast with the realities of the age, its language and methods; a people who build institutions of the state of Palestine, giving an exemplary model despite all hardships and hurdles.

The people of Palestine, Mr. President, who receive you today aspire to attain their simplest rights—the right to freedom, independence, and peace—and look forward to that day to come quickly in which they exercise normal and natural life over the land of the state of Palestine—the independent state of Palestine—along the borders of the 4th of June, 1967, with Jerusalem, the “Lady of the Cities,” as its capital, alongside the State of Israel.

We, Mr. President, believe that peace is necessary and inevitable, and we also believe that it is possible. We believe that peacemak-

ing—and as much as it requires, political courage—also requires an expression of good faith, a recognition of people's rights, respect for the other, and dissemination of a culture of peace and the commitment to international legitimacy and its resolutions. Certainly, peace shall not be made through violence, occupation, walls, settlements, arrests, siege, and denial of refugee rights.

We are extremely in pleasure to receive you today in our country. Our people share with American people—and with you personally—the belief in the values and principles of freedom, equality, justice, and respect for human rights. And we, together with the peoples of the world, are partners in the pursuit to achieve a just peace that ends occupation and war and achieves security, stability, and prosperity to all the peoples of our region.

Today, ladies and gentlemen, we have conducted a good and useful round of talks with His Excellency President Obama. It was an opportunity to focus, on our side, on the risks—and the disastrous risks—that the continuation of settlement activity represent on this two-state solution and over the need to release prisoners.

I asserted to His Excellency the President that Palestine has taken long and additional steps for the sake of making peace. I hereby assert again that we are ready to implement all our commitments and obligations and to