

the folks who rallied around her, Americans all across this country who, when they saw neighbors and friends or strangers in need, came to help. And people who today still spend their time every day helping others: rolling up their sleeves, doing the hard work of changing this country without the need for credit or the need for glory; don't get their name in the papers, don't see their day in the sun, do it because it's right.

These Americans live the basic values that define this country, the value that we've been reminded of in these past 10 years as we've come back from a crisis that changed this city and an economic crisis that spread throughout the Nation: the basic notion that I am my brother's keeper and I am my sister's keeper and that we look out for each other and that we're all in this together.

That's the story of New Orleans, but that's also the story of America: a city that, for almost 300 years, has been the gateway to America's soul. Where the jazz makes you cry, the funerals make you dance—[laughter]—the bayou makes you believe all kinds of things. [Laughter] A place that has always brought together people of all races and religions and languages. And everybody adds their culture and their flavor into this city's gumbo. You remind our Nation that for all of our differences, in the end,

what matters is, we're all in the same boat. We all share a similar destiny.

If we stay focused on that common purpose, if we remember our responsibility to ourselves, but also our responsibilities and obligations to one another, we will not just rebuild this city, we will rebuild this country. We'll make sure not just these young men, but every child in America has a structure and support and love and the kind of nurturing that they need to succeed. We'll leave behind a city and a nation that's worthy of generations to come.

That's what you've gotten started. Now we've got to finish the job.

Thank you. God bless you. God bless America. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 4 p.m. at the Andrew P. Sanchez and Copelin-Byrd Multi-Purpose Center. In his remarks, he referred to Michelle Gobert, president, Signs Now; Donna Brazile, vice chair of voter registration and participation, Democratic National Committee; Willie Mae Seaton, founder, Willie Mae's Scotch House restaurant; musicians Troy "Trombone Shorty" Andrews and Malcolm J. "Dr. John" Rebennack, Jr.; and Victor York-Carter, Garland Sipper, Caswick Naverro, and Denzel Shine, participants in a "My Brother's Keeper" affiliate program, who had lunch with the President.

Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session During a Live Webcast on the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action To Prevent Iran From Obtaining a Nuclear Weapon

August 28, 2015

Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations Chairman Stephen M. Greenberg. Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. I'm Stephen Greenberg, and I'm privileged to be here at the White House. I'm the chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations. To my right is Michael Siegal. Michael is the chair of the Board of Trustees of the Jewish Federations of North America. And sitting next to him is the individual we are most privileged to have

address us today, the President of the United States, Barack Obama.

Mr. President, I can equivocally state to you that our entire community is united in its desire to ensure—ensure—that Iran never acquire a nuclear weapon. We know, sir, that that's a goal that you have personally declared. And we also know it's one that's shared by all the Members of Congress and the American people. So, sir, whatever differences may exist as to how best to achieve that

goal, they're neither political, nor are they personal.

Mr. President, we all want to, and we must, emerge from this process united. We must reaffirm our commitment to that special relationship between the United States and the Israeli people and the Israeli Government. We must be vigilant, totally vigilant, in our fight against global terrorism and all of its supporters. And we certainly, sir, must dedicate ourselves to making sure that Iran complies with all the requirements in the agreement, U.S. law, and U.N. regulations.

Mr. President, people of good will may differ on the approach, but never the objective. There's just too much at stake. We're so grateful to you that you've taken the time to speak today to leaders and members of the Jewish community, as we continue to educate and inform our constituents about this most critical issue.

Ladies and gentlemen, it is my honor to present the President of the United States, Barack Obama.

The President. Well, Steve, thank you very much. Thank you, Michael. And I think the approach I'm going to take is to make some informal remarks at the top, and then I want to spend most of the time hearing from some of the questions that have already been submitted. But I really want to thank the Conference, the Federations, for helping to host this.

And I know you've already had a chance to hear from the Secretary of Energy, Ernie Moniz, who went through, no doubt, many of the technical aspects of the deal that has been shaped by the P5-plus-1. What I want to do is just step back and remind everybody how we got here.

When I ran for office, I made a series of commitments, series of promises to the American people. One of those commitments was that Iran would not get a nuclear weapon. Another commitment was that I would do everything in my power as President of the United States to preserve the unbreakable bond between the United States and Israel and to ensure Israel's security.

A third commitment was that, given the lessons of the previous decade, I would never hesitate to use military force where necessary to protect America, its friends and allies around the world, but that I would always first try a diplomatic approach, not only because war inevitably creates unintended consequences and great pain and hardship, but also because sometimes, diplomacy is more effective in achieving our goals.

And the deal that the P5-plus-1 has struck accomplishes each of those promises and commitments that I made when I ran for office. I know that many people who are listening know the basic outlines of the deal, but I just want to reiterate the core of it.

This deal blocks every way, every pathway that Iran might take in order to obtain a nuclear weapon. It makes sure that the centrifuges that are currently in Natanz are removed, except for a handful, and it makes sure that they cannot immediately use more advanced centrifuges to build up their capacity to create enriched uranium that might be diverted into a weapons program.

The underground facility of Fordow is converted into a research facility and no longer will have in it centrifuges that could be used to create nuclear weapons or nuclear materials and might be difficult to reach. The heavy-water facility at Arak that, if struck by a missile, could create a plume and, thereby, is more difficult to deal with, that is going to be reconfigured.

So you have the existing facilities being transformed. You have a commitment in which stockpiles of highly enriched uranium are being shipped out. We create then a verification and inspection mechanism across the entire nuclear production chain within Iran that is unprecedented, more rigorous than anything that has ever been negotiated in the history of nuclear nonproliferation.

And we also preserve the capacity to snap back all of the various sanctions provisions that we put in place very systematically—my administration working in concert with our partners over the last 5 years, sanctions that ultimately brought Iran to the table—we have the

capacity to snap those back in the event that Iran cheats or does not abide by the terms of the deal.

So what we have done is, for the first 10 years, essentially restricted Iran's capacity not just to weaponize nuclear power, but we severely constrained any nuclear program, peaceful or militarized. After 10 years, they're able to obtain some additional advanced centrifuges, but they continue to have to be carefully monitored in terms of the stockpiles that they produce.

And even critics of this deal acknowledge that for the first 15 years or so, we have extended the breakout time so that not only are we on them, constantly observing what they're doing, but if they decided that they wanted to break the deal, we would have ample time to respond in ways that prevented them from getting a nuclear weapon. The breakout time would be significantly longer than it is right now.

So, because of the stringency of the deal, the vast majority of experts on nuclear proliferation have endorsed this deal. The world is more or less united, with some significant exceptions, obviously, the State of Israel and perhaps others less publicly, around the deal. You have seen people who are unlikely bedfellows—Brent Scowcroft and Elizabeth Warren—endorse the deal. [*Laughter*] And we have said to Members of Congress, we are prepared to answer every single question and provide exhaustive hearings on every element of this.

The criticisms of the deal have really come down to a few buckets, and maybe I'll just address those very quickly upfront. Number one, people have said that, well, Iran will cheat. They're not trustworthy. And I keep on emphasizing, we don't trust Iran. Iran is antagonistic to the United States. It is anti-Semitic. It has denied the Holocaust. It has called for the destruction of Israel. It is an unsavory regime. But this deal doesn't rely on trust, it relies on verification and our capacity to catch them when they cheat and to respond vigorously if they do. And it's precisely because we are not counting on the nature of the regime to change that it's so important for us to make sure that

they don't have a nuclear weapon. And this is the best way to do it.

A second argument I've heard is, well, they are going to, in 15 years, have the ability to break out, and they'll be more powerful. But in fact, we're not giving away anything in this deal in terms of our capacity to respond if they choose to cheat. We are not giving up our ability to respond militarily. We're not giving up our ability to impose sanctions. Any of the tools that critics of the deal are suggesting we could be applying now we'll be able to apply in 15 years. But we'll have the advantage of a deal that the entire world has ratified, that Iran has committed to, saying that it's not going to have a nuclear weapon. We will have—have purchased 15 years of familiarity with their program so that we know exactly what's going on. And so anybody sitting in my chair 15 years from now will be in a much stronger position to respond if they at that point decide to break out than a President would next year or the year after.

Number three, people have suggested that this will give a windfall to Iran and they will be able to conduct more terrorist activity and destabilizing activity in the region. I want to make sure people have some perspective here. Iran's defense budget is \$15 billion a year. By comparison, ours is around \$600 billion. Because of the unprecedented partnership we have with Israel, Israel has a much stronger military. Our Gulf partners spend eight times as much money as Iran does on their military.

So Iran is a regional power; it's not a superpower. The money that they're obtaining is the money that has been frozen under sanctions. They will get about \$56 billion back, but they're going to have to spend that to prop up an economy that's been crushed by our sanctions. Their economy will improve modestly, but there's no analysis that's been done by our experts that suggests that they are going to have a qualitatively different capacity to engage in some of the nefarious activities that they've done before.

That's not to say that those aren't very serious issues. We have to stop Iran from getting missiles to Hizballah that threaten Israel. We

have to stop their destabilizing activities using proxies in other parts of the region. But to do that requires us to better coordinate with our partners, improve our intelligence, improve—continue to build on things like Iron Dome that protect populations from missiles coming in over the border. And those are all things that we have to do anyway. We're in a much better position to do it if we also know in the meantime that Iran doesn't have a nuclear weapon. That's the one game changer, and that's why it has to be our number-one priority.

So I'll—let me just close this initial set of comments by saying something about the U.S.-Israel relationship that you raised, Steve. The bond between the United States and Israel is not political. It's not based on alliances of convenience. It is something that grows out of family ties and bonds that stretch back generations and shared values and shared commitments and shared beliefs in democracy. And like all families, sometimes, there are going to be disagreements, and sometimes, people get angrier about disagreements in families than they do with folks who aren't family. I understand that. But we've repeatedly throughout the history of the United States and Israel had times where the U.S. administration and the Israeli Government had disagreements, and that does not affect the core commitments that we have to each other.

And throughout my administration, even my fiercest critics in Israel would acknowledge that we've maintained unprecedented military cooperation, unprecedented intelligence coordination. We have not only maintained, but enhanced, the degree of military assistance that we provide, including helping to fund things like the Iron Dome program that has protected and saved lives inside of Israel.

And what I have said repeatedly is that as soon as this particular debate is over, my hope is, is that the Israeli Government will immediately want to rejoin conversations that we had started long before about how we can continue to improve and enhance Israel's security in a very troubled neighborhood.

But what I would emphasize is that the commitment to Israel is sacrosanct and it is nonpar-

tisan. It always has been, and it always will be. And I would suggest that, in terms of the tone of this debate, everybody keep in mind that we're all pro-Israel. We're all pro-U.S.-Israel. And we have to make sure that we don't impugn people's motives even as we have what is a very serious debate about how best to protect the United States, Israel, and the world community from a potentially destabilizing Iranian nuclear weapon.

So, with that, why don't I open it up for some questions?

Debate Over Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action To Prevent Iran From Obtaining a Nuclear Weapon

Jewish Federations of North America Board of Trustees Chair Michael D. Siegal. Thank you, Mr. President. It's my honor to represent the thousands of very concerned members of our community, to have this opportunity to talk to you about the Iranian deal. As you can imagine, we have thousands of viewers and thousands of questions that have been submitted. And we've read them all, believe it or not. [Laughter] I don't know that I've read them all, but we've read them all. And as you might suggest and assume, there's quite a divergence of opinion on this issue—

The President. Yes.

Mr. Siegal. —and its implications, but there are some clear themes.

So I would say—and ask you—it's been over a month since you announced the agreement with Iran, and those who support it and those who are against it have made their views known at this point. And in the debate, there has been heated rhetoric from both sides that has crossed the acceptable lines of even tough political discourse.

So American Jewish supporters of the deal have been called ugly names, while opponents have accused—have been accused of warmongering and worse. And so many of these allegations come with, sort of, deep anti-Semitic undertones. Needless to say, this uncivil rhetoric has made our community very uncomfortable.

During your time in office, you have been clear about your opposition to anti-Semitism in

all of its repugnant forms. So, Mr. President, what is your reaction to the use of this hateful rhetoric? And what can we do collectively to elevate the dialogue?

The President. Well, Michael, as I mentioned, I think that people of good will can come down on different sides of this issue, although I would challenge a little bit the notion that there has been sort of an equivalence on both sides of heated rhetoric.

I—the truth of the matter is, is that when Jerry Nadler, for example—a person who, for personal reasons, but also political integrity, has consistently stood by Israel—is attacked in ways that are appalling, a man of conscience who was—had the courage to oppose the Iraq vote at a time when that was very unpopular and was proven right, that is the kind of stuff that I think people have to be deeply concerned about.

Those who support the deal I think have—certainly my administration and me—have tried to stay focused on what we think are the logical conclusions and facts based on the nature of the deal and what alternatives are available.

And at no point have I ever suggested, for example, that somebody is a warmonger, meaning they want war. What I have said—and I—this I don't apologize for—is that if this deal is rejected, if we do not have this mechanism that nuclear experts around the world have said is unprecedented and severely constrains Iran's program, then there have to be alternatives. There has to be a better way to accomplish our goal of making sure Iran doesn't have a nuclear weapon.

Critics have suggested that that doesn't have to mean military actions. We could, for example, just impose unilateral sanctions and double down and squeeze Iran harder. The problem there is, is that we actually have experience of unilateral sanctions without the support of the world community. That's what was happening before I came into office, and it didn't work. Iran accelerated its nuclear program unimpeded because we did not have global cooperation.

My administration cobbled together that global cooperation, and it was premised on the notion that if in fact we got a deal that prevents Iran from getting a nuclear weapon, then those sanctions would be lifted. If now we rejected the opinion of the world community, then it is unlikely—and this is not just my opinion; you've heard it from Ambassadors from these countries—that they would maintain those sanctions. So that does not end up being an option.

Once you've cut off those options—the deal that I'm proposing and the ability to maintain long-term sanctions of the sort that we put in place previously—then at that point, we really don't have options because we're already at a point where Iran's breakout time is relatively short and we're kind of flying blind. And the logical conclusion then is, is that for any President—me or my successor—to make sure that Iran is getting a nuclear weapon, I'm going to have to resort to some sort of military action because there aren't going to be a lot of other options available to us, not many tools left in the toolkit.

And I make that point, Michael, because that's not to suggest that opponents of this deal want war. What it is, is a sober analysis of what options we have available to us and why it's so important, I think, for us to get behind this deal and not pretend that there are other easier options that are available to us.

But in all this debate, what's important to remember is, is that we're all pro-Israel and we're all family. And the Jewish Members in Congress who are supporting this deal—I don't need to give you their biographies—I think they feel a commitment to Israel and having knowledge of the Jewish history that rivals anyone else's. And those in my administration who care deeply about this issue and who are supporting this deal, their motives shouldn't be questioned.

And those who oppose it, my view is, is that they have a sincere concern because, just as the people in Iran—Israel have a sincere concern, when you have a regime that denies the Holocaust, that's going to make you worried. You've got to take that seriously. And so I rec-

ognize where the anxieties come from. But I think that it's important for us to remember the bonds that hold us together more than—that go well beyond this particular issue.

Israel-U.S. Security Cooperation/Israel-U.S. Relations

Mr. Siegal. Thank you. I wanted to expand a little bit on a comment you made in your remarks about the divisiveness that's been going on. It's been divisive in Congress. It's been divisive in the Jewish community and, to some degree, across America. And so—and it's been obviously to some degree some concern about the divisiveness between the United States and the Israel relationship, maybe just at the governmental level.

But regardless of how the vote takes place, many of the viewers are concerned about the disagreements; that the deal may have created some distance—we've heard about that; you commented on it—between the governments of the United States and Israel. And our community gets very, very unsettled and very anxious when there is daylight between our positions. And so, while we have received hundreds of questions on this in this regard, what I'd like to ask you—and you made a comment about how do we reenergize and how do we recreate the dialogue that was occurring before this deal—so how do you see us reenergizing the relationship between Israel and the United States?

The President. I'll be honest with you, I think this is going to happen pretty quick, because we both have a shared interest in not just preventing Iran from getting a nuclear weapon, but also making sure that they're not sending weapons to Hizballah, that they're not destabilizing—that Iran is not destabilizing its neighbors. So not only do we have a shared history, shared values, not only are we family, but even on this particular issue of Iran, we agree more than we disagree.

And so, as I indicated earlier, we've been in discussions with the Israeli Government for months now about the importance of us getting back on track in working together to enhance our security cooperation, to think about,

what are the next generations of missile defense programs that we can set up? How do we improve our intelligence and interdiction to prevent arms from being sent to terrorist organizations? How do we counteract Iranian proxies in the region? And those are all things that we should be doing anyway, even if we weren't having this debate on the Iranian deal.

I've heard some suggest that the reason I'm calling for all this enhanced cooperation is to compensate for the fact that Iran is going to be more dangerous after this deal. Nothing could be further from the truth. These are things that I've been suggesting we need to be doing consistently. And we will be much safer once this deal is in place and we know that Iran is not getting a nuclear weapon. But it doesn't solve all the problems that we have with Iran. And Israel knows that; we know that. So those conversations, I think, will move rapidly, and I think they will move smoothly.

In terms of differences generally between the U.S. Government and the Israeli Government, I've said this before. Sometimes, I've got—I have arguments with friends, and sometimes, I have different views. What I've found after 54 years on this Earth is that my best friends are the ones who I can be honest with. And if I think that they're wrong on something, I've got to be able to say it. And if they think I'm wrong, they've got to be able to give voice to it. That's what being good friends means.

And I know that sometimes that makes it difficult for members of the Jewish community because, as you said, the preference is no daylight, and that means no arguments. But that actually can be dangerous itself if it leads us to make bad decisions that ultimately are bad for the national security of both countries. Better to air these things out even if it's sometimes uncomfortable, as long as the tone is civil and as long as we keep our eye on the big picture, which is, the fates of our two countries are always going to be intertwined.

Israel-U.S. Security Cooperation

Mr. Siegal. Great. Thank you, Mr. President. On that we have—as you indicated, we're all aware of the very bad neighborhood that

exists around Israel and how the noose seems to be getting a little bit tighter. You wrote to Congress recently, and we received many questions regarding the issue of the neighborhood and the threats of the neighborhood. So we have a question from Randall Meacham of Durham, North Carolina, who says—

The President. Great town.

Mr. Siegal. Yes, it's a—it really is. Good colleges. It says: "Will America continue to help Israel maintain its strategic and qualitative military edge in the region?"

The President. Yes. That's always been a priority of ours. That's a central policy of the United States, through both Democratic and Republican administrations. My administration, as I said before, has consistently applied that principle in concrete ways, and we'll continue to do so. We think it's very important that our strongest ally in the region, our closest friend, is able to protect itself. And I know that that's something that I've had repeated conversations with Prime Minister Netanyahu about.

It's not just that the United States will come to the aid of our friends and neighbors. I think in light of the tragic history of the Jewish people, there is a legitimate and understandable desire on the part of Israel to make sure that it can protect itself from whatever threats may arise. And that's why the QME—the qualitative military edge—is so important. And that's why you've had bipartisan support for the concrete manifestations of that, in weapons systems, in military aid. And there are a host of consultations that have already been taking place on that that will continue long into the future.

Iran's Nuclear Program

Mr. Siegal. Thank you for your answer on that one. We have another question from one of our viewers, a Donald Ashkenazi, from Great Neck, New York, who wants to know the risks of the deal. So you've got four questions, much like our Passover Seder has four questions, which I know you do at the White House.

The President. Absolutely.

Mr. Siegal. I haven't been invited, but okay.

The President. Well—[laughter].

Mr. Siegal. It says: "Aren't you concerned"—so I'll read them—"aren't you concerned that after 15 years, Iran will have access to the highly enriched uranium that they need to build a nuclear weapon—one of the things you talked about? Do you worry at that time that Iran might build as large a nuclear infrastructure as they want? What about others in the region? And do you expect that others will also insist on building comparable nuclear infrastructures? And then lastly, and importantly, how does this deal reduce the risk of nuclear proliferation in the region?"

The President. Good. One thing that might be helpful is to understand, sort of, what a lot of this argument has been about. I think that in the best of all worlds, Iran would have no nuclear infrastructure whatsoever. There wouldn't be a single nut, bolt, building, nuclear scientist, uranium mine anywhere inside of Iran. And that, I suppose, would be the single guarantee that Iran never has a nuclear weapon, unless it purchased one, of course, from North Korea—

Mr. Siegal. Right.

The President. —which it could also do.

Unfortunately, that's not a reality that's attainable. And those who say they want a better deal, that this isn't a good deal and they want a better deal, typically mean that not only do they want Iran not to have nuclear weapons, but they don't want them to have any nuclear program at all, even a peaceful one.

The problem is, is that even Iranians who oppose this regime believe that Iran should have the right for—to peaceful nuclear programs. The world community—not just the Russians or the Chinese, but the Europeans, the Indians, the Japanese, others—they all believe that under the Non-Proliferation Treaty, you are allowed to have peaceful nuclear power. You just can't have a weapon.

So this deal is designed to essentially put Iran in the penalty box for the first 15 years, where even its peaceful nuclear program is severely constrained. After 15 years, assuming they've abided by that deal, they can then start opening up their peaceful nuclear program.

But their prohibition on weaponizing nuclear power, that continues in perpetuity and will continue to be monitored by the toughest inspection regime that exists under the current international rules, called the Additional Protocol. And we'll still be monitoring it very carefully, and we will have had 15 years of knowledge about what their program is.

Now, is it possible that at the end of 15 years, they now start introducing some more advanced centrifuges and, at some point, they feel comfortable enough, cocky enough, where they say to themselves, now is the time for us to break out, we're going to kick out all the IAEA inspectors, we're going to announce that we're going to pursue a nuclear weapon? Is that possible? Absolutely. Just as it's possible that they could have done that next week if we hadn't had this deal. The question then becomes, have we given up any ability to respond forcefully? And as I indicated in my opening remarks, we will have not given anything at all.

When I came into office, I talked to the Pentagon to say, it's not enough for us just to beat our chest and rattle our sabers. Do we have specific plans in terms of how we would respond if necessary to Iran dashing for the goal line in getting a nuclear weapon? And we prepared and made sure that we could respond. And we have shared a lot of information with our Israeli partners and our other partners in the region about our confidence in our capacity to respond. A President of the United States 15 years from now is not going to be in a worse position to respond, he'll be in a stronger position, or she will be in a stronger position, to respond. And so that's something that I feel great confidence about.

The alternative—I've never understood the logic that says, because there may be issues that we have to deal with 15 years from now, we should reject a deal that ensures us for 15 years not having a nuclear-weaponized Iran. And we now are in a situation in which they could break out next year, without inspectors on the ground to monitor effectively, without the international constraints that this deal provides, and forcing us or the Israelis to make that same decision, isolated, without interna-

tional legitimacy, and in a situation where even the best estimates suggest that, at best, a military approach at this juncture would probably forestall a determined Iran for a year or two from getting a nuclear weapon.

Iran's Support of Terrorism

Mr. Siegal. Thank you. So you've mentioned a few times and I want to expand a little bit on about what you've said about Iran being an untrustworthy partner in the agreement. As we've seen even post the agreement, we've seen the Ayatollah spew just hateful rhetoric against America, against Israel, against yourself, personally, as it turns out. [*Laughter*] And so, in the agreement, right, there's sort of this immediate financial relief that occurs—

The President. Well, it's not immediate. The way this works is, is that they're going to have to effectively shut down Fordow as it's currently configured, the underground facility; take out the majority of the centrifuges in Natanz, the aboveground facility; entirely convert the heavy-water reactor at Arak; put in place the inspection—they've got to perform across the board, which will take them months before they then get relief.

Mr. Siegal. All right, it—so technically they have to have certain actions and behaviors.

The President. Well, these are big actions.

Mr. Siegal. Not to diminish their actions.

The President. They're getting rid of 98 percent of their stockpile. Go ahead.

Mr. Siegal. But there is financial relief—

The President. Yes.

Mr. Siegal. —as well as perhaps billions of dollars of additional commercial contracts that will come their way. Somewhere during the agreement—I think it's after 8 years—they get a conventional weapon, kind of, relief from the United Nations, as well as, as we've seen, after the expiration of time, they could do some unfettered things that we don't like. And nothing in the agreement it seems to require them to change any of their bad behavior that they're doing.

So we have a specific question from one of our audiences—I apologize for that.

The President. No problem.

Mr. Siegal. So, from Terry Rosenberg from Boston. She asks: “Mr. President, what can be done about Iranian behavior and their support of terrorism, now and in the future, and what will transform—what do you believe will really transform Iran to become a more responsible global player?”

The President. Well, first of all, I think it’s important—because there was a lot of stuff in that question—

Mr. Siegal. Yes.

The President. —so I want to unpack some of it. Nothing in this agreement prevents us from continuing to push back forcefully against terrorist activity, support for terrorist proxies in the region, destabilizing activities in the region. We are not normalizing relations with Iran here. [*Laughter*]

What we are doing is taking one game-changing problem—them getting a nuclear weapon—and moving that off the board. But we are still going to be maintaining our own sanctions for Iranian violations of human rights and terrorism. Those don’t go away. We are still going to not only be able to enforce our own sanctions, but U.N. sanctions, that are separate and apart from any nuclear sanctions, about Iran sending weapons to Hizballah or other terrorist organizations that have been designated. We’re still going to have all the tools in our toolbox to go after nefarious activities by Iran in the region.

Now, do I hope that by virtue of Iran having greater commercial interactions with the world and students’ exchanges taking place and perhaps a generation of Iranian leadership changing, do I hope that the character of the regime changes? Absolutely. But I’m not counting on it.

Being for this deal does not involve pie-in-the-sky hopes about Iran. We will retain all the tools that we have to go after them. What we can’t do is, because this deal doesn’t solve all of the problems about Iranian behavior, give up our most powerful opportunity to deal with a major part of the Iranian portfolio that would present huge problems for us, and that is them getting a nuclear weapon.

So does this deal solve every problem that we have with Iran? Not even close. Does it

solve the biggest one that would cause what Prime Minister Netanyahu and others called an existential threat to Israel? That it does do. And does it ensure that—does it best ensure that we’re in a position to identify what Iran is doing on its nuclear program and prevent it from weaponizing and maintaining a nonproliferation regime in the region, around the world? It does.

Enforcement of the Iran Nuclear Agreement/Interim Agreement To Prevent Iran From Developing a Nuclear Weapon

Mr. Siegal. Thank you for your answer on that one. So we’ve received many questions about consequences and consequences if Iran doesn’t keep its end of the deal. After all, the clarity in terms of penalties for lawbreaking is a basic tenet of the American legal system. Mr. President, Mr. Mel Arnoff from California asks, “Please explain the details behind the snapback of sanctions and help us understand how the United States and its allies will effectively enforce consequences for the various infractions.”

The President. This is one of the unique features of this deal. The way our negotiators structured this, we don’t have to have agreement from China or Russia or even our European partners. If we determined that Iran has violated this agreement, we are in a position to reimpose all of the multilateral sanctions, not just U.S. sanctions, but the sanctions that were previously in place. We can put those all back in place by that determination.

Now, some critics have said, well, what if Iran has a small infraction or they’re kind of nibbling at the edges of the deal? And are—is a future President really going to want to blow up the whole thing just for minor infractions? And what I’ve said—and this was actually a very thoughtful question that Congressman Nadler and some other supporters asked—what I said to them was, we’re going to be in a position to continue to turn the dials and modulate other responses other than just snapping back all the sanctions if in fact Iran is not doing what it’s doing.

And we actually have some precedent for this. Your listeners and viewers may not be fully aware that 2 years ago, when we announced the interim deal that allowed Iran to come into negotiations, they got some very modest relief from sanctions. They agreed not just to suspend their nuclear program, but also to get rid of the really highly enriched uranium that had been the subject of the cartoon drawing that Prime Minister Netanyahu had talked about as being the biggest threat at the United Nations.

A lot of the same critics of this current deal said at the time, this is never going to work, Iran is going to cheat, we're not going to know, they're just stalling for time, they're getting—there's going to be a floodgate of relief coming in. And we said, no, we're pretty confident we can actually monitor this thing and implement it effectively.

And today, 2 years later, even our fiercest critics acknowledge that it worked exactly the way it was supposed to. They got some modest relief. They got rid of the most highly enriched uranium stockpiles that they had. They did not install new centrifuges. We monitored what they did. And so—and during the course of these 2 years, there were a couple of times where they were too slow on something, they didn't quite do exactly what they were supposed to do. There was some ambiguities about their interpretation versus ours. And what we said was, well, until you get this fixed, you're not getting any more sanctions relief. And they fixed it pretty quick.

So we actually have tested our capacity to enforce this. And we've got some outstanding experts who helped to build the sanctions regime in the first place. And we're confident that not only can we go all the way and snap back sanctions for a very significant breach of the agreement by the Iranians, we're going to be able to also affect their incentives to make sure that they follow the rules and the spirit of this deal over the next—over the future of the deal.

Iran-U.S. Relations/Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action To Prevent Iran From Obtaining a Nuclear Weapon

Mr. Siegal. Okay. Thank you. So we're going to run out of time shortly, so we're going to maybe make this the last question depending on the answer. But you've spoken a great deal about the construct of mutual respect.

The President. Yes.

Mr. Siegal. And in the agreement itself, it makes a number of references specifically to the mutual respect of the Iranian regime to the United States, to the Europeans. And again, we've seen sort of a bending over backwards to some degree of our desire to be conscious of that, which is very worthwhile. But it does seem like the Iranian regime doesn't understand the mutual part of the mutual respect. So I'm just concerned how you feel about when you see these insults that are coming from the Ayatollah and the regime that says, "Death to America," "Death to Israel," tweets that are incredibly repugnant. Where is the mutual respect from their side?

The President. Well, I—obviously, it's not forthcoming at the moment. But the United States is the most powerful nation in the world, and the President of the United States doesn't respond to taunts. The President of the United States responds to interests, facts, evidence. And we try to make decisions based on what's going to be best for the security of the American people, our friends, our allies, and our values around the world. And so I'm less interested in terms of this deal in what the Supreme Leader says about me, more interested in what's actually happening on the ground.

You'll recall that when we were in the midst of these negotiations and they were trying to be finalized, the Supreme Leader had all sorts of characterizations about what was going to happen to the deal, and "we've outnegotiated them," and beating his chest a little bit because he's a politician. And I guess that's how politicians operate—[laughter]—even in Iran.

But what I was concerned about was what's in the text and what we can enforce and what we can verify to make sure they're not getting a

nuclear weapon. And at the end of the day, despite all the talk both from Iran and some of the commentary here, the text reflected the political framework that we had agreed to back in April.

And so am I troubled by these—this rhetoric? Of course. Does it speak to a deeply antagonistic and twisted world view among leadership inside of Iran? Yes. That's precisely why we can't let them have a nuclear weapon. And this is the best way to do it.

And to the broader issues—I want to emphasize this to everybody who is watching—if I lived in Israel, and I had seen rockets rain down on homes, as I've seen when I went to a place like Sderot, if my grandparents had traveled to Israel and lost family in the Holocaust and I hear somebody denying it, I've got a visceral reaction that says, how can I do business with somebody like that? I understand it. It's loathsome. And I think it's been said repeatedly—and I think as an African American I understand—history teaches us that man is—can be very cruel to man and you have to take threats seriously. But what history also teaches us is that sometimes the best security is to enter into negotiations with your enemies.

When the United States negotiated with the Soviet Union in the midst of the cold war, we had missiles trained on every major American city. And we had to give something up in that deal. We had to actually dismantle some of our arms. And so, in some ways, it was a much riskier proposition. But there was a recognition among both Democrats and Republican leaderships, farsighted, that we had the better system, that truth and values were on our side. And as long as we could maintain our capabilities and not even trust, but verify, that over time the world would shift in our direction. And we ended up winning the cold war without firing a shot directly with the Soviet Union.

So I am appreciative of the anxieties and the concerns that people have. I respect them. I'm somebody who wouldn't be sitting here if it weren't for the support of friends and supporters in the Jewish community all across this country, some of whom are watching right now, some of whom who are opposed to this

deal, but are still my friends, and we'll still be playing golf, and they'll be over at a Seder dinner next year.

But I would just ask everybody to look at the facts on this. And I have now had this debate for a couple months now, examined every angle on this deal, as we did in the Situation Room exhaustively before we signed off on this deal. And the fact is, this is our best way to make sure Iran doesn't get a nuclear weapon. That should be our number-one priority.

If we are able to accomplish that and make sure that, with all the other problems that are going on in the region and all the other threats that Israel and the United States face, from ISIL and from the collapse of places like Yemen and what's happening in Syria, if we're able to take this one thing and put that away, it is going to free us up—the United States and Israel—to work together for the safety, security, and prosperity of all our people for years to come.

And so there are times where you got to overcome the emotions and look at this thing with a cold, tough assessment. And when you do that, the other side has not presented an alternative that better accomplishes that central goal. That's the reason why I'm hopeful that Members of Congress get behind this deal. And I promise you that nobody is going to have a bigger stake in implementing it effectively than me.

Mr. Greenberg. So I get to say thank you, which I'm delighted to do, first of all, for your candor. On behalf of the entire Federation system, on behalf of the Conference, we thank you for that. And I must say, I was very happy personally to hear what you just said about understanding, from your history, the plight that your people and the American people know. But our people, as you know, Mr. President, over the years, there have been a lot of tyrants who have threatened us. And unfortunately, we have to take them seriously. I know you appreciate that, and you know that sometimes what I said in my beginning remarks, people of good will always have the same objective, but there is that history there.

So I know, sir, that we've tried to gather questions. I'm not sure we were smart enough to cover the waterfront. I—and before we lose you, which we'd love to go on forever, but we know we can't, is there anything you'd like to say in closing, sir?

The President. The one thing I want to emphasize to everybody who's watching is, get informed on this. What I've said to my team—from Secretary of State Kerry to Secretary of Energy Ernie Moniz, to our individuals who manage sanctions, to Treasury Secretary Jack Lew, to my entire White House staff—is we want people to be informed. We want you to ask as many questions as you can. Because that's how confident I am that this is the right thing to do.

I think that if in fact we rejected this deal, we would be putting Iran in the driver's seat. I think they would garner enormous international sympathy. They would be able to isolate the United States and Israel as the reason for the deal falling through. I think the sanctions would begin to dissolve; they would not be as effective. So, ironically, Iran would get some of that \$56 billion back anyway, and their economy would begin to improve anyway. And if in fact they are hell bent on gaining a nuclear weapon, they would have provided the cover for them then to go try to dash for the goal line without the kinds of inspections, verifications, and mechanisms of this deal.

If, on the other hand, we get this deal in place, then we will have shut off all the pathways for a minimum of 15 years. And in 15 years, if in fact the critics—what the critics say is true, and they have just been playing a waiting game, or this deal just was a pause button, I have every confidence that the President of the United States, 15 years from now, is in—going to be in a position, having made the same pledge I made—which is, Iran is not getting a nuclear weapon—to take actions that are necessary, including potentially militarily force to

prevent them from getting a nuclear weapon, and will be in a stronger position to do so.

So, whatever the questions people may have, find out. This is not one of those issues where I'm interested in spinning. I just want everybody to know, the more information you have, the more confident you'll be that this is the right thing to do.

And to all my friends in the Jewish community, I want you to just understand that the—regardless of the position people are taking on this issue, the friendship, the love between the Israeli people and the American people that manifests itself in so many different ways, that's not going anywhere. That's there. And we shouldn't, for fear that that gets lost, not have a vigorous debate about this. We should welcome a vigorous debate. That's one of the things that true friendship affords: You know that you can mix it up and the next day you're going to be the best of friends. And that's who we are.

Mr. Siegal. Thank you.

The President. Thank you so much.

Mr. Greenberg. Thank you again. And we look forward to continuing this conversation, because we have so many issues of mutual concern. And I want to thank you not just for today, but you have always been available to us. And we look forward to continuing the worthwhile conversations we already have, we've had, and look forward to those in the future, sir.

The President. That will continue. Thank you so much. I really enjoyed it.

Mr. Siegal. Thank you for your time. Appreciate it.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:10 p.m. in the Diplomatic Reception Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to former National Security Adviser Brent Scowcroft; and Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Hoseini-Khamenei of Iran. He also referred to the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) terrorist organization.