

Administration of Donald J. Trump, 2018

Remarks Prior to a Meeting With Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel and an Exchange With Reporters

March 5, 2018

President Trump. Thank you very much. It's a great honor to have Prime Minister Netanyahu and Mrs. Netanyahu with us. They've been friends for a long time. We have, I would say, probably the best relationships right now with Israel that we ever had. I think we're as close now as, maybe, ever before.

Jerusalem was a wonderful thing, and I know it was very much appreciated in a big part of the world, not just in Israel—in a very big part. So that was a decision that I had to make. Many Presidents were discussing whether or not to make that decision, and they promised it in their campaigns, but they never were able to do what they should have done. So I was able to do it, and I think it's something that's very much appreciated in Israel, but far beyond Israel.

We are very close on trade deals. We are very, very close on military and terrorism and all of the things that we have to work together on. So the relationship has never been better. And, Mr. Prime Minister, Mrs. Netanyahu, it's a great honor to have you.

Sara Netanyahu. Thank you.

Prime Minister Netanyahu. Thank you.

President Trump. Thank you very much.

Prime Minister Netanyahu. Thank you, thank you. Mr. President, Donald, Melania: Sara and I want to thank you for your extraordinary friendship and hospitality. It's always a pleasure to see you both, but this is the first time we meet in Washington—America's Capital—after you declared, Mr. President, Jerusalem as Israel's capital. And this was a historic proclamation, followed by your bold decision to move the Embassy by our upcoming national Independence Day.

I want to tell you that the Jewish people have a long memory. So we remember the proclamation of the great King Cyrus the Great—Persian King. Twenty-five hundred years ago, he proclaimed that the Jewish exiles in Babylon can come back and rebuild our temple in Jerusalem. We remember, a hundred years ago, Lord Balfour, who issued the Balfour Proclamation that recognized the rights of the Jewish people in our ancestral homeland.

We remember 70 years ago, President Harry S. Truman was the first leader to recognize the Jewish state. And we remember how a few weeks ago, President Donald J. Trump recognized Jerusalem as Israel's capital. Mr. President, this will be remembered by our people throughout the ages. And as you just said, others talked about it. You did it. So I want to thank you on behalf of the people of Israel. And I also want to—I look forward to our discussions on both challenges and opportunity.

If I had to say what is our greatest challenge in the Middle East to both our countries, to our Arab neighbors, it's encapsulated in one word: Iran. Iran has not given up its nuclear ambitions. It is—came out of this nuclear deal emboldened, enriched. It's practicing aggression everywhere, including on our own borders. And I think we have to stop this country—the chants, "Death to Israel," "Death to America." Iran must be stopped. That is our common challenge.

The second is seeking, because of that challenge, to exploit the opportunity for peace, because the Arabs have never been closer to Israel; Israel has never been closer to the Arabs. And we seek, also, to broaden that peace with the Palestinians.

So I look forward to those discussions. But I want to—I want to just iterate—reiterate what you just said. Mr. President, I've been here for nearly four decades with—talking, seeking to build the American-Israel alliance. Under your leadership, it's never been stronger, and the people of Israel see your position on Jerusalem, they see your position on Iran. They see your magnificent defense of Israel and the truth in the United Nations. And I, as Prime Minister, see something that you, as President, see, but others can't see—the extent of our intelligence and other cooperation in matters that are vital for the security of both our peoples.

And, Mr. President, I just want to say thank you for your leadership and thank you for your tremendous friendship.

Thank you.

President Trump. Thank you very much. Thank you. My honor.

Q. Mr. President, when do you—*[inaudible]*—your peace plan?

Construction of U.S. Embassy in Jerusalem

Q. Are you going to come to Jerusalem for the opening of the Embassy?

President Trump. Thank you very much. I may. I may. They have started, as you know, construction. And I may. We will be talking about that and other things.

Q. So you may come in May to open the Embassy?

President Trump. I may. I may. We're looking at it. We'll have it built very quickly. A lot of people wouldn't be doing it quickly like that. We're going to have it built very quickly and very inexpensively.

They put an order in front of my desk last week for a billion dollars. I said: "A billion? What's that for?" "We're going to build an Embassy." I said, "We're not going to spend a billion dollars." And we're actually doing it for about \$250,000. So check that out. Now, it's temporary, but it'll be very nice. Two hundred and fifty thousand dollars versus a billion dollars. Is that good?

Prime Minister Netanyahu. Yes, good.

President Trump's Travel to Israel

Q. So can we say that you're confident—*[inaudible]*—coming to Jerusalem?

President Trump. We're looking at coming. If I can, I will. But I'll be there again. Israel is very special to me. Special country. Special people. And I look forward to being there, and I'm very proud of that decision.

Arab-Israeli Peace Process

Q. And what about your peace deal? When will you present your peace deal?

President Trump. We're going to see. We're working on it very hard, and we'd like to—look, it would be a great achievement, and even from a humanitarian standpoint, what better if we could make peace between Israel and the Palestinians? And I can tell you, we are working very hard on doing that. And I think we have a very good chance.

And the biggest difficulty that anybody has had—you look over 25 years—nobody could get past number one: Jerusalem. They couldn't get past it. We've taken it off the table. So this gives us a real opportunity to peace. We'll see how it works out. The Palestinians, I think, are wanting to come back to the table very badly.

Q. Who said that?

Q. What if they don't come?

President Trump. If they don't, you don't have peace. You don't have peace.

Q. What's your plan if they don't come?

President Trump. If they don't, you don't have peace, and that's a possibility also. I'm not saying it's going to happen. Everybody said this is the hardest deal to make of any deal. Whenever you have a hard deal, like in business, you say, "Oh, this is almost as bad as Israel and the Palestinians." [*Laughter*] You use it, like, as an example.

This is the hardest deal. This is years and years of opposition and, frankly, hatred, and a lot of things involved in this deal beyond the land. And I will tell you that if we could do—if we could do peace between Israel and the Palestinians, that would be a great thing for the world. It would be a great thing for this country and for everybody.

So we're working very hard on it. We have a shot at doing it. Thank you all very much. I appreciate it. Thank you.

U.S. Tariffs on Imported Steel and Aluminum/North American Free Trade Agreement/Trade Deficit

Q. Paul Ryan wants you to back down on trade. Paul Ryan says he's worried about a trade war. Are you going to back down on the tariffs?

President Trump. No, we're not backing down. Mexico is—we've had a very bad deal with Mexico, a very bad deal with Canada. It's called NAFTA. Our factories have left our country. Our jobs have left our country. For many years NAFTA has been a disaster. We are renegotiating NAFTA, as I said I would. And if we don't make a deal, I'll terminate NAFTA.

But if I do make a deal which is fair to the workers and to the American people, that would be, I would imagine, one of the points that we'll negotiate. It will be tariffs on steel for Canada and for Mexico.

So we'll see what happens. But right now, a hundred percent. But it could be a part of NAFTA. And I understand—I just got a call from the people who are right now in Mexico City negotiating NAFTA. Mexico and, really, Canada want to talk about it. But if they aren't going to make a fair NAFTA deal, we're just going to leave it this way.

People have to understand, our country, on trade, has been ripped off by virtually every country in the world, whether it's friend or enemy—everybody. China, Russia. And take people that we think are wonderful—the European Union—we can't do business in there. They don't allow it. They have trade barriers that are worse than tariffs. They also have tariffs, by the way, but they have trade barriers far worse than tariffs. And if they want to do something, we'll just tax their cars that they send in here like water.

So we may have friends, but remember this: We lost, over the last number of years, \$800 billion a year. Not a half a million dollars, not 12 cents. We lost \$800 billion a year on trade. Not going to happen. We've got to get it back.

And of course, the biggest problem—the biggest problem is China. We lost \$500 billion. How previous Presidents allowed that to happen is disgraceful. But we're going to take care of it.

Thank you all very much. Thank you.

Trade

Q. [*Inaudible*]—talking about a trade war?

President Trump. I don't think you'll have a trade war.

Q. No trade war?

President Trump. I don't think so. I don't think you're going to have trade war, no.

Q. Prime Minister Netanyahu, would you like to comment about the latest news coming from Israel?

Prime Minister Netanyahu. I will later. Thank you.

President Trump. Thank you all. Thank you. Thank you very much. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:13 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House.

Categories: Interviews With the News Media : Exchanges with reporters :: White House; Meetings With Foreign Leaders and International Officials : Israel, Prime Minister Netanyahu.

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