

## Remarks Prior to a Meeting With Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel

*March 5, 2012*

*President Obama.* Well, I want to welcome Prime Minister Netanyahu and the entire Israeli delegation back to the White House, back to the Oval Office.

This visit obviously comes at a critical time. We are seeing incredible changes that are taking place in the Middle East and in North Africa. We have seen the terrible bloodshed that's going on in Syria, the democratic transition that's taking place in Egypt. And in the midst of this, we have an island of democracy and one of our greatest allies in Israel.

As I've said repeatedly, the bond between our two countries is unbreakable. My personal commitment—a commitment that is consistent with the history of other occupants of this Oval Office—our commitment to the security of Israel is rock solid. And as I've said to the Prime Minister in every single one of our meetings, the United States will always have Israel's back when it comes to Israel's security. This is a bond that is based not only on our mutual security interests and economic interests, but is also based on common values and the incredible people-to-people contacts that we have between our two countries.

During the course of this meeting, we'll talk about the regional issues that are taking place, and I look forward to the Prime Minister sharing with me his ideas about how we can increase the prospects of peace and security in the region. We will discuss the issues that continue to be a focus of not only our foreign policy, but also the Prime Minister's: how we can, potentially, bring about a calmer set of discussions between the Israelis and the Palestinians and arrive at a peaceful resolution to that long-standing conflict. It is a very difficult thing to do in light of the context right now, but I know that the Prime Minister remains committed to trying to achieve that.

And obviously, a large topic of conversation will be Iran, which I devoted a lot of time to in my speech to AIPAC yesterday and I know that the Prime Minister has been focused on for a

long period of time. Let me just reiterate a couple of points on that.

Number one, we all know that it's unacceptable from Israel's perspective to have a country with a nuclear weapon that has called for the destruction of Israel. But as I emphasized yesterday, it is profoundly in the United States' interest as well to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon. We do not want to see a nuclear arms race in one of the most volatile regions in the world. We do not want the possibility of a nuclear weapon falling into the hands of terrorists. And we do not want a regime that has been a state sponsor of terrorism being able to feel that it can act even more aggressively or with impunity as a consequence of its nuclear power.

That's why we have worked so diligently to set up the most crippling sanctions ever with respect to Iran. We do believe that there is still a window that allows for a diplomatic resolution to this issue, but ultimately, the Iranians' regime has to make a decision to move in that direction, a decision that they have not made thus far.

And as I emphasized, even as we will continue on the diplomatic front, we will continue to tighten pressure when it comes to sanctions, I reserve all options, and my policy here is not going to be one of containment. My policy is prevention of Iran obtaining nuclear weapons. And as I indicated yesterday in my speech, when I say all options are at the table, I mean it.

Having said that, I know that both the Prime Minister and I prefer to resolve this diplomatically. We understand the costs of any military action. And I want to assure both the American people and the Israeli people that we are in constant and close consultation. I think the levels of coordination and consultation between our militaries and our intelligence not just on this issue, but on a broad range of issues, has been unprecedented. And I intend to make sure that that continues during what will be a series of difficult months, I suspect, in 2012.

So, Prime Minister, we welcome you, and we appreciate very much the friendship of the Israeli people. You can count on that friendship always being reciprocated from the United States.

*Prime Minister Netanyahu.* Thank you.

*President Obama.* Thank you.

*Prime Minister Netanyahu.* Mr. President, thank you for those kind words. And thank you too for that strong speech yesterday. And I want to thank you also for the warm hospitality that you've shown me and my delegation.

The alliance between our two countries is deeply appreciated by me and by everyone in Israel. And I think that, as you said, when Americans look around the Middle East today, they see one reliable, stable, faithful ally of the United States, and that's the democracy of Israel.

Americans know that Israel and the United States share common values, that we defend common interests, that we face common enemies. Iran's leaders know that too. For them, you're the "Great Satan," we're the "Little Satan." For them, we are you, and you're us. And you know something, Mr. President, at least on this last point, I think they're right. We are

you, and you are us. We're together. So, if there's one thing that stands out clearly in the Middle East today, it's that Israel and America stand together.

I think that above and beyond that are two principles, longstanding principles of American policy that you reiterated yesterday in your speech: that Israel must have the ability always to defend itself, by itself, against any threat and that when it comes to Israel's security, Israel has the right, the sovereign right to make its own decisions. I believe that's why you appreciate, Mr. President, that Israel must reserve the right to defend itself.

And after all, that's the very purpose of the Jewish state: to restore to the Jewish people control over our destiny. And that's why my supreme responsibility as Prime Minister of Israel is to ensure that Israel remains the master of its fate.

So I thank you very much, Mr. President, for your friendship, and I look forward to our discussions. Thank you, Mr. President.

*President Obama.* Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:53 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House.

## The President's News Conference March 6, 2012

*The President.* Good afternoon, everybody. Now, I understand there are some political contests going on tonight, but I thought I'd start the day off by taking a few questions, which I'm sure will not be political in nature. [Laughter] But before I do, I want to make a few announcements about some steps we're taking to help responsible homeowners who've been struggling through this housing crisis.

Now, we've clearly seen some positive economic news over the last few months. Businesses have created about 3.7 million new jobs over the last 2 years. Manufacturers are hiring for the first time since the 1990s. The auto industry is back and hiring more than 200,000 people over the last few years. Confidence is up, and the economy is getting stronger.

But there are still millions of Americans who can't find a job. There are millions more who are having a tough time making the rent or the mortgage, paying for gas or groceries. So our job in Washington isn't to sit back and do nothing. And it's certainly not to stand in the way of the recovery. Right now we've got to do everything we can to speed it up.

Now, Congress did the right thing when they passed part of my jobs plan and prevented a tax hike on 160 million working Americans this year. And that was a good first step. But it's not enough. They can't just stop there and wait for the next election to come around. There are a few things they can do right now that could make a real difference in people's lives.

This Congress should, once and for all, end tax breaks for companies that are shipping jobs