

Remarks at an Obama Victory Fund 2012 Fundraiser in New York City January 19, 2012

Thank you, everybody. Please have a seat. It is wonderful to be back in New York, and it is wonderful to be among so many wonderful friends. As I look around the room, I've got people who've supported me when nobody could pronounce my name—[laughter]—and I was running for the United States Senate. In fact, I've got a couple people here who supported me when I was running for the State senate—my Chicago contingent here. [Laughter]

I want to thank all the organizers who helped pull this together. I also want to give a special shout-out to one of the finest mayors that this city has ever had, Ed Koch, who's here. We are grateful to him.

We're going to spend most of our time in a conversation. I don't want to give a long speech, partly because I have three more events tonight. [Laughter] But the main reason is I want to save most of the time for a conversation and a dialogue between us.

But let me just, first of all, say that we're obviously living in historic times. When I first came into office, we were going through the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression, and so understandably, a lot of my time and most of the country's attention was consumed by how do we get America back on its feet.

But we were also in the midst of two wars. We were also coming out of a period in which America's leadership around the world had declined. And what we've been able to do, I think, over the last 3 years is to not only avert a Great Depression, not only save an auto industry, not only get the economy moving in the right direction—although we've still got a long way to go—but we were also able to end a war that had distracted us from our most ardent enemies, we were able to decimate Al Qaida, we were able to beef up what we were doing in Afghanistan in a way that now allows us to take a transition and start bringing our troops home there and turn over the security needs of the Afghan people to Afghan security forces.

But what we were also able to do, I think, is to restore a sense of America as the sole, indispensable power, a country that, whether it's responding to an earthquake or a tsunami, or it's dealing with a dictator that is about to ruthlessly butcher his people, we aren't out there alone. We're able to mobilize around a set of values and a set of principles and ensure that the international rules of the road are followed.

And it's because of that extraordinary work that my Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, has been able to do, that our entire national security team has been able to execute, that America is stronger now than it was 3 years ago. But what's also true is the world is going through the kinds of changes that we haven't seen in a generation. And obviously, nowhere is that more true than in the Middle East.

Now, I'm sure we're going to have a chance to take some questions on these issues, but I want to just make a couple of key points.

Since I've been in office, we have unequivocally said that Israel's security is non-negotiable, and that we will do everything that's necessary to make sure that Israel is able to thrive and prosper as a secure Jewish state. Part of that has been to make sure that we've got the strongest military cooperation that we've ever had between our two nations. That's not my opinion, by the way, that's the Israeli Government's opinion.

Part of it is by making sure that as the Arab Spring swept through the region, that we are pushing hard on countries like Egypt to make sure that they continue to abide by the peace treaties that have served both countries well.

Part of it is mobilizing an unprecedented campaign of sanctions and pressure on Iran and stating unequivocally that we're not going to tolerate a nuclear weapon in the hands of this Iranian regime. And we've been able to organize folks like China and Russia that previously would have never gone along with something like this. And it's been so effective that even the Iranians have had to acknowledge that their economy is in a shambles.

When I came into office, Iran was united and the world was divided. And now what we have is a united international community that is saying to Iran, you've got to change your ways.

Now, this doesn't mean that we're where we need to be. The Arab Spring can still go in a whole multitude of directions, and this is going to be a very delicate time for us to make sure that the legitimate aspirations of ordinary people for democracy and economic opportunity doesn't get channeled by demagogues in ways that are dangerous for America's security interests or Israel's security interests.

We still have situations like Syria where people are being slaughtered. And obviously, that has huge ramifications for the region. Iran still has not made the right choice in terms of taking a path that would allow it to rejoin the community of nations and set aside its nuclear ambitions. And obviously, we still have not made the kind of progress that I would have liked to have seen when it comes to peace between Israel and the Palestinians, a peace, by the way, that I believe is not just good for the Palestinians, but is profoundly in the strategic interest of Israel.

So we've still got a lot of work to do. And my main message tonight is going to be, I'm going to need you in order for us to finish that work. We're not going to be able to succeed in fully transitioning from a time in which the United States was isolated and at war and disregarded around the world, to one in which we have restored a sense of balance and vision and purpose to world affairs, unless we can continue on the effective path that we're on.

And obviously, the American people are still keenly interested in making sure that the economy is working. And that's going to dominate the debate. And although I believe that we've got a great story to tell on that front, although I can tick off statistics about how we've had 22 straight months of private sector job growth and that we're starting to see companies actually bringing jobs back to the United States because of our renewed competitive posture, and I can talk about the investments that we're making in basic research and science to make sure that we maintain our innovative edge, and

I can talk about all the things we've done in Government to make it more efficient and leaner so that it can more effectively serve the American people, despite all those stories that we've got to tell, unemployment is still too high and a lot of people are still hurting and the housing market is still weak and State and local governments are still trying to figure out how to balance their books.

So, in that environment, this is still going to be a tough race, regardless of who they nominate. And the most important thing that we can do on the foreign policy front is make sure that we've got an America in which everybody has got a fair shot, everybody is doing their fair share, everybody is playing by the same rules, and we once again create a sense of opportunity and optimism here in the United States. Because when that happens, then America looks outward and it realizes the critical role that it plays in world affairs. And when folks are struggling, we turn inward, and sometimes we don't realize how important it is for us to be involved in some of these critical issues.

This is a group obviously that spends a lot of time thinking both about domestic issues and international issues. And my main message to you is I intend to win, but I'm going to need your help doing it.

And over the next 10 months, when we are having as clear a contrast between the parties and as profound a debate as we've seen in a very long time about the direction that America needs to take, I hope you know that the values you cherish, what you stand for, what you believe in, are the things I cherish and I believe in and I'm willing to fight for.

And if you have that confidence in me—because I certainly have that confidence in you—then I'm absolutely positive that not only will we win the election but, more importantly, we're going to be able to continue this path that we started in 2008.

Thank you very much, everybody. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:18 p.m. in the main reception area of Daniel restaurant. Audio was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.