

Remarks by President Trump at Signing of Presidential Proclamation Recognizing Israel's Sovereign Right Over the Golan Heights

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Remarks

Foreign Policy

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Diplomatic Room

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PRESIDENT TRUMP: It's a big moment. It's a very important moment. It's my honor to welcome Prime Minister Netanyahu to the White House. He's a very special man. He's done a great job.

I want to begin by expressing our condolences to the Prime Minister and the people of Israel for the horrific Hamas rocket attack on Israeli homes this morning, which wounded seven civilians at least, including numerous children.

Our prayers are with our friends in Israel as they carry out an incredible way of life in the face of great terror. The United States recognizes Israel's absolute right to defend itself.

The despicable attack this morning demonstrates the significant security challenges that Israel faces every single day. And today, I am taking historic action to promote Israel's ability to defend itself, and really to have a very powerful, very strong national security, which they're entitled to have.

In a moment, I will sign a presidential proclamation recognizing Israel's sovereign right over the Golan Heights. The State of Israel took control of the Golan Heights in 1967 to safeguard its security from external threats.

Today, aggressive action by Iran and terrorist groups in southern Syria, including Hezbollah, continue to make the Golan Heights a potential launching ground for attacks against Israel. Very violent attacks.

Any possible future peace agreement must account for Israel's need to defend itself from Syria, Iran, and other regional threats. We do not want to see another attack like the one suffered this morning north of Tel Aviv.

In our meeting today, the Prime Minister and I will discuss these dangers, as well as several mutual priorities in the Middle East and beyond. We'll be discussing other subjects also, including trade, but we will mostly be discussing this, defense and perhaps offense.

Under my administration, the unbreakable alliance between the United States and Israel has never been stronger. You read things; you hear things. It's never been stronger. Just remember that. People talk, but it's only talk. Our relationship is powerful.

At this moment, the American embassy stands proudly in Jerusalem, the capital the Jewish people have established. And they've wanted the embassy for many, many years — for many decades — and, frankly, through many Presidents. And we got it done. Not only did we get it done, we also got it built at a slight cost saving, like about one-billion-dollar cost saving. (Laughter.)

And I want to thank Ambassador David Friedman for the job he's done, and Jason Greenblatt, and Jared, and everybody. They worked so hard together, so I want to thank you all.

Thank you very much, Ambassador. You enjoying it?

AMBASSADOR FRIEDMAN: I love it. Thank you.

PRESIDENT TRUMP: And you love Israel?

AMBASSADOR FRIEDMAN: And America.

PRESIDENT TRUMP: Good. And America. I was waiting for him to say that. (Laughter.)

We have defeated the caliphate in Syria. We have withdrawn from the horrible Iran nuclear deal and imposed the toughest-ever sanctions. And these are, by far, the toughest ever on the Iranian regime. It's having a big effect. Iran is not the same country that it was when I took office. The day I took office, we had threats all over the Middle East and beyond. Iran is a much different place right now than it was.

As I said during my State of the Union Address, we will not avert our eyes from the dictatorship that chants "Death to America," "Death to Israel," and calls for genocide against the Jewish people. We won't let them even consider that.

We will confront the poison of anti-Semitism through both our words and, maybe even more importantly, our actions. In the last century, humanity witnessed the horrific consequences of anti-Semitism and a world without a Jewish homeland.

In the wake of those unthinkable horrors, the Jewish people built a mighty nation in the Holy Land — something very, very powerful, something very special and important.

Today, Israel demonstrates that incredible possibilities when strong, sovereign, and independent nations chart their own destinies. There can be no better example of greatness than what Israel has done, starting from such a small speck of sand. Israel is an inspiration, a trusted ally, and a cherished friend. The United States will always stand by its side.

I'd like to now invite Prime Minister Netanyahu to say a few words. And Bibi and I have known each other for a long time. He's another one who truly, truly loves Israel. I think I can say he also loves the United States.

So before I sign the presidential proclamation recognizing Israel's sovereignty over the Golan Heights, I'd like to ask Prime Minister Netanyahu to say a few words. Thank you very much. Thank you. (Applause.)

PRIME MINISTER NETANYAHU: Mr. President, my dear friend, Donald: You have shown, consistently, incredible support for Israel, for our right to self-defense. When we exercise that self-defense, you have never flinched. You have always been there, including today. And I thank you.

Yesterday, a rocket was fired from Gaza, deep inside to Israel. It hit a home north of Tel Aviv. It wounded seven, including two small children. And, miraculously, no one was hurt. No one was killed.

Israel will not tolerate this. I will not tolerate this. And as we speak — as I told you, Mr. President, just now — Israel is responding forcefully to this wanton aggression.

I have a simple message to Israel's enemies: We will do whatever we must do to defend our people and defend our states. After this meeting, I will return home, ahead of schedule, to lead the people of Israel and the soldiers of Israel. But before I go, Mr. President, it was so kind of you to invite me to come here, and it was so important for me to come here to the White House and to thank you.

Mr. President, over the years, Israel has been blessed to have many friends who sat in the Oval Office. But Israel has never had a better friend than you. You show this time and again.

You showed this when you withdrew from the disastrous nuclear deal with Iran. I remember in one of our first meetings, you said, "This is a horrible deal. I will leave it." You said it; you did it.

You showed it when you restored sanctions against a genocidal regime that seeks to destroy the one and only Jewish State. You said, "I will restore those sanctions." You said it and you did it.

You showed that when you recognized Jerusalem as Israel's capital and moved the American embassy there — and gave us a tremendous ambassador. You said it; you did it.

And you've showed it once again, Mr. President, with your official proclamation recognizing Israel's sovereignty over the Golan Heights.

Mr. President, ladies and gentlemen, this is truly a historic day. For two decades, from 1948 to 1967, Syria rained deadly fire from the Golan Heights on Israel's citizens below. A generation of Israeli children lived in constant danger. And then, in two glorious days, in June 1967, the brave soldiers of Israel scaled those daunting heights and liberated the Golan.

This has profound meanings for all Israelis and for me personally. One of those brave soldiers was my brother, who was wounded in battle three hours before the end of the war. And a few years later, as an officer in a special unit, I led my soldiers into a covert mission into Syria. And as we came back to the Golan, to Israel, we nearly froze to death in a blinding snowstorm. Well, as you can see, I'm still here. (Laughter.)

But at that point, in 1967, Israel seized the high ground, which has since proven invaluable to our defense, because in 1973, Syria launched a surprise attack against Israel, and those same Golan Heights proved to be to enable us to absorb the initial attack — it was a horrific attack — and successfully counterattack the invading Syrian forces. Within three weeks, we were at the Gates of Damascus. Outmanned, outgunned, our brave soldiers triumphed after one of the hardest-fought tank battles in our history.

But while Israel won those two wars, we would have to wait nearly half a century until this moment here, in this room, to translate our military victory into a diplomatic victory. And that is why, Mr. President, your decision to recognize Israel's sovereignty on the Golan Heights is so historic.

Your recognition is a twofold act of historic justice. Israel won the Golan Heights in a just war of self-defense, and the Jewish people's roots in the Golan go back thousands of years.

In the long sweep of Jewish history, there have been a handful of proclamations by non-Jewish leaders on behalf of our people in our land: Cyrus the Great, the great Persian king; Lord Balfour; President Harry S. Truman; and President Donald J. Trump. And you, Mr. President — Mr. President, you've done it not once but twice, with your bold proclamation on Jerusalem and with your bold proclamation today on the Golan.

Your proclamation comes at a time when the Golan is more important than ever for our security — when Iran is trying to establish bases in Syria to strike at Israel. From across the border in Syria, Iran has launched drones into our airspace, missiles into our territory.

Mr. President, just as Israel stood tall in 1967, just as it stood tall in 1973, Israel stands tall today. We hold the high ground, and we shall never give it up.

Mr. President, we have a saying in Israel. I'll say it in Hebrew. It says, "Ha'am im HaGolan." That means, "The people are with the Golan." But thanks to you, we now know that there are two peoples who stand with the Golan: the people of Israel and the people of America.

So on behalf of all the people of Israel: Thank you, President Trump. Thank you for your leadership, thank you for your friendship, and thank you for all you have done to make the alliance between America and Israel stronger and greater than ever. Thank you, Mr. President.

PRESIDENT TRUMP: Thank you very much. (Applause.)

So this was a long time in the making. It should have taken place many decades ago.

(The proclamation is signed.)

Bibi, maybe you can give this to the people of Israel?

PRIME MINISTER NETANYAHU: Thank you. Thank you. (Applause.)

Q Mr. President, after signing this proclamation, after recognizing Jerusalem, will your deal of the century include separation of Jerusalem? Will you give Palestinians —

PRESIDENT TRUMP: Well, we're talking right now. We're talking about this. Thank you very much. Thank you, everybody.

Q Will Israel have to pay something in order to have this recognition?

Q Do you want to see Prime Minister Netanyahu be the next Prime Minister?

PRIME MINISTER NETANYAHU: Mr. President — Mr. President, I have to tell you that I brought you a case of the finest wine from the Golan. I understand you're not a great wine drinker, but could I give it to your staff?

PRESIDENT TRUMP: Yes, you can. (Laughter.)

PRIME MINISTER NETANYAHU: And I hope they don't open an investigation on that. (Laughter.)

Q Mr. President, do you think Robert Mueller acted honorably?

PRESIDENT TRUMP: Yes, he did. Yes, he did.

END

12:16 P.M. EDT