

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Remarks at the Brookings Institution's 2014 Saban Forum

REMARKS

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Secretary of State**

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SECRETARY KERRY: Thank you. Thank you very much. Thank you all.

Martin, thank you so very much. Haim, where are you sitting here? Somewhere. Haim, thank you. Gerald, thank you so much for your incredible leadership. Ambassador Dermer, great to see you here. And former Ambassador Oren, I see you here. Joe Lieberman - I'm picking through the audience. I'm stopping at the second row. (Laughter.)

It's really a pleasure for me to be here. And I know you've had an amazing lineup and you just heard from Bibi a few minutes ago, and he and I never cease our conversations. We are talking several times a week, as recently, I think, as yesterday.

And Martin is right. I won't give up, but I hope it's going to take less than a miracle. And I believe it can. That's my personal belief. It takes decisions and a willingness to move in the right direction. But for so many years, Martin Indyk has been a dreamer and a doer in the effort to help the Israelis and the Palestinians find peace. It's, frankly, been the cause of your career, Martin, I think it's safe to say. And I am very grateful to Brookings for letting me steal you for a while, and I want to congratulate Brookings on having the good sense to steal you back. (Laughter.) They made you an offer that we couldn't match - the vice president. (Laughter.) As Joe Biden reminds me, that title's already taken in our business. (Laughter.)

I'm pleased and honored to be back here at the forum this year, and let me just say that the fact that so many Israeli officials were able to participate in this forum - and I met with a few of them on the side - in the midst of what we all understand is a very turbulent period back home, it tells you a lot about the enduring bonds between our two countries and the priority that both of our countries place on our relationship, and believe me, we do. That Prime Minister Netanyahu

joined all of us today from 6,000 miles away reminds us that our world really is smaller than ever before, and it also underscores the importance of the relationship.

From the standpoint of diplomacy, this reality presents us with capabilities and opportunities that our predecessors never dreamed of, but it also presents challenges that they never faced. Today, our security and prosperity at home are deeply intertwined with the security and prosperity of around the world, and that means there's really no such thing as a regional threat anymore. In today's world, regional threats, if left unaddressed, will inherently become global threats. Next door is everywhere.

And there's no next door that probably a lot of people wouldn't love to avoid more than the Middle East. But as everyone in this room knows, we have to be deeply engaged - deeply engaged - in this region in its entirety because it is directly in the interest of our national security and our economy, but it is also in keeping with who we are and with our relationships.

We also have to be engaged because our friends are so important to us. The relationship we have with Israel and the relationships that we now have with many Arab states - those relationships actually make us safer in a very dangerous world by enabling us to respond earlier and more capably to the security risks of terrorism, aggression, proliferation, organized crime. And by helping our friends to become stronger, we actually become stronger ourselves. And of course, turbulence in the Middle East is also a real threat to our own prosperity.

The bottom line is that our engagement in the world isn't a choice. It's a necessity. And nowhere is that more true than in the Middle East, where from the Sahel to the Maghreb, from Yemen to Syria, we are seeing an epic struggle take place in which dividers and destroyers are working overtime to drown out problem solvers, healers, builders and where in too many places violent extremists are pursuing agendas of hate. And all of us in this room who believe in a different future for the region have to lead the effort to push back against those trends.

That is exactly what we are doing in the fight against ISIL, or as it is known in the region, Daesh. This is organization whose sheer evil knows no bounds. Daesh claims to be fighting for Islam, but its actions are an insult to Islam. It's an organization that in a concerted, willful, decided way rapes and brutalizes women and sells them as brides as young girls - 10, 11, 12, 13 years old. They viciously and indiscriminately attack groups of all ethnicities, sects, and religions, including vulnerable minorities. And they brutally murder innocent people - Jews, Christians, and Muslims alike.

And what makes them different from their peers - and believe me, they are - is that they are moving against whole swaths of territory; they

steal vast quantity of weapons and money; they control more assets and territory than any similar organization ever has - way more than al-Qaida ever did at the height of its energy - and they recruit the fanatical and the misguided from countries around the world. How else can you explain Americans, Australians, Germans, Dutch, British, others fighting in Syria with ISIL?

Daesh has one goal, my friends: to impose its reign of terror over as many people and as much territory as it can and by any means necessary. They call it a caliphate, but it's a zone of chaos and destruction without one positive offering for a future.

Since September, when President Obama outlined America's plan to mobilize a broad coalition to degrade and ultimately defeat Daesh, we have been working through multiple lines of effort in order to do so. And I believe that General Allen briefed you earlier today on those lines of effort.

In Brussels on Wednesday, just this past Wednesday, just two and a half months after we launched this effort, I chaired the first ministerial-level meeting of the Global Coalition to Combat Daesh. We had representatives of over 60 countries and entities sitting around one table, institutions from around the world.

Two and a half months ago, my friends, that did not exist. That structure wasn't there. It grew out of our diplomacy, our historic meetings with our NATO partners in Wales, and with Arab countries in Jeddah, and with the broader international community in New York. And we continue every day to grow it now, and we will.

Participants in Brussels discussed the concrete progress that we have made already to halt and roll back Daesh's gains on the battlefield, to restrict its finances, to address the flow of foreign fighters, to counter, above all, its toxic ideology. We heard from the new prime minister of Iraq, Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi, about the country's new government, which embraces inclusivity and pluralism. And at that meeting's conclusion, coalition members joined together unanimously to issue a strong communique underlining the need for, I quote, "a sustained, united, and coordinated response," and we reiterated our shared "long-term commitment to this effort."

Obviously, our commitment and our capacity will be measured over years. I understand that. But I have to tell you, that even in two and a half months, we are making steady, measurable progress. Already Daesh's hold on territory has been challenged from the Mosul Dam to territory north of Tikrit and the Baiji oil refinery, where together with the Iraqis, the Daesh were driven out. We fought back against the encirclement of Amirli and liberated those folks. In Sinjar Mountain, we succeeded in freeing people from the siege. In Kobani, which so many people in the press were predicting was going to fall imminently, the fight goes on, and we have reinforced people and even negotiated with the Kurds to put Kurds in Kobani in order to help fight ISIL.

ISF, our forces, and the Iraq forces have now taken up defensive positions. And already, the finances of Daesh have been strained, thanks to the energetic action by the United States government, our Gulf partners, and others. And already, their message of hate is being debunked in media markets, public meeting places, mosques - in the region and across the globe - in an organized effort by the coalition to delegitimize their false claims. I will tell you, we worked hard at that. We've had our Under Secretary of State Rick Stengel out in the region, going to Al Jazeera, going to Al Arabiya, talking with various partners, bringing them to the table. The grand mufti of Egypt declared that ISIS is the organization of Satan. We've had major mullahs, imams, clerics, all speaking out in Friday prayer against the notion that there is any legitimacy whatsoever to this entity.

And I might add to you, this is something perhaps even of a model of possibilities for what we can do with respect to the hate that is spread throughout the region on an ongoing basis. And we've had those conversations with Arab countries about what can be done in the West Bank and in Gaza and throughout the region to quash the level of vitriol that appears in print, cartoons, in television, in commentary, and even in schools. That has to end.

But the fact is that the momentum that Daesh built up during the summer, all the predications and the possibility of even Baghdad being under siege, has dissipated. Daesh commits on a continuing basis terrible crimes, but it has also been forced to relinquish bases, to abandon training sites, to alter its mode of communications, to disperse personnel, and, you will notice, to also stop the use of large convoys.

In Iraq, the Iraqi people are fighting hard to reclaim the land that they have lost. And the new government in Baghdad is proceeding now with plans to establish a new National Guard, and, as I mentioned, with the coalition's support, Iraqi forces have regained important ground. Kurdish troops are battling bravely in the north. And throughout the rest of the country - and you may have noticed just the other day that Prime Minister Abadi succeeded in getting an oil deal with the Kurds, which has been long in the seeking. In addition, Sunni tribal fighters are beginning to come on board. And General Allen is the perfect person because he was in Anbar, he knows these chieftains, and he's working with them. And Iraq's national army is preparing to launch a counter-offensive. And we are confident that they will do so when the time is right, not in a matter of years but a matter of months.

In Syria, we are continuing to strike Daesh targets and challenge the safe haven that Daesh has found in that war. We have attacked its command facilities, damaged its oil infrastructure, and blocked, obviously, as I said a moment ago, its effort to seize the town of Kobani. And we are working to establish regional sites for training

and equipping the moderate armed Syrian opposition, for which we will be doing a great deal more in the weeks and months ahead.

Now let me make a few things clear regarding Syria. As President Obama has said repeatedly, we have no doubt that President Assad has lost all legitimacy - 200,000-plus dead, gassing his own people, barrel bombing his own people, destroying people with sectarian targeting. It's hard to imagine that the Syrians fighting Assad or the core countries that back them, particularly those countries who represent the Sunni majority population - hard to imagine that they will ever stop their support against the individual who killed 200,000 - certainly 150 or so of their people, because that figure includes people in the regime. But as long as he maintains a firm grip on power, nobody quite understands how you can stop the violence.

Now while Assad claims to be the last line of defense against a terrorist takeover in Syria, the truth is his relationship to Daesh has been symbiotic. It was Assad's ruthless reign that fueled Daesh's rise and enabled terrorists to portray themselves as the only alternative Syrians had to their dictator.

And when it comes to their future, Syrians should not have to choose between a tyrant and the terrorists. Those are both dead ends. And that is why we favor a third option - the moderate Syrian opposition who are fighting both extremists and Assad every day. And we remain as committed as ever to supporting them, with an understanding that it's a hard fight. But notice, this is three and a half years now in the doing, and they're holding on and they're fighting. And we do so understanding above all - and this is really important, and all of our counterpart, all my colleague counterparts from every country agree with this, including Russia, Iran, there is no military solution. The only possible way for the Syrian civil war to end is through a negotiated political solution. Obviously, if Assad believes he doesn't have to negotiate, it's a problem.

So we're currently pursuing that path with conversations in the region. I met with Foreign Minister Lavrov this week, and there are conversations going on about how one might try to approach that political settlement. We will continue to pursue a diplomatic path, just as we will remain committed to degrading and defeating Daesh in Iraq, in Syria, and wherever it is found. And we will do so until that goal is achieved, I assure you.

But the fact of the matter is - I want you to think about this; I think we talked about it a little bit last year - even once Daesh is defeated and Syria is stabilized, our work is far from over, folks. Because unless we commit ourselves to a broader, long-term strategy for the region, the next Secretary of State will come right back here and talk about the need to defeat some other hateful extremist group that goes by some other acronym. And that's why, while we certainly must do all we can to address the immediate threats to peace and

security in the Middle East, we have to commit to pursue a future in which the kind of threats that we see today simply cannot thrive.

And that will require a greater commitment than this Congress has thus far evidenced it is willing to engage. But we are not going to stop trying to lay out the case for it and how and why we must do it. It means under - it means addressing the underlying issues driving the cycle of conflict throughout the Middle East. I'm not just talking about Palestine and Israel. I'm talking about radical religious extremism and other extremism, the lack of economic opportunity, bad governance, corruption, the lack of economic opportunity for the average citizen, the gross violation of human dignities, the failure to provide hope to a whole generation of young people in countries that are increasingly 60 and 65 percent under the age of 35, or under the age of 30, all of whom have smartphones, all of whom have mobile devices, all of whom follow everything that's happening in the rest of the world and are connected to that world on a daily basis.

This is a generational task. It's not going to happen overnight, or even a few years. I understand that. And as an outside power, even the powerful United States of America, we can only ultimately play a supporting role in much of that. But if there's any opportunity hidden in the Daesh crisis, challenge, it's the chance to build the common ground needed to address these shared threats and to pursue shared interests.

Here is one small but, really, very powerful example. Not long ago, an Iraqi Arab pilot, Major General Majid Ahmed Saadi, flew an Iraqi Air Force helicopter with a Kurdish crew and a Yezidi member of parliament to rescue Yezidis on Mount Sinjar. Tragically, the helicopter crashed. General Saadi was the only one killed. But before he died, he told a New York Times reporter that the mission to rescue the Yezidis was the most important thing that he had ever done in his entire life and career as an Iraqi pilot. Think about that. The historic level of cooperation between Iraqi and Kurdish forces has resonated deeply in both communities. And the presence of Saudis and Emiratis and Jordanians and Qataris and others, all of them together facing this challenge now, is the sign of a new set of possibilities for regional engagement in security and counter-terrorism and anti-extremism that may open new windows for all of us, including Israel, Palestinians, Jordan, Egypt.

Now, the spirit may be embryonic, but it is pretty significant and it's real. It began earlier this year, when a new, inclusive Iraqi Government came to power after months of intense negotiations among Iraqi leaders, and I want to say, proudly, supported by intensive, quiet diplomacy by the United States and other partners, who worked every step of the way to try to make sure that a new government could come out with the strength and the commitment of the people to the kind of pluralism and inclusivity necessary to change Iraq.

Since then, Prime Minister Abadi and his cabinet have taken important steps to unite Iraq under an inclusive government that represents people of all religions, sects, and tribes. That means engaging seriously with the Sunni community and working directly with tribal leaders in the fight against Daesh. It means overcoming decades of animosity and mistrust to reach a long-sought and vitally important oil agreement with the Kurdistan Regional Government. It means taking difficult steps to root out corruption within the Iraqi Government itself, and to reform the Iraqi Security Forces, and that is what President Obama has committed our troops to go and do. Not to fight, but to help them to reconstitute themselves and take the fight to Daesh.

There is still a long way to go, but Iraqi leaders are showing the world that they are determined to avoid the mistakes of the past and repair the broken society that actually was the enablement of Daesh's rise. And I will tell you that every country and minister at that big table, which was not a NATO meeting, but took place at the NATO headquarters, every country was impressed by what they heard and what they felt and the quality of the leadership that they are seeing.

The simple reality is, my friends, against the currents of politics and of the pronouncements we hear in the media and the talking heads of cable television, the reality is we are making progress. We are not over-claiming, we are not suggesting it's a done deal; it's not. But we are making a steady progress, and we can see the road map to success.

Now, the hard work of mending Iraq's internal divisions is also helping it to improve relations with its neighbors. And this is not insignificant. When we met in Jeddah, Foreign Minister Saud al-Faisal, the longest-serving foreign minister in the world, stood right up and said, "We're going to recognize this new government, and we're going to exchange ambassadors, and we're going to invite them to come and meet."

And so countries that once sought to isolate Baghdad because of the sectarianism that was practiced are now not just inviting visits, but have warmly welcomed Iraq's leaders in their capitals. Iraq's Shia-led government has hosted key officials from its Sunni-majority neighbors, including Emirati Foreign Minister Abdullah bin Zayed and Turkish Prime Minister Davutoglu, and others, all of whom came away saying how good the visits were. Relations between Iraq and Saudi Arabia have begun to thaw, with Iraq's President visiting Riyadh and the kingdom preparing to open this embassy in Baghdad for the first time since the first Gulf War.

Now, we have no illusions. The Middle East remains profoundly divided. But the imperative of joining together to fight Daesh, an equal-opportunity killer of Sunnis, Shia, Kurds, Christians, and others, is actually enabling the process of bringing people together. As we were tragically reminded just two days ago, with the murders in Yemen of

American Luke Somers and South African Pierre Korkie, Daesh has no monopoly on terror.

But in the midst of acts of terror and even more, we are seeing the potential of the emergence of a new regional alignment, with little in common but a shared aversion to extremists. But I will tell you what they are all telling me. They are telling me that they are prepared to stand up and make peace with Israel, and they are telling me that they believe there is in this moment the ability to create a new regional alliance against the Hamases the Daeshes and the Ahrar al-Shams and the Boko Harams and so forth. And we would be negligent if we didn't try to take advantage of that. As recently as six months ago, all of this would have seemed absolutely impossible. And it has become clearer to all that defeating violent extremism and strengthening regional cooperation are two ways to build a better future for the Middle East and a more secure future for Israel and its neighbors.

Preventing a nuclear-armed Iran is a third leg of that stool. Ensuring that Iran does not obtain a nuclear weapon has been the heart of President Obama's foreign policy from the moment that he took office. It has not changed. And when he talked to me about the prospect of becoming Secretary of State, I looked at him and I said, "Mr. President, I want to know for certain that what you're saying about Iran and what the consequences may be if we can't get where we need to go in a deal are actual - are real. I mean, are we going to hold them accountable?" And the President looked at me and he said, "Iran will not get a nuclear weapon, and I will do whatever is necessary."

The President has never changed on this. And that policy will not change. And while we may disagree on tactics from time to time, when it comes to the core strategic goal - no nuclear weapon - there is not an inch of daylight between the United States and the State of Israel. And that is why, over the past year, we and our P5+1 partners have been engaged in intense and tough negotiations with the Iranian Government in hopes of finding a comprehensive, durable, and verifiable arrangement that resolves all of the international community's concerns.

Now, I ask you to take a moment. It is important to take a moment to remember how we got to this point. We are here not because of the difficult history between the United States and Iran, though difficult it is. And yesterday's deeply disturbing charges against an American journalist who was simply doing his job is just the latest reminder of that. Nor are we here because of the indefensible threats that Iranian leaders have periodically made against Israel, though indefensible they are. We are not even here because of terrorist acts Iran has sponsored, or its destabilizing activities in the region, though we condemn them whenever and wherever they occur.

Rather, we are here for a few simple reasons - because systematically, over many years, Iran did not address the world's concerns about an illicit nuclear program, and because the entire international

community felt that it was imperative that Iran meet its international obligations. So we spent several years building the broadest, deepest sanctions regime in history, in order to get the answers the world demands. I was chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee when we passed those, and I am proud of the impact that they've had, as is every member of Congress. We wouldn't be at the table without it.

But we are also here - excuse me - we're also here because, ultimately, we believe that the best way to prevent Iran from having a nuclear weapon is through a verified, negotiated agreement - thank you, Martin - we are convinced that the best way to create accountability is through a verified negotiated agreement that resolves the international community's legitimate concerns, proves that Iran's program is peaceful, as it says it is, and gives the Iranian people, with whom we have no specific quarrel, the chance for a better future.

Now, obviously, this process takes time. The stakes are high, the issues are complicated and technical, and if we are, in fact, to cut off all the pathways through which Iran could obtain enough fissile material for a bomb, every detail matters enormously. But it also takes time because we will not settle for just any agreement. We want the right agreement.

Last year, I spoke here at the forum shortly after we signed the Joint Plan of Action that enabled us to begin formal negotiations. And I remember distinctly many voices proclaimed we had made a tragic mistake. We were admonished that Iran would cheat and the sanctions regime that we had painstakingly built over several years would crumble. We were accused of jeopardizing the safety and security of our nation and our closest partners. And in response, I shared with you at that time that the United States, our partners, including Israel and the entire world, would, in fact, become safer the day that the Joint Plan of Action was implemented. And guess what. That is exactly what happened.

One year ago, Iran's nuclear program was rushing full-speed toward larger stockpiles, greater uranium enrichment capacity, the production of weapons-grade plutonium and ever-shortening breakout time. Today, Iran has lived up to every commitment it made in the interim agreement. Progress on its nuclear program has been rolled back for the first time in a decade. How do we know that? Because the IAEA and our partners have been able to verify that Iran is indeed honoring the JPOA commitments.

Today, IAEA inspectors have daily access - daily access - to Iran's enrichment facilities, including Fordow, and we have developed a far deeper understanding of Iran's nuclear program, its centrifuge production, its uranium mines and mills. Iran's entire stockpile of 20 percent enriched uranium has been diluted or converted - every ounce - and they have suspended all uranium enrichment above 5 percent. All

progress on the Arak plutonium reactor is frozen in place. No new components have been put in that would allow them to commission it.

And I can assure you, as we work now to reach a comprehensive deal, the United States continues to believe - as we have from day one and as Israel has said it also believes - that no deal is preferable to a bad deal. And that's why we had an extension. Now, we know that just like JPOA, any agreement will be subject to the legitimate scrutiny of our citizens, the Congress and our closest partners.

We also have no intention of negotiating forever. And absent measurable progress, who knows how much longer this could go on? As of now, with significant gaps still remaining, we do not know if we will be able to make it.

But we also know for sure that a negotiated settlement, a negotiated outcome, if it meets our standards, is the best way to account for and close off all of Iran's potential pathways to a nuclear weapon. And in recent weeks, we have seen new ideas surface, flexibility emerge that could - I repeat, could - help resolve some issues that had been intractable. And that is why, two weeks ago in Vienna, when we reached the most recent deadline that we'd set for the negotiation, we all agreed to extend them for this brief period of time. By the way, though it said seven months, we're not looking at seven months. We are - I think the target is three, four months, and hopefully even sooner if that is possible.

Now, why are we doing this? Because I believe, President Obama believes, the Administration deeply believes that it would be the height of irresponsibility, it would be against our own interests and those of our closest partners, to walk away from a table when and if a peaceful resolution might really be within reach. If this effort fails, we have been crystal clear that we will do what we have to do. But if we succeed in reaching an agreement, the entire world - including Israel - will be safer for it.

Now, no one should doubt for a minute that the U.S.-Israeli relationship remains as strong as ever. I want to make crystal clear - I've heard this from Israelis up and down the chain of command: Never has our security cooperation, despite whatever political agreement there might - disagreement there might be at a given moment or tactical disagreement - never has our day-to-day, month-to-month, long-term security cooperation been stronger or better than it is today, with Iron Dome, with weekly, daily consultations, with constant briefings on what we're doing with Iran, other things, and with support for Israel under siege from Gaza and elsewhere.

Now, of course, like all disagreements, as I've said and I've got to say it again, yeah, we're going to disagree from time to time on something tactical, and we're going to disagree on settlements, which we believe deeply - and we are shared in this opinion by most of the rest of the international community - that those settlements are

undermining the prospects for peace and isolating Israel in the international community itself. It is important that we address these kinds of differences directly and respectfully.

But make no mistake - the bonds that link our countries do remain unbreakable. And that's not a cliché. They just are. Twenty-nine years in the United States Senate, 100 percent voting record; many, many wonderful trips; many, many friends; a great connection personally and otherwise. Our commitment to Israel's security and future does remain ironclad.

And this commitment remains at the top of our minds as we sit at the negotiating table with Iran. But it is also the reason that we are so deeply troubled by the recent events in Israel, Gaza, the West Bank, and Jerusalem.

No country, obviously, should have to endure the barrage of rocket fire, the horrendous threat of a terrorist jumping out of a tunnel armed with tranquilizer drugs and handcuffs, to snatch some person out of a kibbutz and drag them back into Gaza and hold them hostage. No one should be subject to that fear and to that consideration on a daily basis. And no one should have to endure, as the Israeli people did during this summer's conflict in Gaza, the barrage of rockets that came as far as the airport in Tel Aviv and which hit with greater accuracy.

But also, no community should have to endure the loss of thousands of its citizens, including hundreds of children, women, as the Palestinians experienced during that that period too because of the choices that Hamas made.

The ongoing unrest has brought new traumas to everybody. And just this past week, two Israelis were stabbed as they shopped for groceries in the West Bank. And we were all devastated and shocked and angered by the brutality of the attack in the synagogue last month in which three rabbis - each one an American citizen - were hacked to death even as they prayed.

Meanwhile, Palestinians have endured a spate of unconscionable "price tag attacks," the burning of a mosque near Ramallah.

These atrocities have no place in the modern world, and we - all of us - have to condemn them in the strongest possible terms.

But I will tell you, having worked at this issue, as Martin said, for so many years, as have so many of you, common sense and strategic analysis tells us definitively: This cannot go on. Too many Israelis have died. Too many Palestinians have died. And we have to do everything possible to prevent the loss of more innocent lives and smother the sparks of an immediate tension which is growing so that that tension does not explode into a full-fledged fire.

And I will tell you, all the years of travel on the Foreign Relations Committee and now as Secretary of State, I have never seen so much frustration building up with all of the stakeholders as it is today. Last month, I made an urgent trip to Amman in order to meet with President Abbas and then with Prime Minister Netanyahu and King Abdullah, and to reaffirm the status quo on the Temple Mount. Since then, because the leaders made the right decisions, tens of thousands of Arabs have prayed, things have been calm, all sides have proven they can work together and actually achieve progress. And I have continued to work both publicly and privately with the Israelis, with the Palestinians and the Jordanians to push for concrete steps to deescalate the tensions and try to end the violence.

But even as we work to calm the situation, it is really imperative that we keep our long-term goals for regional stability in mind. President Obama and I have said many times and I say it again today and I believe it from here to the tip of my toes: The status quo between the Israelis and the Palestinians is not sustainable, and the alternatives to peace are neither acceptable nor viable. We cannot ignore larger issues that have to be resolved.

Now, that's why we spent nine months engaged in serious negotiations, because it is the only way that an enduring peace can be achieved. And I can assure you that over those nine months, gaps were narrowed, progress was made, definitions were given to very difficult issues. And I came to understand, as did everybody else involved, much more the tiny needle that has to be threaded in order to try to find a way to accommodate those interests. But I still believe that could be done. Those of us who were part of this process, Martin included, still believe there are possibilities to be pursued. And we know that Israel will only and should only enter into an agreement if its full security needs are fully met. I understand that. No Israeli can be asked to turn the West Bank into Gaza. But we believe there are many ways - and General Allen and others have worked on them - that that can absolutely be avoided.

And now with Egypt and Jordan and others in the region, there are many ways in which others can join in helping to guarantee that. In fact, that's why, with the extraordinary work of General Allen, we made an unprecedented effort to address Israel's security in the context of the two-state outcome. And that's why we continue to explore how the new regional dynamic regarding Daesh and the Arab world will enhance the security of Israel and its neighbors. Yes, we know that Israel has to be strong to make peace, but we also know that real peace will make Israel stronger.

Now, I fully recognize that, to most people living in Israel, Gaza, or the West Bank, today as I speak, the idea of peace sounds dubious at best and impossible to many. I understand that. But I cannot tell you notwithstanding how strongly the United States flat-out rejects the notion that peace is a pipedream. In fact, the need for a two-state solution is even stronger today than it was a year ago.

And I know there are Israelis who question whether Palestinian leaders will make the difficult decisions that peace requires. Palestinians have the same questions about Israeli leaders. And the world's questions about both parties' willingness to move forward have led to mounting pressure for the international community to act, because everyone feels impacted by the gridlock.

Now, given recent headlines and debates, it's important to reiterate that this conflict cannot be resolved through unilateral actions or by efforts to delegitimize Israel; it must ultimately be resolved between the parties themselves.

And there should be no question that a two-state solution - yes, a two-state solution - is the only path to peace, for the simple reason that there is no one-state alternative that is viable or that would preserve Israel's status as a Jewish state and democracy.

America will continue to stand with those who believe in a peaceful future for their children. Now, obviously, we don't expect the negotiations to resume tomorrow. There is an election in the next few months now in Israel, and the Israeli people will have important choices to make for their future. And we look forward to working closely with the new government, whatever its composition, whenever it is formed. And we will absolutely not involve ourselves in any way in the middle of the choice of the people of Israel. Achieving a negotiated two-state solution will, however, remain high on the agenda of this Administration of the United States.

For now, it is important that we keep the hopes of a lasting peace alive, that we support that those who believe it is still possible, and that we continue to work to build the Palestinian economy and create the conditions for successful negotiations. And once the parties themselves make the tough decisions required to get back to the talks, we stand ready to be engaged.

In the end, we should all want the same things: security and a normal life for Israelis, an independent state where they can live in freedom and dignity for the Palestinians, and peace and prosperity for both peoples and for the entire region.

One of the things that excites me the most about those possibilities is the degree to which, when I meet with President al-Sisi or Mohamed bin Zayed of the Emirates, or King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia, they all talk about what the region could be like with peace. They view the economic prowess of Israel as an asset to all of them. And things that could happen in terms of agriculture and energy, a range of possibilities - and we need - my friends, we really need to break down some barriers and explore those possibilities. In Israel, Gaza, and the West Bank, in Syria and Iraq, from the shores of the Mediterranean to the banks of the Tigris and Euphrates, the future depends on

whether we can stand united against those who would divide us by tribe, by sect, by race or religion.

It depends on whether world leaders can find the way to address their differences directly, honestly, and peacefully, instead of through militant proxies.

And it depends on whether we can provide young people with an option beyond either living in an authoritarian dictatorship or joining the extremist underground.

I believe we can, and I think you do, too.

Today marks 73 years since the United States was attacked at Pearl Harbor. December 8th, 1941, Franklin Roosevelt went to the Capitol to address a joint session of the U.S. Congress. As he spoke, the world was burning. The future was uncertain. And the challenges facing the United States and our allies seemed to many at the time insurmountable.

But not to FDR. He was focused. He was up to the challenge. He had faith in the possibility of success. And he told the Congress, "With the unbounding determination of our people, we will gain the inevitable triumph."

Ultimately, the dividers and the destroyers are no match for the problem solvers, the healers, the builders of the world. And with the courage to change course and break the cycles of conflict that have existed for far too long, then we too - we too - will gain the inevitable triumph, and build a peaceful and secure future for the Middle East, and by extension, for the entire world. That, as the scripture tells us, is a charge worth keeping. Thank you. (Applause.)

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