

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

SABAN FORUM 2014

STORMY SEAS: THE UNITED STATES AND ISRAEL
IN A TUMULTUOUS MIDDLE EAST

ADDRESS BY ISRAELI PRIME MINISTER BENJAMIN NETANYAHU

Washington, D.C.

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NETANYAHU-2014/12/07

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Introduction:

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Featured Speaker:

BENJAMIN NETANYAHU
Prime Minister of Israel

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MS. WITTES: Ladies and gentlemen, good afternoon. We have had a tremendous weekend of conversation and a lot of discussion about the security challenges that the United States and Israel face in the Middle East, and about the dynamics within our societies and how to sustain strong relationships into the future. And I think one of the things that has come through to me very clearly from all of these conversations is the importance of building personal relationships, friendships, relationships of trust between the United States and Israel at all levels. And we are tremendously fortunate that we have this annual platform to help construct and sustain those kinds of relationships, but at the end of the day there is absolutely no substitute for those kinds of relationships at the very top of our system in Washington and in Jerusalem. And so to cap a weekend of incredible dialogue we have a pair of incredible leaders for you. Now as you all know it's been a very dramatic week in Israel and Prime Minister Netanyahu

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had very much hoped that he would be able to take time to speak to us via satellite and have some back and forth. Unfortunately because of his schedule and the constraints of events in Jerusalem he is not able to do that. He has however sent us just this morning a video that was recorded perhaps two hours ago, so a very fresh message from the Prime Minister of Israel and we are very grateful to him for making that special effort to be part of our weekend of dialogue.

So if you would please bring your attention to the television screens, there's one in the back and one right up here. And now let's hear from Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

PRIME MINISTER NETANYAHU: (Video) My friends, greetings from Jerusalem, the united capital of Israel. I'm sure you understand that I would have wanted to be with you in person today, but I'm sure you also know that there are one or two things here that demand my attention. Haim, I want to thank you for establishing the prestigious Saban Forum. It discusses so many of the important issues facing

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America and Israel today. And of these none is more important to our common security than Iran's ongoing pursuit of nuclear weapons. The November 24 deadline for an agreement has come and gone. That's fortunate because a deal was not signed last month that would have effectively left Iran as a threshold nuclear power. And even though Israel isn't part of the P5+1 our voice and our concerns played a critical role in preventing a bad deal. Now we must use the time available to increase the pressure on Iran to dismantle its nuclear weapons capability.

My friends, while stopping Iran's nuclear weapons program is by far the most vital national security challenge we face the unprecedented instability afflicting the entire region poses an enormous challenge for our common security as well. Where once seemingly coherent nations and clearly defined borders stood, we now see chaos in Iraq, in Syria, in Libya, in Yemen, in Lebanon. The entire region is hemorrhaging. Violence and fanaticism are spreading throughout the Middle East and ISIS savagery

is merely one example of it. The collapse of the older order has made clear to pragmatic Arab governments that Israel is not their enemy. On the contrary, Israel and our moderate Arab neighbors have much to gain by cooperating. And this cooperation could in turn open the door to peace.

Like the moderate Arabs I want Israel to have peace with the Palestinians, a genuine peace, an enduring peace, a secure peace. I stress the word "secure" because for years I demanded that any peace agreement be founded upon robust security arrangements. That was always understood by Israelis, but I hope -- I sincerely hope that it's now better understood internationally for there can be no peace without real security, and there can be no real security without a long-term IDF presence to provide it. For nine months we negotiated with the Palestinians, but they consistently refused to engage us on our legitimate security concerns, just as they refuse to discuss recognizing Israel as the nation state of the Jewish people while at the same time

insisting that Israel recognize a nation state of the Palestinian people. My friends, the talks didn't end because Israel announced that it would build apartments in Jewish neighborhoods of Jerusalem, neighborhoods that will remain a part of Israel under any conceivable peace agreement. The talks ended because the Palestinians wanted them to end. The talks ended because President Abbas unfortunately chose a pact with Hamas over peace with Israel.

Unfortunately the Palestinian leadership is simply not prepared and I hope this changes, but it's not yet prepared to truly confront violence and fanaticism within Palestinian society, within their own ranks. The Jihadist murderers in the tragic attack on the Har Nof Synagogue were not focused on how many apartments Jews were building in Jerusalem, they were focused on killing Jews. After Secretary Kerry spoke with him President Abbas condemned the Har Nof murderers, but still blamed Israel for their heinous actions. And Abbas remains in a political pact with those who celebrated the murder of the

Rabbis, three of whom were also American citizens.

Regrettably the Palestinian leadership not only refused to confront that extremism, at times it even fuels it. It engages in incitement day and day out. Just look at their web pages, look at their web sites and make your hair stand on end. And I think it's important to confront this. I don't think sticking our head in the sand promotes real peace. And I don't believe that false hopes promote real peace. I think they just push peace further away. Real peace will only come with leadership that demands from the Palestinians to accept the three pillars of peace, one, genuine mutual recognition, two, an end to all claims including the right of return, and three, a long-term Israeli security presence. Now I will never give up on this triangle of true peace.

My friends, Israel seeks peace. I seek peace. But for peace we need a Palestinian partner willing to stand up to Palestinian extremists as other Arab governments are now doing throughout the region. I hope that we'll find such a partner, a partner who

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will recognize Israel as the nation state of the Jewish people, who will take our security concerns seriously, who will end all claims. Last week we celebrated the 67th anniversary of the United Nations call for the establishment of the Jewish state. Today we're proud that the Jewish people have achieved our national self determination in a genuinely democratic state, on that guarantees equal rights for all its citizens regardless of race, religion or sex, as promised in our Declaration of Independence. And this will not change. and standing up for Israel's identity as the nation state of the Jewish people I will never agree to legislation that undermines Israel's democratic character, not now, not ever.

My friends, the great bond between Israel and America is anchored in our shared democratic values, and our friendship was demonstrated again over the summer when President Obama and the Congress provided Israel with that additional funding for Iron Dome which has saved so many lives. And that friendship was demonstrated yet again last week when

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an overwhelming bipartisan majority of the House followed the Senate in approving the U.S.-Israel Strategic Partnership Act. I thank our many friends from both parties in the House and the Senate who like me are committed to strengthening even further the U.S.-Israel alliance. I am confident that by continuing to work together closely Israel, the United States, and our moderate Arab partners can build a more secure, prosperous, and peaceful future. It won't be easy because the challenges are great. To meet those challenges Israel needs a government capable of making tough decisions. I hope to receive a broad and renewed mandate from the people to form a strong and stable government that will be up to the task of leading the Jewish state in these tumultuous and fateful times. I am confident that in the years ahead we can and we will steer Israel to safer shores.

Thank you all. (Applause)

MS. WITTES: Ladies and gentlemen, I'm going to ask your forbearance. Please stay in your seats. Secretary Kerry is en route and will be here in just a

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few minutes, so enjoy conversation amongst yourselves,
but please don't get up or leave the room. Thank you.

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I, Carleton J. Anderson, III do hereby certify that the forgoing electronic file when originally transmitted was reduced to text at my direction; that said transcript is a true record of the proceedings therein referenced; that I am neither counsel for, related to, nor employed by any of the parties to the action in which these proceedings were taken; and, furthermore, that I am neither a relative or employee of any attorney or counsel employed by the parties hereto, nor financially or otherwise interested in the outcome of this action.

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