

President Trump Reaffirms Commitment to Israel at Press Conference

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu made his first trip to the White House of the Donald Trump presidency on Wednesday, the first face-to-face meeting for the two leaders since the president's inauguration last month.

There were a lot of topics to discuss, including Iran, settlements in Judea and Samaria, the Middle East peace process and relocating the U.S. Embassy to Jerusalem. While there weren't a lot of indications about what topics they had already discussed, Trump and Netanyahu held a press conference in the East Room of the White House Wednesday afternoon and expressed their mutual respect and commitment to building a stronger bilateral relationship.

Trump addressed the media first:

Today I have the honor of welcoming my friend, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, to the White House. With this visit, the United States again reaffirms our unbreakable bond with our cherished ally, Israel. The partnership between our two countries built on our shared values has advanced the cause of human freedom, dignity and peace. These are the building blocks of democracy.

The state of Israel is a symbol to the world of resilience in the face of oppression—I can think of no other state that's gone through what they've gone—and of survival in the face of genocide. We will never forget what the Jewish people have endured.

Your perseverance in the face of hostility, your open democracy in the face of violence and your success in the

face of tall odds is truly inspirational. The security challenges faced by Israel are enormous, including the threat of Iran's nuclear ambitions, which I've talked a lot about. One of the worst deals I've ever seen is the Iran deal. My administration has already imposed new sanctions on Iran, and I will do more to prevent Iran from ever developing—I mean ever—a nuclear weapon.

Our security assistance to Israel is currently at an all-time high, ensuring that Israel has the ability to defend itself from threats of which there are unfortunately many. Both of our countries will continue and grow. We have a long history of cooperation in the fight against terrorism and the fight against those who do not value human life. America and Israel are two nations that cherish the value of all human life.

This is one more reason why I reject unfair and one-sided actions against Israel at the United Nations—[which] just treated Israel, in my opinion, very, very unfairly—or other international forums, as well as boycotts that target Israel. Our administration is committed to working with Israel and our common allies in the region towards greater security and stability. That includes working toward a peace agreement between Israel and the Palestinians. The United States will encourage a peace and, really, a great peace deal. We'll be working on it very, very diligently. Very important to me also—something we want to do. But it is the parties themselves who must directly negotiate such an agreement. We'll be beside them; we'll be working with them.

As with any successful negotiation, both sides will have to make compromises:

I want the Israeli people to know that the United States stands with Israel in the struggle against terrorism. As you know, Mr. Prime Minister, our two nations will always condemn terrorist acts. Peace requires nations to uphold the

dignity of human life and to be a voice for all of those who are endangered and forgotten. Those are the ideals to which we all, and will always, aspire and commit. This will be the first of many productive meetings.

Netanyahu then gave some brief remarks:

President Trump, thank you for the truly warm hospitality you and Melania have shown me, my wife Sara, our entire delegation. I deeply value your friendship. To me, to the state of Israel, it was so clearly evident in the words you just spoke—Israel has no better ally than the United States. And I want to assure you, the United States has no better ally than Israel.

Our alliance has been remarkably strong, but under your leadership, I'm confident it will get even stronger. I look forward to working with you to dramatically upgrade our alliance in every field—in security, in technology, in cyber and trade and so many others. And I certainly welcome your forthright call to ensure that Israel is treated fairly in international forums, and that the slander and boycotts of Israel are resisted mightily by the power and moral position of the United States of America.

As you have said, our alliance is based on a deep bond of common values and common interests. And, increasingly, those values and interests are under attack by one malevolent force: radical Islamic terror. Mr. President, you've shown great clarity and courage in confronting this challenge head-on. You call for confronting Iran's terrorist regime, preventing Iran from realizing this terrible deal into a nuclear arsenal. And you have said that the United States is committed to preventing Iran from getting nuclear weapons. You call for the defeat of ISIS. Under your leadership, I believe we can reverse the rising tide of radical Islam. And in this great task, as in so many others, Israel stands with you and I stand with you.

Mr. President, in rolling back militant Islam, we can seize an historic opportunity—because, for the first time in my lifetime, and for the first time in the life of my country, Arab countries in the region do not see Israel as an enemy, but, increasingly, as an ally. And I believe that under your leadership, this change in our region creates an unprecedented opportunity to strengthen security and advance peace.

Let us seize this moment together. Let us bolster security. Let us seek new avenues of peace. And let us bring the remarkable alliance between Israel and the United States to even greater heights.

David Brody of CBN received the honor of the first question. He asked about how the fallout of former National Security Adviser Mike Flynn's resignation as it relates to the Iran nuclear deal and whether or not the U.S. and Israel are "on the same page" regarding West Bank settlements.

Trump started his answer by suggesting Flynn was the victim of "fake news" attacks by the liberal mainstream media. He called the retired Army general a "good man" and said leaks that led to his resignation were criminal in nature.

As for the settlements, he said:

I'd like to see you (addressing Netanyahu) hold back on settlements for a little bit. We'll work something out. But I would like to see a deal be made. I think a deal will be made. I know that every president would like to. Most of them have not started until late because they never thought it was possible. And it wasn't possible because they didn't do it.

But Bibi and I have known each other a long time—a smart man, great negotiator. And I think we're going to make a deal. It might be a bigger and better deal than people in this room even understand. That's a possibility. So let's

see what we do.

That led to a little bit of joking about “the art of the deal” between the two heads of state.

The next question, from a member of the Israeli press—as is tradition at East Room press conferences—referred to the so-called “Two-State Solution,” settlements and moving the U.S. Embassy to Jerusalem. This is where Trump the negotiator showed up in full force.

He said:

So I’m looking at two-state and one-state, and I like the one that both parties like. I’m very happy with the one that both parties like. I can live with either one.

I thought for a while the two-state looked like it may be the easier of the two. But honestly, if Bibi and if the Palestinians—if Israel and the Palestinians are happy, I’m happy with the one they like the best.

As far as the embassy moving to Jerusalem, I’d love to see that happen. We’re looking at it very, very strongly. We’re looking at it with great care—great care, believe me. And we’ll see what happens.

Netanyahu responded by stating his conditions for a peace deal:

I read yesterday that an American official said that if you ask five people what two states would look like, you’d get eight different answers. Mr. President, if you ask five Israelis, you’d get 12 different answers.

But rather than deal with labels, I want to deal with substance. It’s something I’ve hoped to do for years in a world that’s absolutely fixated on labels and not on substance. So here’s the substance: There are two prerequisites for peace that I laid out two years—several

years ago, and they haven't changed.

First, the Palestinians must recognize the Jewish state. They have to stop calling for Israel's destruction. They have to stop educating their people for Israel's destruction.

Second, in any peace agreement, Israel must retain the overriding security control over the entire area west of the Jordan River. Because if we don't, we know what will happen—because otherwise we'll get another radical Islamic terrorist state in the Palestinian areas exploding the peace, exploding the Middle East.

Now, unfortunately, the Palestinians vehemently reject both prerequisites for peace. First, they continue to call for Israel's destruction—inside their schools, inside their mosques, inside the textbooks. You have to read it to believe it.

They even deny, Mr. President, our historical connection to our homeland. And I suppose you have to ask yourself: Why do—why are Jews called Jews? Well, the Chinese are called Chinese because they come from China. The Japanese are called Japanese because they come from Japan. Well, Jews are called Jews because they come from Judea. This is our ancestral homeland. Jews are not foreign colonialists in Judea.

So, unfortunately, the Palestinians not only deny the past, they also poison the present. They name public squares in honor of mass murderers who murdered Israelis, and I have to say also murdered Americans. They fund—they pay monthly salaries to the families of murderers, like the family of the terrorist who killed Taylor Force, a wonderful young American, a West Point graduate, who was stabbed to death while visiting Israel.

So this is the source of the conflict—the persistent

Palestinian refusal to recognize the Jewish state in any boundary, this persistent rejection. That's the reason we don't have peace. Now, that has to change. I want it to change. Not only have I not abandoned these two prerequisites of peace, [but] they've become even more important because of the rising tide of fanaticism that has swept the Middle East and has also, unfortunately, infected Palestinian society.

So I want this to change. I want those two prerequisites of peace—substance, not labels—I want them reinstated. But if anyone believes that I, as prime minister of Israel, responsible for the security of my country, would blindly walk into a Palestinian terrorist state that seeks the destruction of my country, they're gravely mistaken.

The two prerequisites of peace—recognition of the Jewish State, and Israel's security needs west of the Jordan—they remain pertinent. We have to look for new ways, new ideas on how to reinstate them and how to move peace forward. And I believe that the great opportunity for peace comes from a regional approach from involving our newfound Arab partners in the pursuit of a broader peace and peace with the Palestinians.

Both men pledged to work on the issue during the press conference. They addressed additional questions about settlements, peace negotiations and the alleged rise of anti-Semitic attacks in the U.S. since the president's election.

The final point elicited a pointed final comment from Netanyahu:

I've known President Trump for many years, and to allude to him, or to his people—his team, some of whom I've known for many years, too. Can I reveal, Jared, how long we've known you? Well, he was never small. He was always big. He was always tall.

But I've known the president and I've known his family and his team for a long time, and there is no greater supporter of the Jewish people and the Jewish state than President Donald Trump. I think we should put that to rest. {eo}