

## The Speech the President Should Have Given

*Ladies and gentlemen, please stand by for a message from the President of the United States:*

“My fellow Americans, I, like many of you am deeply troubled by the accidental killing of seven workers from World Central Kitchen in Gaza by an Israeli strike. I say accidental because I was assured that this was not an intentional targeting. I have spoken with Prime Minister Netanyahu, and members of my team, including the Secretaries of State and Defense, our National Security Advisor have all been in touch with their counterparts in Israel.

In every one of those conversations without prompting from us, even before we said anything, Israeli leaders expressed their deep and sincere regret for what happened and took full responsibility. They promised me they would undertake a full and thorough investigation of the incident, and that they will be taking measures to ensure that something like this does not happen again. They told us that the people who made the decision to bomb the aid convoy will be held accountable and appropriately disciplined. And we have been reassured at the highest levels that Israel is going to do everything it can to increase the amount of humanitarian aid and food going into Gaza.

I could not have asked for any more than this on the part of the Israelis.

In fact, I have seen reports that more food is going into Gaza than ever before. The problem is that Hamas, the terrorist organization which started this war and which still governs Gaza uses the distribution of food as a weapon, and won't let it get to the poor people who deserve and need it.

Folks, there is a reason why there is an old saying, (probably older than me), that “War is Hell.” It is.

I am reluctant to say this, because I was kind of hoping everyone would forget it, but I was reminded by my aides and advisers that we had something very similar happen in the final weeks of our operations in Afghanistan just a few years ago. We tracked an aid worker's car for 8 hours, because the car was seen at a compound used by ISIS and our surveillance drone saw men loading what we thought were explosives into a car. It turned out to be containers of water. We wound up killing an aid worker and nine members of his family, one of whom was only two years old.

These things happen in the fog of war.

I want the American people to know that I know the Israeli people. I know their leaders. I know their values. What happened pains them more than you can imagine. That is because they, like

us, value life. This terrible event is not indicative of their values. It was a mistake, an aberration, not the norm.

They are fighting an enemy that hides behind civilians.

They are fighting an enemy that goes underground into the tunnels they built with the billions of dollars we and other countries around the world have given them so their leaders can be safe, while leaving their people exposed. Hamas uses hospitals, schools and mosques and homes to store their arsenal of weapons, knowing that Israel will do everything it can to limit casualties and loss of the lives of non-combatants.

The ratio of how many non-combatants are killed for every militant or terrorist they take out is the absolute lowest in history – that is how careful they are. I know what I am about to say may be hard to believe, but Israel's enemy regards every death, regardless of whether it is someone on their side or the other side as a victory.

This is why, if Hamas truly cared about its people and their welfare, and wanted to prevent future tragedies and further loss of life, it would immediately, without any delay will lay down its arms and unconditionally release the 134 innocent hostages it has been holding for six months against their will. There is no justification for these innocent men, women and children being held captive.

I call upon the leaders of the world to join me and recognize the nefarious, malicious evil that is Hamas, a proxy of Iran, and of how important it is to all who cherish freedom and value our way of life, that they be defeated.

Thank you, and God bless America.”

Can you imagine what would have happened if the President had made such a speech.

Rather than give legitimacy to Israel's haters and detractors, rather than give oxygen to negative assumptions about Israel, rather than fueling and encouraging anti-Semitism, it would have calmed the storm. There is a word for this kind of response. It is -- presidential. It is the kind of leadership and clear moral voice that is so desperately needed at this time, which is to remind people of the purpose and goals of Hamas, of who started the war, and why Israel continues to fight it.

Having just returned on Thursday from Israel, my second trip there since October 7, this time with an unbelievable group of 20 members of our congregation, I want to share with you some of what we heard and saw while we were there and the messages we were asked to bring back. We went on a mission of solidarity and to volunteer, to show that we cared, which we did through

our meetings and on work sponsored by Sar-El on an army base for several days and working in an apricot field.

While most of us are aware of the rapes, pillaging, kidnapping, killings, beheadings and hostage-taking that occurred on October 7, there was another aspect of the attack that has been under-reported. The western Negev, the area that was attacked, is the breadbasket of the entire country. It provides 70% of Israel's fresh produce. The Hamas army deliberately targeted and sought to destroy Israel's agriculture. We saw some of the results of their destruction. They burned or stole vital farming equipment, tractors, and dismantled and disabled irrigation equipment and did whatever they could to destroy and cause hardship. They killed and burned animals alive.

Among the hostages and those killed were foreign agricultural workers. We may have thought that these people were unfortunate victims who happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. It turns out it was not accidental, but that they were targeted. The killing and kidnapping of foreign workers has driven away many, leading to a labor shortage, causing crops to not be harvested, which is why we assisted in helping in an apricot field.

Incidentally, the damage deliberately done to the environment by Hamas should be reason enough for climate activists and anyone who cares about the environment and ecology to oppose Hamas.

The devastation we saw, the barbarism we heard of, the intensity of the assault is unimaginable.

As was the heroism of so many we met.

I had told you before about Rami Davidian, who at the risk of his own life, went into the belly of the beast – returning over and over to the site of the Nova festival, the field which we visited, to rescue children of people who contacted him on Whatsapp, strangers, begging him to do what he could to save their child. For almost 48 hours straight, without a break, unarmed, he took his small little pickup truck and went back to find and rescue as many young people as he could.

At one point, as he came upon a girl who he thought was alone, he saw that she was already captured and in the hands of five Hamas gunmen. Thinking quickly, without hesitation, he spoke to the captors in Arabic and presented himself as one of them. He said he was a Muslim Bedouin from a nearby village. He told them that they all needed to run away because the IDF was rapidly closing in on them. And then he said to them, "The five of you should go and I will take the girl so she won't slow you down." They willingly handed her over to him. By the time it was all over, his quick thinking and brave actions saved the lives of 750 people.

I think I speak for all of us who went on our mission when I say that we came away inspired and touched by the heroism, the decency, the resilience, the determination we saw.

We met young soldiers as we worked helping to organize several containers full of supplies so they could be ready and sent to the front lines when needed.

We met Tamara Haimov, an energetic bundle of energy who is running a massive program with an army of volunteers in the basement garage of the Tel Aviv Expo Center where they accumulate, organize, and distribute tons of food, clothing, toys and whatever is needed or requested to soldiers and displaced families throughout the country.

A request repeatedly made to us was that we tell the stories we heard, and let people know what Hamas did and how and why Israel is responding. They asked us to be ambassadors, witnesses to counter the impressions left by the media and what they called “fake news” about what was going on.

We saw pipes that were supplied by the West to be used to irrigate and for agricultural purposes were converted by Hamas into rockets of destruction. Inverting the words of the prophet inscribed on the Isaiah wall at the United Nations who dreamed that the time will come when, “They shall beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks.” Instead, Hamas takes ploughshares and pruning hooks and turns them into swords and spears, into weapons of war.

As some of you may have heard, there are some cracks in the absolute unity that was so apparent in the immediate aftermath of the attack. Yet, regardless of how people feel about various issues, there was consensus, consistency and agreement that the hostages must be released; that Israel must defeat Hamas and that it not be allowed to remain as a governing force in Gaza; and that to accomplish this, Israel will have to enter Rafah.

Ironically, the residents of the area attacked, and of those attending the music festival were among Israel’s strongest advocates on the left, for peace and accommodation with their Palestinian neighbors. Many have changed their position, while some have not. They still cling to the hope they may be able to live peacefully next to the neighbors bent on their destruction. Yet even those Israelis who believe the Palestinians should have a state of their own, which most are not willing to discuss at this time say this, not because of any sympathy or love for them or their cause, but because they want to have nothing to do with them.

We came away thanked for coming and showing that they are not alone, appreciative of our support. The prevailing theme – *Yahad nenatzeach*, together we will prevail, was ubiquitous. The word *yahad*, together, refers not just to a united Israel, but together, with the unity and

solidarity and support of the American Jewish community and Jews around the world, together, as one people, we will win – so that Israel will live in peace and security.

*Rabbi Stuart Weinblatt*  
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