

Oh, wait, wait, I'll answer the Coast Guard question. Go ahead. This is important—further—what's going on for America today, so I'll answer this. Go ahead.

Search for Wreckage of John F. Kennedy, Jr., Aircraft/Conversations With Kennedy Family

Q. Mr. President, I'm told that you were briefed earlier today by the U.S. Coast Guard about their search for the wreckage of the Kennedy plane. Can you tell us what the results of that are to date? And also, sir, since the search became a—quote, unquote—“recovery operation” last night, have you had a chance to speak with any members of the Kennedy family, and if so, can you relate some or all of those conversations?

President Clinton. Well, let me say, first of all, I did speak with Admiral Larrabee this morning, and again I want to say I think the Coast Guard, the National Transportation Safety Board, the FAA, all the State and local entities who have worked for them have done quite a fine job here; and I'm grateful to them.

He was actually, Admiral Larrabee, somewhat optimistic that they would eventually be successful in this area they have identified, in finding further—at least further parts of the plane. And I believe it's appropriate that this search continue. So I think they've done a good job.

I have had, over the last 3 days, several conversations with Senator Kennedy, and I have talked with Caroline, and I have—but I think it would not be appropriate for me to talk about the merits of it.

Let me say that John Kennedy and his sister and later his wife, were uncommonly kind to my daughter and to my wife, and this has been a very difficult thing for us, personally, as well as because of my position. They are very strong people, and I think they are carrying on as well as any human beings could. But they need the support and prayers of our country.

Thank you.

Prime Minister Barak. Allow my please to add to it—to extend on behalf of myself and the Israeli people our prayers and thoughts to the Kennedy family that faced so many tragedies and now is facing another

one, a tragedy that I believe touched hearts of billions all around the world.

Thank you.

President Clinton. Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President's 178th news conference began at 4 p.m. in Presidential Hall (formerly Room 450) in the Old Executive Office Building. In his remarks, the President referred to Chairman Yasser Arafat of the Palestinian Authority; Rear Adm. Richard M. Larrabee, USCG, 1st Coast Guard District, head of the search and recovery efforts off the coast of Martha's Vineyard, MA, to locate the missing aircraft that carried John F. Kennedy, Jr., his wife, Carolyn Bessette Kennedy, and her sister Lauren Bessette. The President also referred to Mr. Kennedy's sister, Caroline Kennedy Schlossberg. Prime Minister Barak referred to his wife, Nava; and Vice President Abd al-Halim Khaddam of Syria.

Joint Statement by President Clinton and Prime Minister Ehud Barak

July 19, 1999

During several days of close consultations, the President and the Prime Minister conducted a comprehensive review of the U.S.-Israel bilateral relations, the peace process, Israeli as well as regional security, economic and scientific development and cooperation. These fruitful discussions have produced important agreements and understandings in all of these areas.

Prime Minister Barak expressed his deep appreciation of President Clinton's special efforts to enhance the U.S.-Israeli relationship and advance the cause of peace in the Middle East.

President Clinton and Prime Minister Barak have reached a broad new understanding that significantly enhances the already unique bilateral relations between the United States and Israel, and raises their friendship and cooperation to an even higher level of strategic partnership. This new partnership is designed to underpin their joint effort to put an end to the Arab-Israeli conflict and achieve a comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

The President and the Prime Minister have agreed on the need to assign a top priority to the pursuit of peace in the Middle East. They have also reached a meeting of

minds on the desirability of making an intensive effort to move ahead simultaneously on all tracks of the peace process, bilateral and multilateral, as well as on the important role that would be played by the United States in support of the process.

President Clinton assured Prime Minister Barak that the United States would be ready to assist and contribute in any way it can to achieving an historical reconciliation that will usher in a new era of peace, security, prosperity and cooperation in the Middle East. In this context, he reiterated the U.S. commitment to help Israel minimize the risks and costs it incurs as it pursues peace and affirmed the broad U.S. backing that would be accorded to Israel, to facilitate the pursuit of peace.

Recognizing that the U.S.-Israel relationship serves as a cornerstone for pursuing peace, they vowed to strengthen and deepen this unique relationship, which is based on shared democratic values, bonds of friendship, common interests and joint cooperation in so many areas of human endeavor. President Clinton reiterated the steadfast commitment of the United States to Israel's security, to maintain its qualitative edge, and to strengthen Israel's ability to deter and defend itself, by itself, against any threat or a possible combination of threats.

The United States and Israel will sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) which will express their joint intention to restructure U.S. bilateral assistance to Israel. The MOU will state the United States' intention to sustain its annual military assistance to Israel, and incrementally increase its level by one-third over the next decade to a level of \$2.4 billion subject to Congressional consultations and approval. At the same time, the MOU will provide for a gradual phase-out of U.S. economic aid to Israel, over a comparable period, as the Israeli economy grows more robust, less dependent on foreign aid, and more integrated in world markets.

The two leaders also reviewed the status of the U.S.-Israeli defense relationship and agreed that existing defense channels of coordination and cooperation work effectively. These would have to be further consolidated and strengthened under a Defense Policy

Advisory Group (DPAG) to meet the new challenges of WMD, counter proliferation (CP) and theater missile defense (TMD). The Group will coordinate and plan the cooperation between the U.S. Department of Defense and the Israeli Ministry of Defense.

In addition, the two leaders agreed on the components of the \$1.2 billion military aid package for Israel that the Administration has already requested from Congress. The President assured the Prime Minister of his intention to work closely with the Congress to seek expedited action for funding, starting in FY 1999, for this package to support Israel as it implements the Wye River Memorandum. The package will have three components:

- Assistance to the Israeli Defense Forces as they carry out further redeployments, including projects which will be managed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

- Assistance in meeting Israel's broader strategic requirements, including Theater Missile Defense (TMD), helicopters, and communications equipment and munitions.

- Assistance in meeting the increased cost of Israeli counter-terrorism efforts.

The two leaders also agreed on the importance of spreading the benefits of peace to all those who participate in the process. In that context, they expressed support for the \$400 million in assistance to the Palestinian people and \$300 million for Jordan that is part of the Administration's request to Congress to support implementation of the Wye River Memorandum.

President Clinton and Prime Minister Barak agreed that Israel faces new challenges in the strategic arena, particularly the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missiles that threaten to undermine Israel's security. In this context, the two leaders agreed to step up the overall bilateral cooperation and coordination, as well as to implement a number of measures designed to help Israel meet these emerging threats:

- The United States will provide funding for Israel's acquisition of a Third Arrow battery that will enhance the protection of Israel's citizens from ballistic missile attacks.