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The Honorable Joseph R. Biden
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

May 13, 2024 - Day 220 of Captivity for 132 Men, Women, and Children

Dear President Biden,

We write on behalf of the Rabbinical Council of America, representing over one thousand Orthodox rabbis, to express our profound shock and disappointment at your CNN interview of last Wednesday, May 8th. As 132 people are still being held hostage in Gaza, we wonder: how did the leadership of the Hamas terror organization receive your words, "we're walking away from Israel's ability to wage war in those areas," other than as a signal encouraging them to continue to hold onto the hostages, and as a morale booster for the remaining battalions of their terror army?

One day prior to the CNN interview, on Tuesday, May 7th, your public remarks at the US Capitol memorializing the Holocaust drew a direct link between those who were murdered by Hitler and those who were murdered by Hamas, describing October 7th as the hatred of the Nazis "brought to life...[by] the terror group Hamas...driven by ancient desire to wipe out the Jewish people off the face of the Earth." As the United States defeated Hitler then, so the State of Israel must defeat Hamas now. As was the case in World War Two, the aim is not to obliterate a murderous ideology; it is to destroy the ability of the enemy to carry out its nefarious aims. Given that the twin goals of the war are to rescue the hostages and to destroy Hamas, we reject the distinction between so-called offensive versus defensive weaponry. Israel is defending its citizens from further attack by Hamas. We believe it is within the national interest to enable them to continue to do so, especially as they are also presently under attack from Hezbollah and the Houthis, and, just a month ago, from Iran.

We refuse to translate "never again" as merely "never forget." We now know that those who hate Jews—the people or the Jewish state—today can dutifully remember the Holocaust through museums, academic programs, monuments, and memorial events, and yet proceed to subvert its memory in the service of their hatred. When the late Rabbi Jonathan Sacks described antisemitism as a mutating virus, he explained that in the twenty-first century this means accusing the Jewish State of crimes against humanity, genocide, etc. To us, the commitment to "never again" means the State of Israel.

Mr. President, your remarks to CNN on May 8th stand in stark contrast to your decades-long commitment to a strong US-Israel relationship. We know that this commitment, in word and in deed, is borne of common interests, of shared values, and of genuine affinity. It was especially evident in the weeks and months following October 7th. In light of this, these latest statements are especially painful; they risk undermining the State of Israel in its hour of "never again."

With hopes that your administration will reconsider its approach moving forward, we remain,

Sincerely yours,

[Signature of Rabbi Zvi Engel]
Rabbi Zvi Engel
President

[Signature of Rabbi Menachem Penner]
Rabbi Menachem Penner
Executive Vice President