

ABC News Special

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1:40:43 a.m.

4 minutes and 8 seconds

MARY BRUCE: And, David, I am sure that the President is watching all of this extremely closely. It has been 736 agonizing days for these families, for the world, waiting for this very moment for these remaining hostages to be released. President Trump, of course, it is a huge moment for him as well. He helped to broker this deal. He is coming here where he is going to greet and spend some time with the families of the hostages, who we know that he has also been speaking with throughout this process. Then he will be addressing the Knesset, the Israeli parliament. He's only here for a couple of hours before then heading to Egypt, where he will meet with the Egyptian President el-Sisi and also 20 other world leaders, to try and begin to talk about what comes next. But today, right now, in this moment, this morning is all about these families and the hostages being returned, a momentous, huge moment, highly emotional and the President, I'm sure, watching this closely on Air Force One. David.

DAVID MUIR: Mary, we know the President expected to come here to Israel to speak to the Israeli parliament, Knesset. And of course, after that, he'll travel to Egypt, where he'll meet with world leaders to sign this deal into place. But Mary, he declared on Air Force One on the way here that this is the end of the war, though you and I both know what comes next will also be very difficult to navigate.

BRUCE: Yeah, the President has been quite stern in that. When speaking with reporters earlier this morning aboard Air Force One, saying bluntly, the war is over, the war is over. And of course, that is the hope. And while as the President has said, this is a momentous breakthrough and obviously the ceasefire that everyone had been hoping for, there is still a lot of work to do here and a lot of huge questions. A tremendous sticking points remain. Chiefly, will Hamas disarm, making sure that Israel does not resume its campaign once the hostages are returned, and how to govern Gaza going forward? All of these are things that need to be worked out. But the President, as he gets ready to take something of a victory lap as he is expecting to be greeted as a peacemaker here in Israel today, is adamant that this is going to hold, and that is what he said to reporters. He said, this is going to hold. He said he has gotten a lot of verbal guarantees from both sides. And interestingly, the President said, I don't think they are going to want to disappoint me, underscoring the vital role that he played and that he feels he played in this. One of the other remaining questions, what role will President Trump play going forward in trying to negotiate the next phase and beyond, David?

MUIR: And Mary, President Trump fully aware of the support he has on the ground here from the families and for from the supporters of the families here. When I walked through Hostage Square, many of them told me they wanted to thank President Trump because, in their words, they believe it was his pressure on Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to finally come to the table on this cease fire.

BRUCE: Yeah, and the President did play an extremely pivotal role here. He was extremely

tough with Benjamin Netanyahu. Yes, they are very close allies. But the President has admitted, yes, he had to have some difficult conversations with him. He really turned up the pressure in the last several weeks, also taking steps to show Hamas that he had credibility, that he could be trusted in these negotiations as well. And, David, you saw that over the weekend in that rally that was held here, where the President's negotiators, chief negotiators, his Middle East envoy, Steve Witkoff, his son-in-law, Jared Kushner, who helped negotiate this deal when they were speaking to the crowd, to the families of hostages and so many supporters, there was a huge cheer and applause when he mentioned President Trump and the work that he had done. So many here extremely grateful for the role that the President has played. Interestingly, we also saw that crowd booing for Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu, who has really faced a lot of pushback for the way that he has conducted this war. The President, though this morning, is defending Netanyahu, saying that he is the right guy at the right time and saying he did a great job.

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2:51:17 a.m.

2 minutes and 6 seconds

BRUCE: David, just a remarkable sight. Israel, quite literally rolling out the red carpet to welcome President Trump, who, of course, played such a critical role in brokering this deal. And in fact, reporters traveling with him note that as they were landing, there was a giant sign on the beach that said simply, thank you. The President is likely to be greeted here as a peacemaker. You see there on the red carpet as well, waiting for him, of course, Benjamin Netanyahu, who the President worked incredibly closely with. It was their relationship that, in many ways was the key at the heart of being able to finally get this done. The President views Netanyahu as an incredibly close ally, but also has admitted that he had to — to be tough with him. Those are the President's words that he had to apply tremendous pressure on Netanyahu to finally get this deal over the finish line. And, David, I think back to the fact that it was just two weeks ago, exactly that we were at the White House, the President with Netanyahu there in the State Dining Room, unveiling their 20-point peace plan. And to imagine that now, just two weeks later, that we are here in Tel Aviv, watching the President arrive to celebrate this historic moment, the return of these hostages, it is a remarkable turn of events. And of course, you also see there on the tarmac the two men who negotiated this deal, not — not career diplomats, but rather two real estate developers. The President's Middle East envoy, Steve Witkoff, and his son-in-law, Jared Kushner, who, of course, has a tremendous experience in the region. He worked on the Abraham Accords during the President's first term and also close business ties in the region. Jared Kushner playing a critical role in getting this deal across the finish line. The question, then is what comes next? And we did hear the President sort of bristle at the notion that Netanyahu hasn't gone so far as to say that the war is over, the President pushing back against that sternly with reporters aboard Air Force One saying, the war is over. The war is over. Do you understand that? And I suspect that is a message that he will be delivering here as he speaks to the Israeli parliament shortly after meeting with the hostage families.

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12:28:46 p.m.

3 minutes and 25 seconds

MUIR: And as you could hear from President Trump here today, hoping that this day not only defines his presidency but defines the future here of the Middle East. What comes next, though, Mary, as you and I both know, will be a significant challenge here.

BRUCE: A tremendous challenge, David, and President Trump throughout the day has been welcomed, both here in Israel and in Egypt as a peacemaker and this is a huge success for President Trump. He is now hailing this as a historic dawn of a new Middle East. He no question helped to broker this deal. He was pivotal through his relationships within the Middle East and also just through his own brash style, putting tremendous pressure on Netanyahu and also taking actions that proved that he could be trusted to Hamas. But the President today has been touting this deal. He has also been looking ahead, but it is notable that he has not really been discussing the details yet. Of the many, many challenges ahead, he did tell reporters a short while ago that he believes that phase two has begun, that it began immediately. So we are now at that point. But the President has also declared that this war is over. It is now up to many of the leaders that he is meeting with now to ensure that that actually comes to pass. But there are tremendous questions that still remain here. How will Gaza be made secure? How will it be reconstructed? Who's going to pay for all of that? And who will govern Gaza in the short term? I have been asking these questions of the President for the last week: what does phase two look like? He hasn't wanted to get into those details just yet. Today has been a moment for him to celebrate this victory. The question now, how does he take this momentum and move it forward? And we have heard from him that he, in fact believes that this is a turning point, not just for Israel and the people of Gaza, but for the Middle East as a whole. He has mentioned relations with Iran today in his remarks as well. He has a grand, big vision, and he is hoping that this is just the beginning of a true new era here, David.

MUIR: And no one, of course, minimizing the power, the impact of these 20 hostages being returned to these Israeli families here today, extremely, extremely moving images being seen all over the world. Mary. But on Air Force One, coming into the region, as you know, President Trump made it very clear when asked. He said, the war is over. We have not heard those words from Israeli authorities any sort of declaration to that extent from the prime minister or the Israeli military.

BRUCE: We have not. And it is a very important distinction. The President has been blunt. He thinks this is going to hold and that the war is over. In fact, he was quite blunt about that. The war is over. The war is over. You understand? That is what he said to reporters when they pointed out that Netanyahu hasn't gone so far in declaring that. Hamas has welcomed that statement. And so there is a it appears to be a bit of a disagreement. And certainly while the President is using this breakthrough, this return of hostages, this tremendous ceasefire to claim that the entire war has been solved, the reality is that there is a lot left to work out here and while interestingly, Netanyahu, of course, is not there tonight, he was invited by Egyptian President el-Sisi in a conversation that President Trump brokered himself earlier today. Netanyahu not attending, citing the Jewish holiday, so it is an interesting moment to have this conversation

about the path forward without essentially the protagonist in this story.

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4 minutes and 40 seconds

MUIR: Mary, you heard James talking about the very difficult questions that lie ahead. Obviously, getting the 20 hostages home, that's phase one. And it is significant just getting to this point. A lot of credit being given to President Trump, not only around the world, but particularly here in Israel. Mary, you've seen it yourself. I saw it right here in the square, Hostage Square, where people came up and told me that they appreciated the efforts of President Trump. And in many ways, they believe it was President Trump who applied significant pressure on their own, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. We know the two men are allies, but that there was behind the scenes significant pressure in the final days leading up to that ceasefire. President Trump actually alluding to that during his address to the Knesset, the parliament here in Israel today, saying Benjamin Netanyahu can be tough to deal with, got some laughter in parliament, said that's why he's a good leader, but he can be difficult to deal with. And Mary, I thought that was a bit of a hint to what those final days of negotiations might have been like between President Trump and his close ally, Benjamin Netanyahu. But as James talked about the significant questions going forward, we know there's a board of peace, if you will. They've named this apolitical group that will oversee the future of Gaza. And chairing that group will be President Trump himself. He talked about that today in parliament, but that's taking on a significant role on the world stage. He's standing there and as James mentioned, it wasn't President el-Sisi shaking hands there in Egypt with the leaders who are gathered in Sharm el-Sheikh. It was President Trump himself taking on one of the most difficult, one of the thorniest, one of the most intractable sort of regions in the world. When you look at the history of the fighting here and now, he'll be sort of chairing that board as it moves forward.

BRUCE: Yeah. And there is no question President Trump is taking ownership in many ways of this. It was remarkable to see him standing there greeting all of the leaders, shaking everyone's hands one by one. And as you noted, he will be the chair of this board of peace. In fact, the President was joking earlier when he was speaking with reporters that everyone's lining up to be a member of that board, but it does put President Trump front and center in the conversation about what comes next. And that means that he will continue to face tough questions and in many ways, be held accountable, in part for what comes next. Here. You noted that he said that Netanyahu can be tough. Well, so can President Trump. And he has said that that is what helped to clinch this deal, was that Trump was willing to be tough on Netanyahu. He put tremendous pressure on him, especially in the last few weeks, to make it clear that that now was the time that they had to have this ceasefire, that Israel had to be willing to pull back its troops to those agreed upon borders so that they could finally get the hostages released and move on to this next phase. But also, as we were discussing, Netanyahu and President Trump don't exactly see eye to eye on where things currently stand. The President has been emphatic that the war is over. He has said that several times today. Netanyahu hasn't been willing to go that far and that means that President Trump may have to continue to be tough with Netanyahu moving forward. All of these

leaders here now to discuss the future of the fate of this conflict and the future of peace in the Middle East. And so much of this will come down to these really, you know, detailed, thorny issues. Who is going to pay? Who's going to put up forces to help to — to bring about security within Gaza just so that you can get to the point of being able to rebuild? What happens to the people of Gaza who, you know, have said it has been written in this 20-point peace plan, and this was a bit of a shift from the for the President because you recall months ago? In fact, I recall that first meeting with Netanyahu in the Oval Office, where President Trump stunned many by saying that Gazans would Palestinians would have to leave Gaza now in this 20 point peace plan, quite the opposite tone. It says that they are being encouraged to stay. And I pushed the President on this point late last week just asking him to clarify, can he guarantee that no one will be forced to leave? And he said, yes, yes. You know, Palestinians will be able to stay in Gaza. But of course, he has also noted that it is very difficult, given the conditions there, to imagine how they will be able to live through this rebuilding process, so there are just a lot of basic nuts and bolts, logistical questions about how you are going to get to a point of peace. And today, now marks the beginning of that conversation with these leaders, but even once they agree on something, you of course have to get the main players on board as well.

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12:51:43 p.m.

5 minutes and 18 seconds

MUIR: This is a moment when the leaders of the Arab world are there for President Trump to show their support. And the question now will be, what will they do to contribute to making sure there is a secure Gaza and a Gaza where the tens of thousands of civilians will be fed, will be policed, will be protected and have their own sovereignty.

BRUCE: David, the President is looking for their buy in, and then he has to make sure that they keep their word. Those are two very daunting tasks. And so I think in this speech, the President is likely to tout this amazing accomplishment, to praise everyone in the room for coming together to help make this happen, and then urge them to keep this momentum going. We do have a few excerpts of the speech and he will say “all the momentum now is toward a great, glorious and lasting peace,” but he needs the help of all of these leaders to make sure that that actually comes to fruition and that is a very tall task, David.

MUIR: Mary, we heard the President just moments ago talking about the media, which we know he often does. He is a student of the media, watches the reporting very closely, seems somewhat surprised himself at the coverage of this historic moment, the return of the 20 hostages, said the media, by and large, covered it with, you know, he appreciated the favorable coverage and of course, the tougher questions come after the return of these hostages. And as I was saying earlier, there is no one witnessing what we've seen today, diminishing the power of what finally played out for the families who waited for more than two years. But President Trump likely knows himself. What comes next will be equally as difficult here.

BRUCE: He does. He is well aware of that. He certainly is taking a victory lap today. He

certainly has been relishing all of the praise, but the praise is much deserved. He played a very pivotal role here, an incredibly pivotal role in getting this deal across the finish line in a way that, as he notes, his predecessor was unable to do. But all of the circumstances coming together, the work of his negotiators, Steve Witkoff, his Middle East envoy, his son-in-law Jared Kushner, using his real estate know-how, his connections in the region to get this deal together. But even Jared Kushner has reflected on how this is similar to a real estate deal in the sense that you get to yes and then you work out the details they have gotten to. Yes, they've gotten the ceasefire. They have now the hostages finally home on this momentous day. Now you have to get down to doing the real work of working through what comes next and how you make sure that this lasts, and coming up with some long term solution. So, the President — yes, he has been, I think, quite pleased to see all of the coverage praising his role in this. He certainly seemed to relish the reception he received here in Israel earlier today, the — the lengthy standing ovations, the repeated standing ovation, the heaping praise from the Israeli leaders, the calls for him to perhaps receive the Nobel Peace Prize next year. So yes, this is a huge moment for this President, for the us. But now what comes next, David.

MUIR: You mentioned Mary as Steve Witkoff, the envoy, President Trump's envoy and his son-in-law, Jared Kushner. Neither described themselves necessarily as diplomats, though they will be defined that way given the history-making roles they had leading up to this moment. And both — both Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner have indicated that they're in this through the rest of these phases, that this — this wasn't an effort on their part to get us to the hostages coming home. And then they would walk away from this. The two of them are — are signaling already that they will continue the very difficult work that comes now.

BRUCE: Yeah. And that was a real question. How much involvement would they have? What would that look like? Steve Witkoff telling reporters a short while ago that he's already begun working on implementation. He's focused on that next phase. How involved Jared Kushner will be may still be a bit of an X factor, but it is a remarkable story for the history books. How these two real estate developers, not career diplomats, somehow managed to negotiate this deal. They have spent the last several days, actually in Egypt, hammering this out. Jared Kushner has been blunt in saying it was not easy. He said there were moments where it was really chaotic. He joked that Steve Witkoff used a lot of four-letter words, but that they were able to get this over the finish line. And a lot of it comes down to the way they do business. Jared Kushner, of course, has deep ties to the region. He knows many of these leaders, both through his own personal business, but also, of course, through his work. During his father in law's first term, he helped to negotiate the Abraham Accords with much success, something that the President mentioned he hopes to continue to build upon earlier in his remarks today, so it is truly a very classic Trump tale. He doesn't necessarily turn to those with career diplomats, those with this kind of experience. He thinks outside the box. He touts himself for and takes praise, or excuse me, takes pride in the fact that he does that. It is why President Trump often refers to himself as the dealmaker-in-chief, and that is a moniker that he certainly has earned here in getting to this first phase. David.