

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

JANUARY 27, 1976

OFFICE OF THE WHITE HOUSE PRESS SECRETARY

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THE WHITE HOUSE

EXCHANGE OF TOASTS  
BETWEEN THE PRESIDENT  
AND  
YITZHAK RABIN  
PRIME MINISTER OF ISRAEL

THE STATE DINING ROOM

10:15 P.M. EST

THE PRESIDENT: Prime Minister and Mrs. Rabin  
and distinguished guests:

It is again a pleasure for us to say shalom.

Betty and I have, of course, and all of our guests feel a very special warmth as far as you, Mr. Prime Minister, and Mrs. Rabin are concerned, and our friendship on a personal basis has been one of long standing and a very enjoyable and very pleasant one.

Your five years in Washington as the distinguished Ambassador of Israel created many and very warm friendships. Betty and I are two of those friends and we are deeply grateful for that relationship and we are obviously delighted to be your hosts tonight.

We are very proud that you are the first head of Government guest during our Bicentennial year and I think that tells us something -- the celebration of our Nation's history gives Americans a deeper appreciation of basic values that we share with the State of Israel.

The tribute that your country and ours pay to these ideals you expressed in Philadelphia last night. Both of our Nations have had a very painful birth as well as growth. As havens for men and women fleeing persecution, both of our Nations find their vitality as well as their strength today in a commitment to freedom and a commitment to democracy and the spirit of free peoples.

Both of our Nations, Mr. Prime Minister, have tasted the bitter truth of war and the struggles that are necessary to preserve independence and security. Both of us know full well in today's world that eternal vigilance is the price of liberty and we individually and collectively will not fail.

MORE

I applaud your statesmanship, Mr. Prime Minister. You have shown it over and over again. It has contributed so much that has been achieved so far. I am gratified that our personal friendship and relationship now facilitates the closest consultation on the very complex problems that we face in the problems ahead.

From the moment of Israel's independence, all of America's Presidents, as well as the major political parties, have identified with your freedom and your progress.

America now completes its second century. Israel counts its heritage in thousands and thousands of years and its modern history in decades. Yet, our heritage, your country and mine, are the same.

I think we must take inspiration from the founding fathers of both our Nations and the principles of justice and freedom which they have passed down to you as well as to myself for the survival of those principles, which is our major responsibility. You are dedicated to that end, Mr. Prime Minister, and all of your people are likewise, and they are an inspiration to all of us.

Israel, Mr. Prime Minister, like the United States, has stuck to its principles and persevered with courage and determination. The unbreakable spirit of the people of Israel remains its strongest defense. And as we reflect on this Bicentennial year, we are both mindful of the indispensable role that the United States has played in the world as a guardian of stability and defender of freedom.

I want to tell you, Mr. Prime Minister, that I am determined, as I think most Americans are, that America will remain strong and America will remain committed to its allies and to its world responsibilities.

I know that Israel and our other friends and allies depend upon America's strength and America's commitment. Our two Nations have been working together for peace in the Middle East. No peace-making process, as you well know, is easy, but important steps have been taken and we are proud of the role that America has played in working with your country.

I know that all Americans deeply desire to see the process continued toward its goal of a just and secure peace.

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The United States has demonstrated many, many times, including yesterday in the United Nations, that we will oppose measures that we consider unrealistic or unworkable or that make peace harder to achieve. But we have demonstrated at the same time we are committed to seek and to support positive measures, positive moves toward peace.

We will continue the hopeful effort in which we are jointly engaged.

You and I began our discussions this morning in a spirit of friendship and a spirit of common desire for peace. You stated this morning, and many times otherwise, your Nation's views eloquently and persuasively.

Ladies and gentlemen, I ask that you join me in a toast to the Prime Minister of Israel and to Mrs. Rabin, to the enduring friendship between Israel and the United States and to a just and lasting peace in the Middle East.

In the ancient toast of the Jewish people, l'chayim.

MORE

PRIME MINISTER RABIN: Mr. President and Mrs. Ford, distinguished guests:

First allow me in the name of my wife and myself to thank you, Mr. President, and you, Mrs. Ford, for your kind invitation to come over to this country as your guests.

We also cherish our personal friendship for the time that I served here as the Israeli Ambassador. I remember that many times I used to come to your office as the Minority Leader in the House to ask for your advice, to get a better understanding about what was going on in this country and I always came out of your office more encouraged about America, about the Congress, about your determination to do what you believed that should be done here in this country as well as this country's policies towards the world, towards securing peace and freedom wherever and whenever it is possible.

Since you took this office, awesome responsibility of the President of the United States, this is the third meeting between us here and we have discussed through this period every possibility, everything that can be done to encourage every option, every avenue to move from war towards peace, to achieve tranquility and stability in the area as long as peace has not been achieved, and I appreciated always your attitude that whenever there is a confrontation the efforts to bring about peace must be done from the standpoint of strengths because no totalitarian regime will tolerate a weak democracy and only a strong democracy can expect to achieve peace with dignity, peace that is worthwhile.

I am especially glad, as you mentioned, Mr. President, that I am the first head of government to be your official guest in this Bicentennial year. I am glad especially because I think I represent even though a very small democracy but it is the only one that exists in the Middle East.

Before we came over I found that when you got your independence 200 years ago the total population of then the United States was three million which is exactly (Laughter) the population of Israel today. And I found that your growth came as a result of the determination of the founding fathers to build a country, but in addition to that, by maintaining the basic principle of open gates to waves of immigrants, and your country grew up by the waves of immigrants that came to this great country.

We maintain the same policy and we have grown through immigration and will continue to grow through immigration.

In the last one and a half years we have taken certain steps through the good offices of the United States Government under your guidance in the effort to bring about certain moves toward peace. I believe that on our part we did our share. We have taken risks in the hope that a better future might be built not only for Israel but for the whole Middle East, for all countries and for all peoples.

MORE

We are in a country in which war might be imminent. We have fought four major wars in the last 28 years and between them we have never entertained one day of peace. And after 28 years of war, believe me, Mr. President, if there is something that we aspire to, that we desire, that we are longing for, it is to achieve a real peace.

Allow me to add that when I stayed in this country I learned one thing -- that the vaguest word in the English dictionary is "peace" because so many interpretations are given to this word and therefore one has to be careful when the word is uttered and no practical and meaningful interpretation is given to that.

And therefore for us the meaning of peace that we want to achieve is peace that will give us, as well as to our neighbors, a sense of security to live the way that we prefer to live in our own country and they in their own.

We have done something to bring stabilization to the area but still the road to peace unfortunately is still long and it will require courage, determination and skill to navigate the ship of hope of peace until it will be a real one, and in facing all these complex problems one has not to lose his hope but at the same time to have no illusions in coping with the difficulties that should be overcome.

After the first talk that I had with you, Mr. President, I believed that we realize the difficulties. We are determined to do everything to find ways to cope with these difficulties and I can assure you, Mr. President, that on the part of Israel every effort will be done to find ways to cooperate with you in the efforts to bring about peace to the area which has suffered so much from wars in the last years.

Allow me also, Mr. President, to thank you personally in the name of the people of Israel for your support through the years, to your support to Israel and to the cause of peace in the area in your capacity as the President of the United States. You mentioned what happened yesterday and I am encouraged by what happened today and I would like to thank you very, very much.

And allow me to raise my glass to the President of the United States and to the friendship between our two countries.

L'chayim.

END

(AT 10:33 A.M. EST)