The original documents are located in Box D31, folder “Zionist Organization of America, Pittsburgh, PA, September 4, 1971” of the Ford Congressional Papers: Press Secretary and Speech File at the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library.

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ADDRESS
BY REP. GERALD R. FORD, R-MICH.
ZIONIST ORGANIZATION OF AMERICA
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
September 4, 1971

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Its goals of national liberation and redemption for the Jewish people have paralleled those of the United States in this period as the defender of individual freedom and national independence for all peoples, at a tremendous cost in American blood and treasure.

In the three-quarters of a century since the Zionist movement began, the world has survived through traumatic and dramatic developments. Mankind has engaged in unspeakable horrors and has also wrought wonders of which our forefathers scarcely dared to dream.

Americans have walked and driven on the moon and have slogged through jungle mud and other Americans have watched them in color in the safety of their living rooms.

But surely there has been no greater miracle in this momentous period of human history than the attainment of the Zionist goal to restore the Jewish people to an honorable place among the nations of the earth on the holy ground from which they had been dispersed for centuries.

The Zionist Organization of America played a major part in this modern miracle which brought about the State of Israel, and in sustaining it through the fiery trials that attended its establishment. You rightfully take pride in what has come to pass in our time and all Americans can share a portion of that pride, for it is part of our own pioneer heritage to champion the oppressed and help those who struggle against towering odds to defend their dignity and freedom.

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I for one am proud of the part our countrymen have played in realization of the Zionist dream and of all the United States has done to strengthen the State of Israel and ensure its progress. It has not been a one-way exchange. As an American I am also grateful for the examples Zionism and modern Israel have given to the world, that devastated lands can be restored to fruitfulness, that degraded people can rise from despair to new heights of creativity and courage, that a free society can react to crisis with resolution and unity of spirit.

But we are not here to take pride but to take stock; to realistically appraise the present and attempt to peer rationally into the future. I cannot claim to be a prophet or the son of prophets, but I can share your concern over certain developments both in our own country and in the Middle East.

Things are happening at a breathtaking speed, not only in space and technology but also in national and international politics. President Nixon announced at the outset of his Presidency that he intended to be an activist President in the tradition of Abraham Lincoln and Theodore Roosevelt -- and some might say Franklin D. Roosevelt as well. Many Americans scoffed as the months passed, but I have crisscrossed the country in recent weeks while the Congress was in recess, and not many are scoffing now. They are cheering.

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But President Nixon's vision of the world as it really is and his assessment of the hazards to peace has been perfectly clear from the beginning. Let me quote directly from his February report to the Congress:

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"Vietnam is our most anguishing problem. It is not, however, the most dangerous. That grim distinction must go to the situation in the Middle East with its vastly greater potential for drawing Soviet policy and our own into a collision that could prove uncontrollable."

Those words are, if anything, truer and more sobering today. With the Vietnam problem rapidly being resolved as America's primary international preoccupation, the Middle East problem with the Arab-Israeli conflict at its center remains in stark and somber primacy on our agenda.

Some of my good friends and good friends of Israel have asked me recently, almost reluctant to express the thought, whether President Nixon's dramatic change of course in relation to Red China, followed by his dramatic switch of signals on domestic wage and price controls, might mean that we could someday wake up to discover a dramatic reversal or revision of United States' policy toward the Middle East.

This is a natural question to which I have an authoritative and instant answer: No!

President Nixon's policy is and will continue to be to strengthen the forces of peace and political stability throughout the Middle East and to reduce the risk of a direct U.S. Soviet military confrontation there. This is a policy we are actively pursuing both with Israel and her Arab neighbors and in direct consultations with the Soviet Union and other outside powers. It is also a policy which parallels the declared policy of the Israeli government and the long-range interest of the Arab peoples.

The reason I can say with certainty that American policy toward Israel and its neighbors will not be subject to sudden change under President Nixon's leadership is that a dramatic redirection already has occurred -- somewhat obscured, to be sure, by public concentration on the Vietnam war. Under this Administration, we have moved from a passive policy of drift and deterioration in our relations with Israel and the Arab nations to an activist pursuit of peace -- first a cessation of shooting and eventually a secure and permanent settlement that can be enforced by the self-interest of the parties immediately concerned. As an interim step to check the rapid build-up of Soviet military personnel and sophisticated military hardware in Egypt the President has personally warned Chairman Kosygin that the United States will provide arms to Israel to maintain the balance of power in the Eastern Mediterranean.
Realism dictates that the only way to secure Israel's existence and the free world's position in the Eastern Mediterranean is to keep Israel prepared militarily, strong enough to meet a new attack and withstand it, and to withstand threats and blackmail from whatever source they may come.

For this, Israel needs the aid of the United States, militarily and diplomatically. Israel does not ask, nor does she need, American fighting men to defend it. Its ability to face its foes has been amply proven. What it does need, and deserves, is to receive from us sufficient military wherewithal. This should be given Israel not grudgingly, but willingly and generously, for it is in our own best interests.

Israel is entitled to know that we understand and appreciate its position as a de facto ally of the United States. The weapons Israel needs from us for its defense must be made available to it not by bargaining processes each year, but through a credible long-range plan. Diplomatically, we must press the initiative by putting on the international agenda a call to free the Middle East from outside forces which have no legitimate or moral justification for being there, and only threaten the peace of the world.

There is a standard old political cliche in this country that firm support of Israel is a bipartisan cornerstone of American foreign policy; that this goes on forever, through the campaign platforms of both Democratic and Republican parties ever since 1948. You and I know that this is not so; American support for Israel has followed a zigzag course in spite of the fairly straight line of political rhetoric.

Moreover, the strategic situation has shifted greatly. It was a relatively safe and simple proposition to make an all-out commitment to Israel when the United States was far and away the most powerful nation on earth and Israel's integrity was threatened only by defeated and disunited Arab neighbors. Under the comforting notion that Israel was quite capable of taking care of herself in what seemed no more than a noisy neighborhood quarrel, during the Sixties many Americans and our government itself turned priority attention to more immediate crises in Korea, in Cuba, in Berlin and in Southeast Asia, all of which involved some direct commitment of American armed forces and confrontation with Soviet and Chinese interests.

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Ironically, Israel's own performance in the six-day war tended to confirm the idea that Israel could cut it on her own, and eventually Vietnam came close to blotting out all other international concerns for the majority of Americans. Unfortunately, Moscow took a much longer and more realistic view of the Middle East -- a view of her long southern frontier that has dominated Russian strategic thinking since long before either Communism or Zionism were born.

Hemmed in by polar wastes on the north and by militarily and politically stronger nations to the west and east, Russia under both Czars and Commissars looked longingly at the weak and underpopulated lands to the South. She did not look reverently at these lands as the cradle of civilization and religion but covetously as the undefended land bridges to Africa and the Indian subcontinent. So it is not surprising that our earliest warnings after World War II that Soviet expansionism had not been buried in the United Nations Charter came in the form of probes toward Iran, Turkey and Greece.

These threats were turned back, but the Baghdad Pact failed to close the line and the Russian romance with the Arab world began. It was slowed by the Sixth Fleet and other American and British countermoves to backstop Lebanon and Jordan, but the Russians swiftly set about building a Soviet naval presence in the Mediterranean which now, according to Admiral Zumwalt's sobering recent report, poses a high risk not only to our Sixth Fleet but to our total mastery of the seas in everything except strategic nuclear deterrence.

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Israel stands in the path of the historic Russian drive to the South where the restive and underdeveloped peoples of Africa and the Indian subcontinent, released from colonial rule but without a unifying ideology, are ripe for the alluring promises of Communism. It is neither in the national interests of Israel nor the United States -- nor for that matter of any independent nation including the Arabs -- to permit one great power to consolidate its grip on this vital region.
As we wind down our involvement in Vietnam -- and President Nixon is winding it down daily; as we shore up and stimulate our domestic economy, itself the victim of a mismanaged and underfunded war -- and President Nixon is doing that with vigor; as we look hopefully toward a generation of peace abroad and tackling the neglected tasks that confront us at home, there is one trend that considerably concerns me.

Will the Congress, with a major political contest looming, stand up and be counted when it comes to maintaining the real security and strength of America and in making up the ground we have lost vis-a-vis the Soviet Union?

Let me give you a simple proposition: Whatever contributes to the overall defense posture of the United States contributes to the overall defense posture of Israel and the free world. Whatever diminishes the long-range security of the United States diminishes the long-range security of Israel and the free world. And, of course, both these propositions can be put in reverse.

I am concerned that the Congress, and the American people, in their disillusionment and war-weariness of the present moment, will so restrict future funds and support for a realistic defense that the Soviet momentum, which has moved inexorably forward on all fronts while we were bogged down in Southeast Asia, will gain such a lead that we can never catch up.

Despite recent revelations, most Americans are not fully aware of the extent to which the Vietnam war effort was financed at the expense of other essential U.S. defense programs, since those who escalated our involvement were unwilling to come to Congress and openly ask for the sums and the sacrifices a commitment of this magnitude and duration demanded.

To give one example, since we have spoken of the Soviet challenge to our peacekeeping Sixth Fleet in the Mediterranean. During the 1960's, the Soviet Union spent over 34 percent of its defense budget on research and development, while we cut ours back to about 18 percent. In the same period the Russians modernized three-fourths of their shipyards; we have only modernized 20 percent of our shipbuilding facilities since World War II.

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This is a long-term prospect, and the first step is simply to stop the shooting and keep the guns silent. As we approach the end of another year by the Jewish reckoning, the guns remain silent along Suez. It has hardly been a year of real peace in the area, but it has been a year of no-war, and I believe this has been a major achievement of the Nixon Administration.

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The President promptly chose the activist course to help defuse the ominously ticking timebomb. When about a year ago his efforts both on a big power level and with the Israelis and Arabs directly appeared stalled and the military situation worsened, the Administration stepped up its initiatives and Secretary Rogers was able to obtain a cease-fire along the canal and some agreement by Egypt, Jordan and Israel to a broad basis for negotiation. Firmness by the United States prevented a serious flareup on the Syrian frontier and helped enable King Hussein to gain the upper hand over terrorists in Jordan.

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On a larger map we see a hope of reduced tension with Red China and with the Russians in West Berlin -- though on Berlin I will wait to read the fine print. President Nixon is making steady progress toward cooling down the whole spectrum of international tensions but an essential ingredient in this is to maintain a strong and credible defense posture for the United States.

I earnestly hope the Congress and the American people will not repeat the mistake we have made after every war in our history by throwing down our strong shields while we beat our swords into plowshares. Certainly the defenders of Israel, and their true friends in America, will never do so.

Thank you, and a heartfelt Shalom.

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