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THE WHITE HOUSE

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

STATE DINING ROOM

9:58 P.M. EDT

THE PRESIDENT: Mr. Prime Minister, Mrs. Rabin, and honored guests, it is a pleasure for Mrs. Ford and myself to be host to you on this occasion and to warmly welcome you back to the United States in this capacity as the Prime Minister of your great country.

But I would also like to extend our warm welcome for all of your friends who are here and the many, many friends throughout the whole United States who are also good and firm friends of the two of you, and to extend to you, representing your country, the depth and the warmth of the feeling that we in the United States have for Israel.

As I was sitting here chatting with you and talking with Mrs. Rabin, I couldn't help but note that 1948 was a somewhat significant year as far as your country is concerned, and it just happened that it was quite a year as far as the Fords were concerned. It was the year that we were married.

MRS. RABIN: And the Rabins.

(Laughter)

THE PRESIDENT: And the year that I got elected to Congress but, more importantly, certainly, the year that Israel gained its independence.

And I am pleased to note that our country was the first of all countries in the world at that time to recognize Israel, and we were proud to do it then and we are proud that it was done by America at that time.

It is especially nice to have the opportunity of meeting with you yesterday and today and tonight and tomorrow, a person who is a soldier, a diplomat, and a political leader, and to know that you represent your country so effectively and so well.

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The American people have a great deal of understanding and sympathy and dedication to the same kind of ideals that are representative of Israel. And, therefore, I think we in America have a certain rapport and understanding with the people of Israel.

We, as two nations who believe in peace, have sought by joint action in conjunction with others a durable and stable peace in the Middle East which I think all of us agree is in the best interest of your country, and the Middle East, and the world as a whole.

We, as a country, are proud to be associated with Israel in this mutual effort to move and to continue to move in the direction of an even better, more stable and more equitable peace in the Middle East.

I can't tell you how pleased that we are to have the opportunity of expressing our gratitude for all of the things that our countries have done together and all of the things that I hope that our two countries can continue to do in the future.

We have mutual aims and objectives. We have a friendship that is durable and growing. We have the kind of relationship that I think, if expanded worldwide, would be beneficial to all mankind.

And so if I may, Mr. Prime Minister, I would like to ask all of our guests here tonight to stand and to offer a toast to your President, and to you and Mrs. Rabin.

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PRIME MINISTER RABIN: Mr. President, Mrs. Ford, distinguished guests, in the name of my wife, and myself, I would like to thank you very much for inviting us and taking care of us during our visit here.

I remember, Mr. President, meeting you while you were the Minority leader in the House. I had many talks with you. I learned very much to admire you and I know that by assuming the responsibilities of the President of the United States, you have taken upon yourself tremendous, a tremendous role, not only for this country. But I believe that the President of the United States is the leader of the free world and has to bear in mind, if you would allow me to say so, not only the well-being of this country but the well-being of all countries that strive for freedom, for democracy, because in the world that we live today, it is not always possible to a small country to do it against odds.

The relationship between the United States and Israel started many years ago when our country was reborn. We faced many problems. The first one was the absorption of many newcomers, immigrants, the remnants of the holocaust of Europe, the second World War, the refugees that came from the Arab countries. I believe that we were a country that half of its population were refugees.

And then the United States offered Israel economic aid, technical aid, that made it possible for us to absorb these people, our brothers, in a way that the transformation from refugees to be part of our creative society was very much facilitated by your help.

During the years other problems appeared. The threat from outside became more apparent and the United States added also military aid in terms of supplying us arms to be able to defend ourselves by ourselves.

I think that 26 years from 1948 have proved that your support to us was used in the best way for the well-being of our people and for preservation of a democracy and the free country in that part of the world.

And I would like to thank you and to thank everybody in this country that has made it possible until today.

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I don't know, Mr. President, if you have seen it. I have given a small present to you. It is a sculpture, a sculpture that describes the struggle between David and Goliath. I believe it is not only a story from the Bible, it is a story that started then and continues until the present days.

And if there is something that symbolizes Israel today, it is the spirit of David facing Goliath. And the meaning of the spirit is, on the one hand, to seek peace, to believe in peace. We are a Jewish state and we believe that part of being a Jew means to seek peace, to search peace.

But on the other hand, to realize that peace is obtainable only for those who are ready to take risks to death to withstand Goliaths.

I believe that this is what is significant to Israel today, the spirit of David seeking peace and at the same time being ready and capable to meet some Goliaths.

I hope and I believe, Mr. President, that under your leadership the relations between our two countries will continue, will be strengthened in the unique spirit that was so significant until today, the search of peace and the understanding that strength helps to achieve peace.

Allow me, Mr. President, to raise my glass to the President of the United States.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you very much.

END (AT 10:11 P.M. EDT)