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THE WHITE HOUSE

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT
AT THE ANNUAL MEETING
OF THE
AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE

THE WASHINGTON HILTON HOTEL

8:55 P.M. EDT

Thank you very, very much, Max, Mr. Winter, Your Excellencies, Members of the Congress, my associates in the Executive Branch of the Government, ladies and gentlemen:

May I express to you, Max, my deep appreciation for your very generous and kind remarks, and I hope and trust that I will have an opportunity for a long, long time to justify that faith. I thank you very, very much.

I am really highly honored and greatly indebted to all of you to participate in the congratulations of the American Jewish Committee on its 70th Anniversary.

As the Committee today celebrates its Anniversary, we, all of us, are observing our Bicentennial. The Bicentennial rightfully addresses the Jewish contribution to America, along with other vital ingredients of our nationhood. The traditional Jewish concepts of justice, liberty, family and citizenship are part and parcel of the American heritage.

When America's founders created this republic 200 years ago, they saw it as a promised land. They were inspired by moral and ethical values of the Old Testament as well as by the teachings of Jesus. As we reaffirm America's traditional separation of church from State, we also honor the spirit of our Constitution which draws its moral philosophy from the Jewish-Christian heritage. Religious values are the foundation of the promise of America: The infinite value we place on each individual; the sanctity of human dignity; the commitment to human rights; and the firm belief in justice for all.

America has grown great because America has the wisdom to invite diversity. Judaism and all other of our religions helped translate the basic credoes of religious faith into the principles and into rules that govern our daily lives. I am tonight especially mindful of the unique blending of the Jewish heritage with the multitude of diverse cultures of our country. I commend the work of the American Jewish Committee and the spirit with which you have translated Jewish concerns into concern for all humanity.

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We are proud to have an agency of the American Jewish Committee co-sponsor a White House meeting on ethnic diversity and group identity next month. When six million Jews were so cruelly murdered in World War II, the victim was not only the Jewish people, but civilization itself. On my visit to the notorious Auschwitz Concentration Camp last summer, I saw the words vividly written "never again." This must apply to all genocide -- either physical or cultural.

The United States stands by the fundamental humanitarian principle that people should be free to emigrate as they choose. A few years ago, we achieved a substantial increase in emigration from the Soviet Union. I will do my utmost to restore this emigration. It will be a complex problem and process in which the Congress and I on this case will have to work very closely together. But the doors were open before and we must strive to re-open them now for the future.

The realization of our mutual goals -- advancement of political and spiritual freedom of all people -- is a priority item on America's conscience. The proclamation of liberty must be written not only in our Declaration of Independence, but in our hearts.

Yet, just as you cannot do all that must be done, neither can your government. Together, we must have a creative partnership; voluntary efforts such as those performed so brilliantly by the American Jewish Committee, combined with Federal and local authority and the willingness to act, to preserve and to extend the values we all share. Two hundred years ago there were relatively few Jews in America. Though small in number, they were great in spirit. They served in all capacities.

George Washington turned to one patriot of Jewish faith, Haym Solomon, when the budget of the Continental Army was totally depleted. Solomon sacrificed his personal fortune and encouraged others to join in financing the American Revolution. In pursuing justice and liberty, he personified the finest qualities of American patriotism.

In those early, early days, we benefited not only from our own patriots, but from outside assistance to establish and to maintain our independence. Today, the American people, regardless of religion, see justice in this Nation's traditional and special relationship to a kindred nation in the Middle East -- the State of Israel.

Most of you know, I am sure, the first head of a foreign government to visit the White House in this Bicentennial year was Prime Minister Rabin of Israel. He paid homage to the shrine of our freedom in Philadelphia before he came to our Nation's capital.

The Israelis' tribute to our Bicentennial demonstrates the basic values shared by America with Israel. Both nations were born in the face of armed opposition. Both nations are a haven for people fleeing persecution. Both nations find their vitality and their vision in a commitment to freedom and to democracy. Both nations share the courage and the determination to preserve their independence and their security.

Israel and the United States have an affinity, not only for each other, but for basic principles of democratic self-government which distinguish these two nations from most of the other nations in today's world. America must, and America will pursue friendship with all nations, but this will never be done at the expense of America's commitment to Israel.

A strong Israel is essential to a stable peace in the Middle East. Our commitment to Israel will meet the test of American steadfastness and resolve. My Administration will not be found wanting. The United States will continue to help Israel provide for her security.

The funds which I have proposed to the Congress for the two budgets that I have submitted total over four billion dollars. I favor such aid because it is so clearly in the national security interest of the United States and so essential to preserve and to promote peace in the Middle East.

These figures speak far more eloquently than any words of my commitment to the survival and security of Israel. It is essential that we remain true to our commitments, not only for ourselves, but for all those who rely upon us. We must never lose the vision that has made our country a beacon to all who seek freedom.

But our strength and our goals are to no avail if we lack the courage, the unity, and the will to utilize our strength in support of our friends. Without cohesiveness of purpose at home, our friends cannot really be protected nor our opponents long dissuaded from aggressive actions.

My dedication to Israel's future goes beyond its military needs to a far, far higher priority -- the need for peace. We appreciate Israel's dilemma in moving toward peace. Israel is asked to relinquish territory -- a concrete and essentially irreversible step -- in return for basically intangible political measures. But it is only in willingness to dare to exchange the tangible for the intangible that hostility can be ended and peace attained.

I am very, very proud that my Administration -- during this Administration, I should say -- the United States has seen a major and a very successful movement toward peace, prosperity and trust abroad as well as at home. Last September's Sinai Agreement was a milestone on the road to peace that would have been inconceivable just a few years ago. I commend and I thank Israel's bold and courageous decision. Israelis and Egyptians are no longer dying in the sands of the Sinai peninsula.

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The peace process must continue without one-sided concessions, but with steady progress. Stalemate, stagnation create unacceptable risks of further conflict. The United States is dedicated to a just and lasting peace in the Middle East. We have worked over the years unceasingly to that end. We shall continue to do so. Yet, in the final analysis, it is the parties to the dispute who must make peace a reality.

The responsibility to achieve that peace exists equally on all parties who must contribute, each in full measure, to the peacemaking process. America's responsibility is to encourage both sides to end the state of war that has for far too long plagued the Middle East and threatened world peace. The 1973 war has had dangerous political and economic repercussions throughout the world. It caused strains on our alliances and near-confrontation with one of our adversaries. The resulting oil embargo and drastic and unwarranted oil price increases caused severe problems of recession as well as inflation.

I will continue, as all of my former colleagues in the Congress will do so, to work for peace in the Middle East. This is not only for the sake of the Israeli and Arab peoples, but for the well-being of all Americans and all humanity. The United States has demonstrated the strength of our free economy, as well as our faith and vision of the future. These qualities are characteristic of a kindred people, the people of Israel. Americans and Israelis have both been inspired by moral aims. Indeed, my commitment to the security and to the future of Israel is based upon basic morality as well as enlightened self-interest. Our role in supporting Israel honors our own heritage.

America remains the real hope for freedom throughout the world. We will remain the ultimate guarantor of Israel's freedom. If we falter, there is no one to pick up the torch. If we withdraw ourselves, those who rely on the United States, those who gain their strength from us, are lost.

But we will not falter; we will not withdraw. We will remain steadfast in our dedication to peace and to the survival of Israel. There may, at times, be differences between America and Israel over the means to achieve mutual goals. But there has not and will not be any erosion of the fundamental American-Israeli friendship, nor will I forsake the goal of peace or the moral commitment to Israel which I now reaffirm. With that conviction, I tonight reiterate the words of George Washington to the Hebrew Congregation of Newport, Rhode Island, two centuries ago. The Government of the United States will continue "to give to bigotry no sanction, to persecution, no assistance." That is my goal worldwide as it is at home.

Thank you very, very much.

END (AT 9:10 P.M. EDT)