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THE WHITE HOUSE

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT
AND
SECRETARY OF STATE HENRY A. KISSINGER
AT PRESENTATION OF MEDAL OF FREEDOM

PAN AMERICAN UNION

7:25 P.M. EST

THE PRESIDENT: Mr. Ambassador, Mr. Vice President, Secretary Kissinger, Mr. Secretary General, Ladies and Gentlemen:

Both Mrs. Ford and myself are deeply grateful for the invitation to participate in this farewell reception in honor of my very close and personal friend, the Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger.

During the tenure of the Secretary of State, we have had many tasks, many challenges and many problems involving the building of a better world. While I will not suggest what might have been, it is my judgment that Henry's legacy provides rich testimony to his wisdom, to his brilliance in working toward solutions to some of the most difficult problems in our postwar history.

The United States and the world is greatly indebted to this superior person. I believe I speak for all of us when I say that Secretary Kissinger, whom we are honoring tonight, we have been impressed by our association with him on a personal basis, impressed by his intellect and his insight and thankful for his mighty efforts for the cause of peace for mankind on a worldwide basis. He is, so far as this American is concerned, the greatest Secretary of State in the history of our Republic. His superb record of achievement is unsurpassed in the annals of American history.

But let me mention just a few examples: The agreement that brought our men home from Vietnam; the historic beginning of our relationship with the People's Republic of China; the foundation and the first building blocks of the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks; the turning point in the modern history of the Middle East, and the first steps toward peace; the breakthrough toward peaceful settlement in Southern Africa; the closest friendship among the North Atlantic allies in a generation; the linking of Japan, our permanent friend, into the community of the industrial democracies; the new dialogue with Latin America; the Seventh Special Session of the U.N. General Assembly, a milestone in world economic history.

In every case, Secretary Kissinger has worked mightily for peace, and in every case the cause of peace has been advanced by his efforts. He led the way in awakening the industrialized nations, the industrialized world, to the changes that must be made if the poor of the world are to know hope and prosperity. He has been the architect of a new and productive relationship with our adversaries.

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His is a record of unprecedented scope and enormous accomplishment. It is a record in which all Americans take pride and it is a record worthy of special recognition.

It is my particular pleasure to be able to give special recognition to this great American this evening before this distinguished and most appropriate audience.

Mr. Secretary, it is my honor and tremendous privilege to award you on behalf of this grateful Nation the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the highest civilian award it is within the power of a President to grant.

Mr. Secretary, I make this award not only in recognition of the monumental contributions that you have made to the security, peace and freedom of the United States, but in recognition, as well, of the fact that during the dark days in our Nation's recent past you showed the world what we were capable of accomplishing and gave your countrymen a reason to be very proud of our Nation.

I make this award, Mr. Secretary, in the presence of the Diplomatic Corps because in the broadest sense what you did for America you did for all mankind.

Now I would like Mr. O'Donnell to read the citation, please.

MR. O'DONNELL: Henry A. Kissinger, scholar, statesman and public servant. By his extraordinary achievements he has earned a place in the first rank of American patriots. A principal architect of America's diplomacy under two Presidents, he guided the Nation in meeting the responsibilities of world leadership.

A brilliant negotiator, he wielded America's great power with wisdom and compassion in the service of peace. He is honored by a grateful President and Nation in the expectation that the past is but prologue.

Signed, Gerald R. Ford, The White House, Washington, D.C.

SECRETARY KISSINGER: Mr. President, Mrs. Ford, Mr. Vice President, Mrs. Rockefeller, Mr. Dean--Mr. Sevilla-Sacasa, I had to be in Washington for eight years before we finally managed to keep a secret.

Mr. President, I cannot tell you how much you honor me by your presence, how much you move me by this unexpected gesture.

The highest civilian decoration of my adopted country is something that I will always treasure and which I will consider an obligation in the causes that you and I and the Vice President and all the members of the Administration have attempted to implement and stand for.

Mr. President, as you leave office, everybody has called attention to your great human qualities, and those of us who have had the honor of working with you have all been uplifted and strengthened by your faith, by your good will and by your devotion.

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But I would like to say to this group of professional diplomats that I believe history will record that our President preserved America from enormous dangers and moved it on the road to its peace and progress, and those of us who are concerned professionally with the future of nations know the grave dangers that can arise when the executive authority of one of the great powers suddenly is thrown into question.

Mr. President, in a matter of fact way, reflecting the greatest qualities of America, you overcame these dangers in a way that they were never even apparent, and out of the difficulties and the potential chaos, you fashioned the world in which we are today. In every troublespot, we cannot say that we have solved the problems, but I think we can say that under your leadership we have taken the first steps and in many areas major steps toward a solution.

With every country in the world our relations are better than they were when you became President. In every troublespot of the world there is more hope than when you took office.

There is always a debate about who does what in an administration. There is no question in the mind of those who served President Ford who made the decisions. It was my honor to be able to collaborate with this fine and decent and devoted man, and I shall treasure it always.

I would also like to pay a very brief tribute to my associates in the Department of State, the dedicated and able professionals who keep our foreign policy going forward, and to my associates who will not participate in the continuity of our foreign policy, whose devotion and dedication was expressed above all in their putting up with me for all these many years and in the service they have given to the Nation and to the world.

And now, Dean Sevilla-Sacasa, if I can say just a few words to my colleagues from the Diplomatic Corps: I have had first-hand experience of your brilliance and eloquence, because over the 3-1/2 years that I have been Secretary of State our Office Directors, Assistant Secretaries, and other officials have been so completely captivated by you that every paper that has been submitted to me debated only the rate at which we would accede to your wishes.

It has been said that a diplomat is a man who lies for his country. We, of course, in this room unanimously reject this proposition. We, however, know something of great importance. We know that in the fate of nations the survival of tens of millions and today, in today's world, the survival of mankind is at stake.

We know that we cannot try certain experiments because the consequences of failure would be too tragic. We know that we are responsible not only for the best that could happen but also for the worst that might happen, and, therefore, there is a premium in our profession on a certain caution and a certain precision and occasionally on a certain repetition, and I see some people in this room where I would delete the qualifying adjective and say an insistent repetition.

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We know this: We know that we attempt to serve the peace, the well being and the justice of mankind.

I have had the honor of visiting perhaps most of the countries assembled in this room, and I have never met a leader who did not wish to achieve peace or who did not understand the importance of community. We differ in our interpretations of these objectives, but in the world of nuclear weapons and of instantaneous communications, in the world where our decisions affect survival itself, we can never slacken in our devotion to the goal of peace and to the goal of well being and to the goal of justice.

It has been a privilege to work with you members of the Diplomatic Corps and with your leaders all over the world. Nancy and I are grateful that you did us the honor of coming here.

I would like to say once again to the President what I have said perhaps too often in these farewells: In no other country would this experience have been possible that we are seeing tonight. In no other country could a man so simple and at the same time so attuned to the currents of our time become President at our most critical moment.

So I thank you, Mr. President, and Mr. Vice President, who has been an inspiration to me for decades, and all of you from the Diplomatic Corps, from the bottom of my heart.

Thank you.

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(AT 7:30 P.M. EST)