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SEPTEMBER 10, 1974

OFFICE OF THE WHITE HOUSE PRESS SECRETARY

THE WHITE HOUSE

EXCHANGE OF REMARKS BETWEEN THE PRESIDENT
AND
PRIME MINISTER RABIN

THE SOUTH LAWN

3:10 P.M. EDT

THE PRESIDENT: Mr. Prime Minister and Mrs. Rabin, it is a very real pleasure for me to have the opportunity of welcoming both of you to the United States.

You are returning as the leader of a great country. You are returning to meet many of your friends over the years that you knew so well during your service here as Ambassador to the United States.

I trust that you and Mrs. Rabin will thoroughly enjoy this visit back to the United States.

The United States, Mr. Prime Minister, has been proud of its association with the State of Israel. We are committed to Israel's survival and security.

The United States for a quarter of a century has had an excellent relationship with the State of Israel. We have cooperated in many, many fields -- in your security, in the well-being of the Middle East, and in leading what we all hope is a lasting peace throughout the world.

Many of our people have a close personal relationship and association with your citizens, your fellow citizens in Israel, and we hope and trust that this relationship will grow and expand.

Over the last few months, there has been movement in the Middle East for a lasting and durable peace. Israel has cooperated, Israel has been helpful, and we hope and trust that in the months ahead the foundation which has been laid will be built upon.

We want, you want, and others throughout the world want a lasting and durable peace in the Middle East.

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The first steps have been taken. Others will follow, and I am certain and positive that, as we meet here during the next several days, we can contribute to the building of a better and finer peace in the Middle East.

I hope that you and Mrs. Rabin have a delightful and warm welcome, which you so richly deserve, in the United States.

PRIME MINISTER RABIN: Mr. President, Mrs. Ford, I am grateful to you for your kind invitation to come to Washington and for your warm words of welcome.

As you know, Mr. President, I am not a complete stranger in this country, nor, indeed, in this city. But this is the first time that I come here in my capacity of Prime Minister of Israel.

You, Mr. President, have very recently undertaken new and awesome responsibilities, and I feel certain, therefore, that you can appreciate the weighty load that rests on my shoulders.

I represent a country which is faced, which is facing manifold problems, great challenges, but also great and new opportunities for internal progress and for peace with her neighbors.

In the performance of my new duties, I am encouraged as all my predecessors have been, by their binding friendship and by the ever-deepening ties which bind the people of Israel with the people of this, the greatest democracy, and with its leaders.

Ever since the renewal of Jewish independence in the land of our forefathers, after long generations of suffering and martyrdom, Israel has enjoyed generous aid and support on the part of the United States. Our gratitude for this sustenance will be recorded forever in the annals of our people.

During all these times since 1948, Israel has seen periods of trial and hardships. Yet she never swerved, even for a moment, from her supreme national goal, which is the quest for peace with her Arab neighbors.

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So far, to our nation's deep sorrow, this goal has eluded us. Despite the recent test of arms, Israel is prepared to seek progress towards peace.

We have in recent months demonstrated that we have taken risks for peace to see whether new efforts may possibly bring us nearer to this achievement.

I know in this quest for peace in our region, we have in you, Mr. President, and in our colleagues in the Government of the United States, a strong and determined partner.

Indeed, you, Mr. President, pronounced the commitment of the United States to the quest of world peace as the central theme in your inaugural address only a few weeks ago.

The people of Israel stand united in the conviction that war is futile, that it cannot solve problems, that only human suffering is brought in its wake. As far as our part of the world is concerned, we are convinced that there is no issue, however complicated it may now appear, that it cannot be resolved by patient negotiations.

What is needed is an equal measure of desire and determination on all sides to achieve peace.

Much depends at this stage on what other governments in the area are prepared to do. At any rate, we in Israel are ready for the peace-making effort.

I must, however, with a full sense of responsibility, add this: As you, Mr. President, assumed high office, you conveyed to your people and to the world the message that a strong America is a powerful guarantee for peace in the world. This is true in the same measure as far as Israel and her own region are concerned. Only a strong Israel, which has the capacity to deter aggression and to defend ourselves successfully by our own strength, has a chance of winning peace.

I cannot underline strongly enough our conviction that the constant maintenance of Israel's strength is an absolute prerequisite for the attainment of solutions to the problems of our troubled region.

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On these and other matters of common interest and concern, I shall be exchanging views with you, Mr. President, and your colleagues, within the next few days. I look forward to doing so in the spirit of confidence and of the cultivation of a good future which has linked our government and our people for so many years.

I am confident that I shall return to Jerusalem assured of the United States' determination to support the well-being of Israel within a Middle East that we hope will finally be advancing on the road towards a just and durable peace, which assures security and progress for all its people.

Thank you very much.

END (3:20 P.M. EDT)

