

Again, I thank you for welcoming us. I thank you for the struggles you have waged for freedom and for security. I thank you for the efforts you now make for peace. It is good to be back.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12 midnight at Ben-Gurion International Airport. In his remarks, he referred to President Ezer Weizman of Israel and his wife, Reuma; Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu of Israel and his wife, Sarah; and Chairman Yasser Arafat of the Palestinian Authority.

The President's News Conference With Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu of Israel in Jerusalem *December 13, 1998*

Prime Minister Netanyahu. Mr. President, I want to welcome you and your entire delegation, the Secretary of State, the National Security Adviser, and your exceptional team, for coming here on this mission of peace and for your understanding of our concerns. We spent many hours in Wye River, and there and in our conversations this morning, I've come to appreciate and admire your extraordinary ability to empathize and the seriousness with which you examine every issue.

Your visit here is part of the implementation of the Wye River accords. Now, this was not an easy agreement for us, but we did our part. And we are prepared to do our part based on Palestinian compliance. When I say that we did our part, you know that within 2 weeks we withdrew from territory, released prisoners, and opened the Gaza airport, precisely as we undertook to do.

The Palestinians, in turn, were to live up to a series of obligations in the sphere of security, in ending incitement and violence, in the repeal of the Palestinian Charter, and in commitments to negotiate a final settlement in order to achieve permanent peace between us. I regret to say that none of these conditions have been met.

Palestinians proceeded to unilaterally declare what the final settlement would be. Coming out of Wye, they said again and again that regardless of what happens in the negotiations, on May 4th of 1999 they will unilaterally declare a state, divide Jerusalem, and make its eastern half the Palestinian capital. This is a gross violation of the Oslo and Wye accords, which commit the parties to negotiate a mutually agreed final settlement.

Mr. Arafat and the Palestinian Authority must officially and unequivocally renounce this attempt. I think no one can seriously expect Israel to hand over another inch of territory unless and until such an unambiguous correction is made.

I said that there are other violations. The Palestinians, I'm afraid, began a campaign of incitement. At Wye, as those who are here well know, we agreed to release Palestinian prisoners, but not terrorists with blood on their hands or members of Hamas who are waging war against us. No sooner did we release the agreed number of prisoners in the first installment that the Palestinian Authority refused to acknowledge what they agreed to at Wye. Falsely charging Israel with violating the prisoner release clause, Palestinian leaders openly incited for violence and riots, which culminated in a savage near-lynching of an Israeli soldier. And the Palestinian Authority organized other violent demonstrations. Therefore, the Palestinian Authority must stop incitement and violence at once, and they must do so fully and permanently.

There has also been some downgrading on parts of the security cooperation between us, and the Palestinian Authority must restore this cooperation again, fully and permanently. They must live up to their other obligations in the Wye agreement in the fields of weapons collections, illegal weapons collections, reducing the size of their armed forces, and the like.

Now, I stress that none of these are new conditions. All are integral parts of the Wye and Oslo agreements to which we are committed. We hope that tomorrow the Palestinian Authority will once and for all live up to at least one of their obligations. And if the PNC

members will vote in sufficient numbers to annul the infamous Palestinian Charter, that will be a welcome development. And it's important; 5 years after the promise to do so at Oslo, to see this happen would be a welcome and positive development.

I think this is—it's just as important to see strict adherence to the other obligations in order to reinject confidence into the peace process and to get this process moving again, where Israel will also do its part.

Mr. President, I'm sure that we can achieve peace between Palestinians and Israelis if we stand firm on Palestinian compliance. I very much hope that you will be able to persuade the Palestinians what I know you deeply believe and I believe, that violence and peace are simply incompatible. Because, ultimately, what is required is not merely a checklist of correcting Palestinian violations but, I think, a real change of conduct by the Palestinian leadership. And they must demonstrate that they have abandoned the path of violence and adopted the path of peace. For us to move forward, they must scrupulously adhere to their commitments under the Wye agreement, on which we have all worked so hard.

And may I say, on a personal and national note and international note, that if there's anyone who can help bring the peace process to a satisfactory conclusion, it is you, President Clinton. Your devotion to this cause, your perseverance, your tireless energy, your commitment have been an inspiration to us all. May it help us restore peace and hope to our land and to our peoples.

President Clinton. Thank you very much, Prime Minister. I thank you for your statement and for your warm welcome. I would say to the people of Israel, I was told before I came here that no previous President had ever visited Israel more than once, and this is my fourth trip here. I may be subject to tax assessment if I come again in the next 2 years, but I am always pleased to be here.

I want to thank you, also, and the members of your team, for the exhausting effort which was made at Wye over those 9 days, the time we spent together, the sleepless nights, and the extraordinary effort to put together a very difficult, but I think sound, agreement.

Let me begin by talking about some of the things that we have discussed today. We've had two brief private meetings: one, a breakfast

meeting with our wives this morning, and then a brief private meeting, and then our extended meeting with our two teams. I want to begin where I always do. America has an unshakable commitment to the security of the State and the people of Israel. We also have an unshakable commitment to be a partner in the pursuit of a lasting, comprehensive peace. I have told the Prime Minister that I will soon submit to the Congress a supplemental request for \$1.2 billion to meet Israel's security needs related to implementing the Wye River agreement. Only if those needs are met can the peace process move forward.

At the same time, I am convinced, as I think we all are, everyone who has dealt with this problem over any period of time, that a lasting peace properly achieved is the best way to safeguard Israel's security over the long run.

Last month, at the conclusion of the Wye talks, Prime Minister and Chairman Arafat and I agreed that it would be useful for me to come to the region to help to maintain the momentum and to appear tomorrow before the PNC and the other Palestinian groups that will be assembled.

I also want to commend the Prime Minister for the steps he has taken to implement the Wye agreement which he just outlined. He has secured his government's support for significant troop withdrawal from the West Bank and begun the implementation of that withdrawal, reached an agreement that allowed for the opening of the Gaza airport, and he began the difficult process of prisoner releases.

The Palestinian Authority has taken some important steps with its commitments, a deepening security cooperation with Israel, acting against terrorism, issuing decrees for the confiscation of illegal weapons, and dealing with incitement, taking concrete steps to reaffirm the decision to amend the PLO Charter, which will occur tomorrow.

Have the Palestinians fulfilled all their commitments? They certainly could be doing better to preempt violent demonstrations in the street. This is a terribly important matter. I also agree that matters that have been referred, consistent with the Oslo agreement, for final status talks should be left there and should be subject to negotiations. But in other areas, there has been a forward progress on the meeting of the commitments.

Now, I know that each step forward can be excruciatingly difficult and that now real efforts have to be made on both sides to regain the momentum. We just had a good discussion about the specific things that the Israelis believe are necessary for the Palestinians to do to regain the momentum. And we talked a little bit about how we might get genuine communication going again so that the necessary steps can be taken to resume the structured implementation of the Wye River agreement, which is, I think, part of what makes it work; at least, it made it work in the minds of the people who negotiated it. And it can work in the lives of the people who will be affected by it if both sides meet all their commitments, and only if they do.

Each side has serious political constraints; I think we all understand that. Provocative pronouncements, unilateral actions can be counterproductive, given the constraints that each side has. But in the end, there has been a fundamental decision made to deal with this through honest discussion and negotiation. That is the only way it can be done. It cannot be done by resorting to other means when times get difficult. And again I say, the promise of Wye cannot be fulfilled by violence or by statements or actions which are inconsistent with the whole peace process. Both sides should adhere to that.

Let me also just say one other word about regional security. I think Israelis are properly concerned with the threat of weapons of mass destruction development, with the threat of missile delivery systems. We are working with Israel to help to defend itself against such threats, in particular, through the Arrow antiballistic missile program. We've also just established a joint strategic planning committee as a forum to discuss how we can continue to work together on security matters.

We're going to take a couple of questions, I know, but again I would like to say in closing, Mr. Prime Minister, I appreciate the courage you showed at Wye, your farsightedness in seeking peace and in taking personal and political risks for it, which should now be readily apparent to anyone who has followed the events of the last 6 weeks. Your determination, your tenacity to build an Israel that is both secure and at peace is something that I admire and support. And I think, if we keep working at it, we can keep making progress.

Thank you very much.

*House Committee Impeachment Vote/
Palestinian Charter Vote*

Q. Mr. President, what is your reaction to the decision of the Judiciary Committee of the House yesterday? Do you intend to resign, as did President Nixon? And with your permission, one question to Prime Minister Netanyahu in Hebrew.

[At this point, a question was asked in Hebrew and translated by an interpreter as follows.]

Interpreter. Mr. Prime Minister, you have, to some extent, appointed Mr. Clinton to act as a referee between the Israelis and the Palestinians. He will appear tomorrow in Gaza where the decision of the committee will be to revoke its objection to the existence of Israel. What will you do if this decision is taken, and how will you react to issues facing you with the Cabinet regarding a no-confidence vote?

President Clinton. My reaction to the committee vote is that I wasn't surprised. I think it's been obvious to anyone who is following it for weeks that the vote was foreordained. And now it is up to the Members of the House of Representatives to vote their conscience on the Constitution and the law, which I believe are clear. And I have no intention of resigning. It's never crossed my mind.

[Prime Minister Netanyahu then answered in Hebrew.]

Prime Minister Netanyahu. If you can translate all of that, you're a genius. [Laughter]

Interpreter. In essence, we expect to see the Palestinian side revoke the Palestinian Charter. We also expect the Palestinians to meet their commitment to stop incitement. If, in fact, tomorrow the Palestinian Charter is revoked, we will view it as a success of our policy. What we merely expect is the Palestinians honor their commitments. And that's our expectation.

Prime Minister Netanyahu. I would say that's a pretty good abbreviation of what I said. [Laughter] You have a great future as an editor. [Laughter]

The President. We all need one. [Laughter]

House Impeachment Vote

Q. Mr. President, how confident are you that you can avoid impeachment in the full House next week, and are you planning any particular kind of outreach—additional—to lawmakers or the public?

President Clinton. Well, I think it's up to—it's a question of whether each Member will simply vote his or her conscience based on the Constitution and the law. And I don't know what's going to happen. That's up to them. It's out of my hands. If any Member wishes to talk to me or someone on my staff, we would make ourselves available to them. But otherwise, I think it's important that they be free to make this decision and that they not be put under any undue pressure from any quarter.

Many of them have said they feel such pressure, but I can't comment on that because I haven't talked directly to many members of the House caucus, the Republican caucus. And I have talked to those—a few—who said they wanted to talk to me; otherwise, I have not. I don't think it's appropriate for me to be personally calling people; unless they send word to me that there is some question they want to ask or something they want to say, I don't think it's appropriate.

Middle East Peace Process

Q. Mr. President, you said that now it's up to the Members of the House to decide—

Prime Minister Netanyahu. May I ask a favor. You are free to ask any one of your questions, but I think the President has come here on a very clear message, on a very clear voyage of peace, and I believe that it would be appropriate also to ask one or two questions on the peace process. I would like to know the answers, too.

Q. This would be exactly my second question. The first one is about what will happen Thursday if the Members of the House will decide about impeachment, if in this case, whether you will consider resignation. And second question, about the peace process, after all what you see now, after you hear the Prime Minister, don't you think you were wrong in the Wye memorandum, that you figured you'd get an agreement which both sides cannot comply?

President Clinton. Well, the answer to both questions is no. And let me amplify on your second question. No, I don't think it was wrong. Look, if this were easy, it would have been done a long time ago. And we knew that in the Wye agreement it would be difficult for both sides to comply. Actually, the first 2 weeks were quite hopeful. In the first phase, I think there was quite good compliance on both sides.

And I think the Prime Minister feels that way as well.

A number of things happened with which you are very familiar which made the atmosphere more tense in the ensuing weeks. And one of the things that I hope to do while I'm here, in addition to going and meeting with the Palestinian groups, including the PNC, is to do what I did this morning, to listen very carefully to the Prime Minister and to his government about what specific concerns they have in terms of the agreement and compliance with it and then try to resolve those and listen to the Palestinians, as I will, so that we can get this process going again.

I find that when the parties are talking to each other and establish an atmosphere of understanding of the difficulty of each other's positions and deal with each other in good faith, we make pretty good progress. But there is a long history here. And 9 days at Wye, or 2 weeks of implementing, you know, it can't overcome all that history, plus which there are political constraints and imperatives in each position which make it more likely that tensions will arise.

But the fact that this has been hard to implement doesn't mean it was a mistake. It means it was real. Look, if we had made an agreement that was easy to implement, it would have dealt with no difficult circumstances, and so we'd be just where we are now, except worse off.

We have seen in the first phase of implementation that good things can happen on the security side from the point of view of the Israelis and on the development of the territory from the point of view of the Palestinians—and the airport—if there is genuine trust and actual compliance. And so what we have to do is to get more actual compliance and in the process rebuild some of that trust.

Perjury/Censure

Q. Mr. President, some Republicans want you to go further than a statement of contrition. They say that they want an admission of perjury. Are you willing to do that? And what do you think about Chairman Hyde and the Republican leadership opposing a vote in the full House on censure?

President Clinton. Well, on the second question, I think you ought to ask them whether they're opposed to it because they think that it might pass since, apparently, somewhere

around three-quarters of the American people think that's the right thing to do.

On the first question, the answer is: No, I can't do that, because I did not commit perjury. If you go back to the hearing, we had four prosecutors—two Republicans, two Democrats—one the head of President Reagan's criminal justice division, who went through the law in great detail and explained that, that this is not a perjury case. And there was no credible argument on the other side. So I have no intention of doing that.

Now, was the testimony in the deposition difficult and ambiguous and unhelpful? Yes, it was. That's exactly what I said in the grand jury testimony, myself, and I agree with what Mr. Ruff said about it. Mr. Ruff answered questions, you know, for hours and hours and hours and tried to deal with some of the concerns the committee had on that. And I thought he did an admirable job in acknowledging the difficulty of the testimony.

But I could not admit to doing something that I am quite sure I did not do. And I think if you look at the law, if you look at the legal decisions, and if you look at what the Republican as well as the Democratic prosecutors said, I think that's entitled to great weight. And I have read or seen nothing that really overcomes the testimony that they gave on that question.

Jonathan Pollard

Q. What about Jonathan Pollard, Mr. President? What about Jonathan Pollard? Can you—[inaudible].

President Clinton. Yes, I can. I have instituted the review that I pledged to the Prime Minister. We've never done this on a case before, but I told him I would do it, and we did it. And my Counsel, Mr. Ruff, has invited the Justice Department and all the law enforcement agencies under it, and all the other security, intelligence, and law enforcement agencies in the Government and interested parties to say what they think about the Pollard case, to do so by sometime in January. And I will review all that, plus whatever arguments are presented to me on the other side for the reduction of the sen-

tence. And I will make a decision in a prompt way.

But we have instituted this review which as I said is unprecedented. We are giving everyone time to present their comments, and I will get comments on both sides of the issue, evaluate it, and make a decision.

Q. I would like to ask—

President Clinton. What did you say? They're demanding equal time, three and three?

Q. I just want to ask the Prime Minister—

President Clinton. Oh, he wants to ask you a question. That's good.

Q. Prime Minister, can you explain, perhaps to the American people, why you think Mr. Pollard is worthy of release at this point?

Prime Minister Netanyahu. Jonathan Pollard did something bad and inexcusable; he spied in the United States; he collected information on behalf of the Israeli Government. I was the first Prime Minister—and this is the first government—to openly admit it. We think that he should have served his time, and he did. He served for close to 13 years. And all that I appealed to President Clinton for is merely a humanitarian appeal. It is not based on exonerating Mr. Pollard. There is no exoneration for it. It is merely that he has been virtually in solitary confinement for 13 years. It's a very, very heavy sentence.

And since he was sent by us on a mistaken mission—not to work against the United States but, nevertheless, to break the laws of the United States—we hope that, on a purely humanitarian appeal, a way will be found to release him.

That is all I can tell you. It is not political. It is not to exonerate him. It is merely to end a very, very sorry case that has afflicted him and the people of Israel.

NOTE: The President's 167th news conference began at 1:50 p.m. in the Office of the Prime Minister. In his remarks, he referred to Chairman Yasser Arafat of the Palestinian Authority; and Edward S.G. Dennis, Jr., former Assistant Attorney General, Criminal Division. He also referred to the Palestine National Council (PNC).