

Remarks at a Dinner Hosted by Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu of Israel in Jerusalem December 13, 1998

Thank you very much. Mr. Prime Minister, Mrs. Netanyahu, leaders and citizens of Israel, my fellow Americans: Let me begin by thanking the Prime Minister, his family, and his administration for the warm welcome accorded to me and Hillary and Chelsea and our entire group. This is, as I have said many times today, my fourth visit to Israel since I became President. Perhaps that fact alone says something about the unique relationship between our two nations.

Last spring I walked out onto the South Lawn at the White House to lead my fellow Americans in our celebration of your 50th birthday as a nation. And as I did that, I thought about how that great old house—where every President since our second President has lived, for almost 200 years now—and how for the last 50 years it has been and now will forever be linked to Israel's destiny. It was in the White House that Harry Truman recognized the State of Israel only 11 minutes after you had declared your independence. And, I might add, he did so over the objection of some of his most senior advisers. It was in the White House a year later that President Truman wept when Israel's Chief Rabbi told him, "God put you in your mother's womb so you would be the instrument to bring the rebirth of Israel after 2,000 years."

Mr. Prime Minister, every President since Harry Truman has been strongly committed to the State of Israel and to Israel's security. No one should doubt that the United States will always stand with you.

Every President has also believed it is vital to Israel's security that together we seek peace between Israel and its Arab neighbors. Israel's own leaders again and again have said this, from Ben-Gurion to Golda Meir, Begin to Rabin and Peres. Now you, Mr. Prime Minister, have taken your own brave steps on the path to peace. This is the correct course because only through negotiated and implemented peace can Israelis live their dream of being both free and secure.

No one knows better the cost the enemies of peace can extract than you, Mr. Prime Minister. You have fought terrorism with your own hands. You have written powerfully about it. You

lost your beloved brother to it. The citizens you now lead face the possibility of terrorism every day.

America knows something of this struggle, too. Hundreds of our citizens have perished in terrorist attacks over this generation, most recently at our Embassies in east Africa. We know we must stand strong against terrorism. We are determined to do so, just as we are determined to find just and peaceful solutions to conflicts and to overcome longstanding hatred and resentments. We know the closer we get, the more desperate the enemies of peace become. But we cannot let terrorists dictate our future. We will not let their bombs or their bullets destroy our path to peace.

Mr. Prime Minister, at Wye River you obtained commitments that will greatly strengthen Israel's security if they are honored. All of us who shared those 9 days and 9 long nights know you are a skilled and tenacious negotiator. Despite your long sojourn in America, there can be no doubt that you remain a *sabra* to the core, tough, the kind of leader with the potential to guide his people to a peaceful and secure future.

Many have pointed out that you are the first leader of Israel born after 1948, actually born in the State of Israel. But I know you never forget that the history of the Jewish people, as you have told us again tonight, is far, far longer, that the issues of today must be considered in light of events of a rich but often turbulent past, including 2,000 years of exile and persecution.

We honor your history, your struggles, your sacrifices. We pray for a permanent peace that will, once and for all, secure the rightful place of the people of Israel, living in peace, mutual respect, mutual recognition, and permanent security in this historic land, with the Palestinians and all your neighbors.

You mentioned, Mr. Prime Minister, the fact that my devotion to Israel had something to do with the instruction I received from my minister long ago. I will tell you, the real story

is even more dramatic. I hesitate to tell it because then you will use it against me when it is helpful. [Laughter]

My pastor died in 1989. Before that, starting in 1937, he came here to the Holy Land more than 40 times. Once in the mid-1980's, we were sitting together—long before I had thought that a realistic prospect—and he looked at me and he said, "You might be President one day. You will make mistakes, and God will forgive you. But God will never forgive you if you forget the State of Israel." That's what he said.

When Hillary first came here with me 17 years ago this month, I was not in elected office. I came on a religious pilgrimage just after we celebrated Christmas. I saw Masada and Bethlehem for the first time, not through political eyes but through the eyes of a Christian. I can't wait to go back to Masada, and I can't wait to go back to Bethlehem.

You mentioned that the troubles and travails and triumphs of Jesus, a Jew, gave the world

the Christian religion, of which I am a part. In the Christian New Testament, we get a lot of instruction about what it takes to make peace and become reconciled to one another. We are instructed that we have to forgive others their sins against us if we expect to be forgiven our own. We are instructed that they who judge without mercy will be judged without mercy, but mercy triumphs over judgment. And we are told in no uncertain terms that the peacemakers are blessed, and they will inherit the Earth.

Please join me in a toast to Prime Minister and Mrs. Netanyahu, the people of Israel, and the promise of peace. *L'Chaim*.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:16 p.m. at the Jerusalem Hilton. In his remarks, he referred to Prime Minister Netanyahu's wife, Sarah. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of Prime Minister Netanyahu.

Exchange With Reporters Prior to Discussions With Chairman Yasser Arafat of the Palestinian Authority in Gaza City, Gaza December 14, 1998

Impeachment

Q. Mr. President, you say you haven't committed perjury. Can you say, sir, that you lied, as some people believe would help?

President Clinton. Sam [Sam Donaldson, ABC News], I've said what I have to say about that. Now, I'm here furthering America's interests, trying to make peace in the Middle East, to keep this peace process on track. I think it's important. I will say what I've said before: I don't believe it's in the interest of the United States or the American people to go through this impeachment process with a trial in the Senate. That's why I have offered to make every effort to make any reasonable compromise with the Congress. I still believe that, and I'm still willing to do that. That's all I know to do. Meanwhile, I'm going to keep working on my job.

Q. Do you think it's appropriate for the Republican leadership to call for your resignation while you are over here, overseas?

Q. President Clinton, how do you feel being in Gaza?

President Clinton. The boundaries of what's appropriate have been changed rather dramatically in the last several months, I think; you know, they'll have to be the judge of their own conduct. I'm just going to do my job as President.

President's Visit to Gaza

Q. President Clinton, how do you feel being in Gaza for the first time? And is there going to be a withdrawal on Friday?

President Clinton. Well, I want to talk to Chairman Arafat about all these issues related to the Wye agreement. But I'm delighted to be in Gaza for the first time. I'm delighted to be the first President to come on Palestinian territory. And I was very pleased to be at the dedication of the airport today. One of the important achievements of the Wye River agreement was the commitment to get this airport open and going, and I'm very, very pleased. It's quite beautiful. And I was pleased to be there, and I'm very glad to be here in Chairman