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### **Joint Statement of the President of the United States and the Prime Minister of Israel**

*October 31, 1998*

On October 31, 1998, President Clinton and Prime Minister Netanyahu concluded a Memorandum of Agreement on the potential threat to Israel posed by the proliferation of ballistic missiles and weapons of mass destruction in the region. This subject has been of great concern to both governments for some time, and the Memorandum of Agreement establishes a new mechanism for enhancing their cooperation in dealing with this potential threat. Pursuant to the Memorandum of Agreement, a joint strategic planning committee will be established to formulate recommendations on upgrading the framework of U.S.-Israeli strategic and military relationships, as well as technological cooperation.

NOTE: An original was not available for verification of the content of this joint statement.

### **Interview With Shlomo Raz and Jacob Eilon of Israeli Television Channel 2**

*October 31, 1998*

#### **Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin**

**Q.** President Clinton, first of all, thank you very much for sitting down with us.

**The President.** Delighted to do it. Thank you.

**Q.** You know, it's exactly 3 years since the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin. And Mrs. Rabin said she was rather disappointed that you failed to mention her husband during the East Room ceremony last Friday. How do you respond to that?

**The President.** Well, you know, the agreement is actually supposed to enter into force on the third anniversary of his passing, of his killing. And I think that if, in fact, it does do so, it is a fitting thing, because none of us would be here if it hadn't been for him. He really started all this in a profound way.

I know that the Madrid conference started before his election, but it was his conviction and his strength and security that he conveyed to the people of Israel, I think, that made this whole peace process possible. And I never do anything in the process that I don't think about him.

#### **Danger to Prime Minister Netanyahu**

**Q.** Mr. President, from the tragic assassination to the current situation, Prime Minister Netanyahu might put himself at the same risk as Mr. Rabin. So perhaps it is unjustified to put pressure on him to follow the Oslo accord or the Oslo track.

**The President.** Well, I don't think there's any question that the Prime Minister has put himself at some physical risk in pursuing the peace process. But I believe that it's important that the people of Israel know that, at least in my opinion, it's a good agreement, that it strengthens Israel's security needs, that the agreements made with the Palestinians are fully consistent with Oslo. And the Prime Minister worked very, very hard to advance Israel's security interests.

Just for example, there was the whole issue of what should be done with the people whom Israel believes have committed acts of violence and terrorism against Israelis. And I am convinced that the Palestinians will now act against these people in a way that is consistent with the agreement and that will meet the Prime Minister's and Israel's needs. So that's an example of a whole array of security advances that were embedded in this agreement. And I think all Israelis who support the peace process should support the agreement because I think it furthers the cause of peace.

#### **Palestinian National Council**

**Q.** Mr. President, is it really the PNC, the Palestinian National Council, that is going to convene to revise the Palestinian covenant with your presence? Is it really the PNC?

**The President.** Well, it's the PNC plus a number of other groups. And some of these groups are embedded within the PNC; that is, they're dual membership for some of the people—in the Government, in the executive council, in the other councils involved. And some are outside the PNC.

But among other things at that meeting, we will seek a clear renunciation of the offending parts of the charter and a general endorsement of the agreement, this whole agreement, so that the process can be seen to be going forward with the support of those who represent grassroots Palestinian opinion.

The Prime Minister wanted me to support this provision, this effort, and he fought very, very hard for this, as did a number of members of his Cabinet who were there, because they thought that there needed to be a debate in a Palestinian forum, even if it was controversial and heated, which would give to the Palestinian people some evidence not only of a commitment to follow an agreement but of a changing of the heart, an opening of the heart of the Palestinians toward the Israelis.

And I thought that argument had a lot of appeal, even though it was not without its hazards for Mr. Arafat.

**Q.** Because—

**The President.** Because it's been 18 months since anything big has happened, and because there's a lot of—he has his problems, too, among them the fact that the standard of living for most Palestinians is lower today than it was when the peace process began, because the enemies of peace keep interrupting the flow of normal life.

So I agreed that if it was that important to Israel and Chairman Arafat were willing to try to accommodate that condition by the Israelis, that I would go to Gaza and address this group and ask them to support the peace and to renounce forever the idea of animosity toward and opposition to the existence of the state of Israel and instead embrace the path not only of peace but of cooperation.

#### **President's Upcoming Visit to Gaza**

**Q.** I want to ask you about your visit to Gaza. Don't you think, Mr. President, that this trip may be seen as a first step in recognizing an independent Palestinian state?

**The President.** Well, if so it would be, I think, wrong, because I have tried strictly to adhere to the position of the United States that we would not take a position on any final status issue.

One of the reasons that I worked so hard at Wye to try to bring the parties together

is I thought it imperative to take this next big step along the peace process so that we could launch the final status talks and get them underway in good faith so that neither side would seek to prejudge a final status issue. That is not what I'm doing in going there. The Prime Minister wanted me to go there and wanted us all to make this pitch.

I asked them if they would make some joint appearances, and if they would both make the same speech to Palestinian and to Israeli audiences. And they said they would do that. I would like to see that happen. I think that would help. It would help the Palestinians to see Yasser Arafat saying the same thing to the Israelis he says to the Palestinians. It would help the Israelis, I think, also. And it would be a good thing for the Prime Minister to be able to give the same speech. Whatever they decide to say, just say the same thing to both communities so that no one thinks that there's any evasion or shading or anything.

I think, just little things like this to open up a little awareness of the other's position and build a little confidence, I think would be quite good.

#### **Jonathan Pollard**

**Q.** Mr. President, why won't you release Jonathan Pollard?

**The President.** Well, I agreed to review his case and to take the initiative to review it. I have not released him in the past because since I've been President in the two previous normal reviews—that is, the ones that were initiated by his request for clemency—the recommendation of all my law enforcement and security agencies was unanimously opposed to it.

But the Prime Minister felt so strongly about it, and I might say, every Israeli Prime Minister I have dealt with on every occasion has asked me about Pollard. Yitzhak Rabin did, Shimon Peres did, and Prime Minister Netanyahu has.

**Q.** But you argued pretty—you had pretty harsh exchanges with Netanyahu, reportedly, about that?

**The President.** No. I thought then, I believe now, and I think the public opinion in Israel bears this out, that it was in Israel's

interest to do this agreement on its own merits because it would advance the cause of Israeli security and keep the peace process going.

I think there's been a lot of reporting about this with which I don't necessarily agree. That's no criticism, I just want to tell you my perception. Bibi Netanyahu argued strongly for Pollard's release. He made the arguments that anyone who knows a lot about the case and thinks he should be released would make. But I took no offense at that. He was representing what he believes to be the interest of the State of Israel. And he did it in—you know, he doesn't make arguments halfway. You observe the Prime Minister, he's an aggressive person; he fights hard for what he believes. I took no offense at it at all.

And I would ask you all to remember when evaluating reports that tempers were frayed or strong language was used; now, remember, the three of us, Mr. Arafat and Mr. Netanyahu and I, we were there for over 8 days. Most nights I was there, I went home at 2 and 3 o'clock in the morning. The last time we were there on this last day, I was up for 39 hours and so were they.

Now, I'm amazed that we didn't have more disruptive conduct and more harsh words, given how exhausted and frayed we were. But it shows you how hard the parties were trying, on the one hand, to make peace, but on the other hand, to protect their security interests. Particularly, I think, that was Mr. Netanyahu's concern. He was desperately trying to find a way to make peace or to advance the peace process that would enable him to go home and sell it to his Cabinet and his constituency. And this Pollard issue was very important to him. But I took no offense at that.

**Q.** But still, Mr. President, there were many reports that you were very upset with Mr. Netanyahu and were quoted saying that his behavior was despicable.

**The President.** That report is not true. That's just inaccurate. And this is the first opportunity I've had to say that. There was a moment in the negotiations when the two guys split apart, and there was an issue raised that I thought was wrong. And I said so in very graphic terms. But I never used the

word "despicable" to describe the Prime Minister. I did not do that.

There was a moment where I thought—there were various moments in these negotiations when I thought—at least from my perspective, trying to be an honest broker—they were both wrong. You would expect this over 8 days.

But at that moment, the issue at stake had nothing to do with Pollard. It was an issue, a dispute between the Palestinians and the Israelis. It had nothing to do with Pollard. And it is true that there was a moment in which there was a heated exchange in which I said something rather graphic, but I did not adversely characterize the Prime Minister in the way that's reported.

#### **Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin**

**Q.** I'd like to talk about the late Yitzhak Rabin. I think you know, Mr. President, that when you said the phrase, *shalom chaver*, "goodbye friend," I think you touched many many Israelis in a very, very special way. And we've been curious, how did you come up with this? I even noticed you have a pin that says, *shalom chaver* on your desk right here in the Oval Office.

**The President.** Yes. I have many Jewish-Americans working for me here, and they all knew how close I felt to Prime Minister Rabin. And they all knew how heartbroken I was when he was shot. And we were—everybody was sort of coming up with ideas. And Shimon Peres later told me that he had not seen those two words used together before because *chaver*, it's sort of a special word; it goes beyond normal friendship.

And one of my—I wish I could say that I knew enough Hebrew that I came up with it, but one of my staff members suggested that I say it. And they explained it to me, what it meant, and it seemed to be perfect for what I was trying to say. I must say, for me, that was more than a political loss. I felt very close to the Prime Minister, to Mrs. Rabin. I got to know their children, grandchildren. And I think always when I'm pushing the peace process forward that I'm doing it not just for myself, but maybe also a little for him.

And I must say, in these last negotiations I was very pleased to see that Prime Minister

Netanyahu, I saw in his eyes, I could almost see in his eyes the moment when he really made the decision that, well, maybe the Palestinians were going to make sufficiently specific security commitments that would be on a sufficiently clear timetable that he could sell not just to the Israeli public at large but to a decisive portion of his own constituency, which is a very different thing, as all of you know better than I do.

And he could see that, that he could personally believe that it would advance Israel's security. And I saw that look in his eyes. I felt from that point on that eventually we would get an agreement. And that's the look that you want to see in a leader's eyes in a situation like that, because I still believe that the right formula is peace and security, and that you really can't have one without the other. But I also believe—I told Mr. Arafat once during these negotiations that we had to get to the point where Israel and the Palestinian Authority had the same enemies. And that they felt that if they couldn't get to be friends, at least they could be comrades. And that if we could fulfill a role there in the way this agreement was written, to build confidence between them on a daily basis, then that would be a good thing for us to do.

**Q.** Do you think, Mr. President, that things might have been different today if it wasn't for the assassination?

**The President.** Yes, of course they might have been. But it's hard to know and pointless to speculate. The main thing I think that is important for me, at least from my perspective as an American President and a friend of Israel, it's important for me that the people of Israel know that I watched these peace talks at Wye unfold. And that I believe that the Prime Minister and the members of his Cabinet who were there, and his staff, were trying their best to advance the cause of Israel's security. I believe that they would never have agreed to this, no matter how much I asked them to do so, if they were not absolutely convinced that it was a real advance for security.

And that, therefore, if we can launch the final status talks, we can redeem the sacrifice of Rabin and all the other people who have

died and given and given and given to secure Israel's place and future.

NOTE: The interview began at 8:25 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu of Israel; Chairman Yasser Arafat of the Palestinian Authority; and former civilian U.S. Navy intelligence analyst Jonathan Pollard, convicted of treason and espionage in 1987. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this interview.

### Remarks at the New Psalmist Baptist Church in Baltimore, Maryland

November 1, 1998

Thank you, "Reverend" Cummings. [Laughter] It's difficult enough to follow one sermon, much less two. [Laughter]

Let me say to Reverend Thomas, I never wanted your message to end. It was wonderful, thank you. I, too, join in wishing Mrs. Thomas a happy birthday. I thank all the wonderful staff and parishioners here at New Psalmist. I have to say that my staff especially appreciated the assistance from Dr. David Blow. I thank Congressman Cummings for his welcome here.

I tell you, I was here about 10 minutes, and I realized how Elijah got to Congress. [Laughter] And I thank all of his staff, Vernon Simmons and others. I thank Mayor Schmoke for all the help that your people gave us. Thank you, sir. I thank your two wonderful Senators, Senator Sarbanes and Senator Mikulski. Senator Mikulski is running for reelection, but she's going to win by acclamation so nobody remembers that she's on the ballot, but I think I should tell you that she is, and she would like it very much if you remembered that, as well.

I thank Governor Glendening and Lieutenant Governor Kathleen Kennedy Townsend for all they have done for Maryland, and I commend them to you. Congressman Cardin, thank you for being here. To Secretary of State John Willis, it's his birthday, too, today, by the way. I would like to thank Senator Blount, County Executive Ruppertsberger, City Council President Bell, City Comptroller Joan Pratt. And I would like to say a special word of appreciation to