

Remarks at the Welcoming Ceremony for Prime Minister Menachem Begin of Israel

September 9, 1981

The President. Prime Minister Begin, on behalf of the American people, Nancy and I are honored and delighted to welcome you and all those accompanying you.

We're proud to stand beside you this morning, joining a tradition of hospitality for Israel observed by our Presidents for more than three decades. Your visit is testimony to the warm friendships, mutual respect, and shared values that bind our people. Today and tomorrow, we'll have an opportunity to meet, to come to know each other, and to discuss in detail the vital issues of peace and security that concern both our countries.

I welcome this chance to further strengthen the unbreakable ties between the United States and Israel and to assure you of our commitment to Israel's security and well-being.

Israel and America may be thousands of miles apart, but we are philosophical neighbors sharing a strong commitment to democracy and the rule of law. What we hold in common are the bonds of trust and friendship, qualities that in our eyes make Israel a great nation. No people have fought longer, struggled harder, or sacrificed more than yours in order to survive, to grow, and to live in freedom.

The United States and Israel share similar beginnings as nations of immigrants, yearning to live in freedom and to fulfill the dreams of our forefathers. We have both sought to establish societies of law, to live in peace, and to develop the full potential of our lands. We share a devotion to democratic institutions, responsible to the wills of our citizens. Our peoples embrace common ideals of self-improvement through hard work and individual initiative. Together, we seek peace for all people. In partnership, we're determined to defend liberty and safeguard the security of our citizens. We know Israelis live in constant peril. But Israel will have our help. She will remain strong and secure, and her special character of spirit, genius, and faith will prevail.

The prophet Ezekiel spoke of a new age -- when land that was desolate has become like the Garden of Eden and waste and ruined cities are now inhabited. We saw how miraculously you transformed and made the desert bloom. We see how, despite dangers every day, your families continue working together to build a better place to live and to prosper in peace and freedom.

Our dream, our challenge, and, yes, our mission, is to make the golden age of peace, prosperity, and brotherhood a living reality in all countries of the Middle East. Let us remember that whether we be Christian or Jew or Moslem, we are all children of Abraham; we are all children of the same God.

Mr. Prime Minister, you come at a time of testing and of hope. The challenges we face are great with the forces of aggression, lawlessness, and tyranny intent on exploiting weakness. They seek to undo the work of generations of our people, to put out a light that we've been tending for these

past 6,000 years. But we understand their designs, and we're determined to oppose them. Working with all our friends in the Middle East, we seek to reinforce the security of the entire region. As we consult about these problems, rest assured that the security of Israel is a principal objective of this administration and that we regard Israel as an ally in our search for regional stability.

Equally important in our discussions is the commitment of our two countries to advance the cause of peace. Mr. Prime Minister, your strong leadership, great imagination, and skilled statesmanship have been indispensable in reaching the milestones of the past few years on the road toward a just and durable peace in the Middle East.

You and the members of your coalition have earned our respect and admiration. Many cynics said Israel would never make peace with Egypt, but you did. Then they said you would not honor your commitment to return the Sinai to Egypt, but you have. Now they say you cannot go forward to work out a just and durable peace with all your neighbors; we know you will.

I look forward to receiving the benefit of your views and advice on the great tasks that remain before us. I'm confident that the United States and Israel will continue their close partnership as difficult negotiations toward peace are pursued. Let me also thank you, Mr. Prime Minister, for helping our special Ambassador, Philip Habib, to arrange a cessation of hostilities across your border with Lebanon -- still another considered step for peace and one well taken.

Prime Minister Begin, I know your entire life has been dedicated to security and the well-being of your people. It wasn't always easy. From your earliest days you were acquainted with hunger and sorrow, but as you've written, you rarely wept. On one occasion, you did -- the night when your beloved State of Israel was proclaimed. You cried that night, you said, because ``truly there are tears of salvation as well as tears of grief."

Well, with the help of God, and us working together, perhaps one day for all the people in the Middle East, there will be no more tears of grief, only tears of salvation.

Shalom, shalom: to him that is far off and to him that is near. And again, Mr. Prime Minister, welcome to America.

The Prime Minister. Mr. President, my colleagues and I are grateful to you and to Mrs. Reagan for your kind invitation, for having given us the opportunity to discuss with you and your advisers international problems, bilateral issues, the danger to freedom resulting from Soviet expansionist policy in our region and its periphery and elsewhere, and the defense of human liberty, which is the essence of our lives, demotive of our efforts, the reason of our labors.

Our generation, Mr. President, lived through two World Wars, with all the sacrifices, the casualties, the misery involved. But the two wars also created and left after them, regrettably, two illusions. In the early twenties, the saying went around the world, ``that was the war to end all the wars." It was not so to be. Only 25 years later another World War broke out, the most horrifying of all in the annals of mankind, not only with the sacrifices in tens of millions of human beings but also with atrocities unheard of in history. Ultimately, mankind crushed the

darkest tyranny which ever arose to enslave the human soul, and then people believed that it is the end of tyranny of man over man. It was not to be.

After May 1945, there were 56 so-called local wars in a period of 36 years alone. In other words, blood-letting and enslavement are going on. Country after country is being taken over by totalitarianism. In nearly 8 years, eight countries were so taken over, either by proxy or directly. So, it is obvious that liberty is in danger, and all free women and men should stand together to defend it and to assure its future for all generations to come.

Mr. President, Israel is a small country, but a free one. Its democracy was proved time and again -- true democracy. It is an integral part of the free world. It is a faithful and, through each democratic regime, a stable ally of the United States. We shall stand together, and Israel will give its share in defending human liberty.

Mr. President, out of those 56 local wars, five were thrust upon little Israel since its inception. We waged them out of necessity to defend our people and to save its existence and to sustain our independence. This is the simple reason why we not only want peace, but we yearn for peace. And therefore, as you rightly said, Mr. President, at a price of great sacrifices and admittedly undertaken -- those are very serious risks -- we made peace. We signed a peace treaty on this very lawn with our southern neighbor, but we strive to sign peace treaties and make peace forever on all our borders with all our neighbors. And with God's help, this noble aim will be achieved, too.

Mr. President, thank you for your heartwarming remarks about my people and my country and touching words about my life, which is only one of the uncountable thousands and millions who have suffered and fought and resisted and saw, after a long night, the rise of the Sun, the day. I am one of them because this is our generation. But your appreciation of our motives, our efforts, our sacrifices is very dear to all of us because, Mr. President, we see in you not only the President of the United States but also the defender of freedom throughout the world.

May I, Mr. President, extend to you on behalf of the people and Government of Israel, our invitation to come and visit our country and its capital, Jerusalem. Then we hope that we shall be able to reciprocate the wonderful hospitality, indeed, in the spirit of all Abraham, whom you mentioned, which was accorded to my colleagues and to myself. Be assured, Mr. President, the people of Israel will receive you not only with utmost respect but with deep cordiality.

Thank you.

Note: The President spoke at 10:09 a.m. on the South Lawn of the White House, where Prime Minister Begin was given a formal welcome with full military honors.

Following the ceremony, the President and the Prime Minister met in the Oval Office. Also present at that meeting were the Vice President, Secretary of State Alexander M. Haig, Jr., Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs Richard V. Allen, Samuel Lewis, U.S. Ambassador to Israel and, on the Israeli side, Foreign Minister Yitzhak Shamir and Israeli

Ambassador to the United States Ephraim Evron. President Reagan and Prime Minister Begin then held an expanded meeting with members of their delegations.