

speech

**Address by Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin
to the AIPAC Policy Conference
Tuesday, March 15, 1994, Washington D.C.**

Dear Steve,
Dear Members of AIPAC and friends,

Yesterday it rained in Jerusalem - and the rain washed away the dust from the ancient stones of the Wailing Wall, from the Temple Mount, from the domes of Mosques, from the synagogues, from the Church steeples. Jerusalem was resplendent as always.

Last night I left Jerusalem, the eternal capital of the State of Israel and the heart of the Jewish people, to arrive here today and bring you the warmest regards from the city of which our forefathers dreamt and to which they turned in their prayers.

My entire life has centered around Jerusalem. I was born there, I fought there, and now, forty six years later, I remember each day, each moment and each flame from within the burning armored cars on the road to the besieged city. I hear the cries of friends calling out for help and several times a week, as I travel to Jerusalem, I see, as you do, the burnt and rusted wreckage on the side of the road, each one recalling for me a struggle of life and death.

I still recall the rows of dead friends next to the dining hall in Quiryat Anavim and I still feel the anguish of the parents of the fighters who still did not know of their fate. In the battle for Jerusalem, we suffered bitter defeats and glorious victories.

This is the same Jerusalem to which I returned with IDF soldiers in the Six-Day War, a Jerusalem of Gold, of copper and of light. To my last breath, I shall remember the first paratroopers at the Wailing Wall and the tears they shed. The history of Jerusalem has been written by blood and tears.

I came full circle - I returned home never to leave it again.

Jerusalem is a city of peace, a city that yearns for peace and the city from which the word of peace will go forth, not withstanding any United Nations resolution.

My dear colleagues,

I bring you today the heartfelt gratitude of the State of Israel and its citizens. I applaud you. You are unique.

I am a friend of AIPAC. We may have differences, but I would like to say: We have many friends and many support organizations throughout the world. AIPAC has been, and will remain the spearhead of the special relation between Washington and Jerusalem.

אי'פ'ק, כל הכבוד לכם.

I feel that this is the time and place to thank Tom Dine, who served as the moving force of the organization for well over a decade. Tom, Israel thanks you.

I would like to welcome Neal Sher and wish him much success in his challenging new post. Neal, let me offer you some advice as an old soldier: "Don't fall asleep on guard duty". The Bible says:

"לא ינום ולא יישן שומר ישראל"

"Behold the guardian of Israel will neither sleep nor slumber."

Neal בהצלחה !!

Dear colleagues,

Tomorrow at this time, I will meet a great friend of the State of Israel in the Oval Office - President Bill Clinton.

He is the leader of the free world. I represent a small, young country of an ancient people. He represents a great country and a new hope. We both share the values and aspirations that have made America and Israel such unique allies.

Friends, Members of AIPAC, I am confident that Israel is secure, above all because of the people and soldiers of Israel, but also because we have such good friends in the United States: in the Jewish community, in the Administration and on the Hill. Who can boast such friends.

Dear Colleagues,

No one forced me to become Prime Minister, but from the day I took office, I have to accept the good and the bad.

Since the day of its inception, Israel has been fighting a bloody battle for its security and well-being. At times, we bury our dead civilians and soldiers, and bite our lips - and continue onward. We preserve the memories of the fallen. We shall not rest until we bring home all our soldiers missing-in-action.

As we struggle, we strive to preserve our character and image as a nation which gave the world the values of morality and culture.

This reputation was tarnished two weeks ago in Hebron, the city where the common father of Israel and Ishmael is buried. In a city which has known both co-existence and the tragedy of massacres of Jews: another tragedy was added. The Tomb of the Patriarchs was desecrated.

We live in a difficult reality where Jews and Arabs interact, rub shoulders daily and hourly. Thousands of Jews and Arabs intermingle: in the fields, markets, and orchards, on buses and in taxicabs, in coffee-houses and restaurants, on construction sites, in factories and at the Tomb of the Patriarchs. In this place, sacred to both religions, Jews and Arabs have prayed together since 1967.

We are destined to live together, Arabs and Jews, in Israel and in the territories - although fanatics from both sides may occasionally stage attacks in an attempt to destroy this reality. The truth however, must be said: We Israelis have suffered more, much more, from terrorist violence. But we also recognize the pain of the Palestinians. All human agony, all suffering, is close to our hearts. There is no difference between the tears of bereaved mothers.

It is possible that the villain who pulled the murderous trigger may not have been crazy in the clinical sense, but the terrible act was that of someone deranged, and in our hearts we have only deep contempt for his vicious act. In fact, almost the entire Knesset, coalition and opposition alike, united in condemning the murder.

This murder is foreign to Judaism - and has shamed the Jewish people and Zionism.

At the same time, we cannot forget the murderous bloody acts of terrorist fanatics who shot Jewish worshippers who stood in prayer in the synagogues of Istanbul, Paris, Amsterdam and Rome. The same denunciation should have been expressed by the Arab parties; however, most remained silent.

A few months ago, I came here from Jerusalem to one of the most difficult, yet perplexing moments in my personal life and probably in the life of the State of Israel and the Jewish people.

You will not forget that moment.

Neither will I. I stood with discomfort on the White House Lawn at what should have been the end of a bitter struggle of blood and terror that has lasted over a century.

It was not easy for me. The person with whom I stood, whose hand I shook, was the same person that ordered his people to squeeze the trigger, to kill women and murder children. I knew this as I stood next to him.

I did not stand there as the private person - Yitzhak Rabin from Harav Ashi Street in Tel Aviv. I stood there as Prime Minister of Israel, from Jerusalem, and as the representative of a people ready to fight for its survival, yet most desirous of peace.

I stood on the lawn because I knew that I would owe to future generations the attempt to end wars and live in peace.

I also knew that the day after would not be easy. I knew that the enemies of peace will follow soon and make every effort to kill this process.

I knew that in peace as in war, we would have to bite our lips, to restrain ourselves and continue to advance towards our goal before us. To disregard obstacles and not allow the enemies of peace to prevail.

Distinguished Friends,

Since September 13th, terrorist attacks took the lives of 33 Israelis and wounded hundreds. In spite of these, we, the Israeli Government stood firm in our position that "We will fight terrorism on the one hand, we will continue the peace negotiations on the other". And I believe this should be the main message especially today, as the terrorist attacks continue and blood continues to be shed.

Dear Friends,

We are proud of our democracy; there are few like it in the world. Every citizen of Israel has the right to express his opinion in a democratic way, to oppose or to support the Government's policy. There are those who claim that our democratic system is weaker than other systems of government in the world. I say to them we will defend democracy and its principles. Indeed, we have already taken significant legal steps against extremists, to achieve exactly that. This past Sunday, the government outlawed these groups, a very unusual but necessary step.

We will not allow anyone in the State of Israel, or in the territories, no matter who he may be or what position he holds, to determine or change the policy of the Government - any government - through blackmail of the trigger or false messianic claims.

Until now, we have expressed regret, pain and condolences. We understand the pain of the Palestinian people. But I would like to state here and now: This heinous murder in Hebron will not destroy our values.

I must clarify to our Palestinian partners: the feeling of loss and sorrow in the wake of the Hebron tragedy will not change our fundamental positions regarding the security of the State of Israel and its citizens, including the Jewish residents in Judea, Samaria and the Gaza Strip. We have no intention of compromising on any security matters. Our security is also your security, and the basic guarantee of the success of peace. I say to you today: No bullet, no knife, no Molotov cocktail, no stone, will undermine our commitment to peace and security. As horrendous as the murder in Hebron was, there can be no further unilateral gestures or concessions. It is time to get back to the negotiating table.

To all those who still have doubts regarding the State of Israel's commitment to peace, I say, in a loud, clear voice: Do not be mistaken. We will continue making peace on the basis of the Declaration of Principles which was signed in Washington and the Cairo Agreement. Indeed, we will accelerate the talks and the contacts and the negotiations. Though it may tarry, peace will come. And indeed, we are working on it during these very days, with the assistance of the U.S. Administration.

We are near the conclusion of the Gaza-Jericho stage in the negotiations for peace. We already see the finish line. A little more effort, and we will begin to lay the actual foundations of peace for our children - ours and the Palestinians. We have no other path, only that of peace.

Distinguished Friends,

As you know, President Clinton met with President Assad in Geneva in January. Out of this event came signs of hope that we intend to explore carefully in order to be sure that Syria genuinely means to achieve the kind of peace and security we are looking for. A peace that would last for generations to come, a peace that would put an end to sufferings, plight and fear. Our negotiations with Syria have been serious. I called on President Assad, and call upon him once again, to walk the extra mile in order to meet us on the road for peace.

Next week we shall commemorate the fifteenth anniversary of the Peace Treaty with Egypt. Both peoples benefitted from this peace. I call upon President Assad and the Syrian people, to join us and invest in our future.

I believe that the near future offers us a rare window of opportunity: The fall of communism, and the collapse of the Soviet Union, which for years supported the Arab armies, has created new opportunities. But lately we see, on the horizon, forces emerging and threatening world peace. We have no time to waste. It is possible that the window of opportunity is narrower than we thought, at first. Therefore, I have committed myself and my Government to the peace process, and hope that 1994 will be a year of breakthroughs with our Arab neighbors. We believe with all our hearts that peace is possible, that it is imperative, and that it will come.

Only one who, year after year, stands facing the thousands and tens of thousands of silent mourners in the cemeteries on Memorial Day; only one who has seen worlds destroyed and families devastated, knows just how important peace is to us.

Nevertheless, as the son of a people that was exiled from its land in that exile lost millions of its sons and daughters in pogroms, in the Holocaust; as the son of a people to whom the picture of the child with raised hands in the Warsaw Ghetto returns at night, I ask for your understanding and undivided attention; For us peace, important as it is, cannot prevail without security. Israel will be very forthcoming in its quest for peace, but it will not compromise on its security.

Israel is ready for peace and is willing to take risks and make the necessary decisions. But any risk or decision should be well calculated, for hasty actions could bring upon us irreversible results. Our enemies - near and far - have not laid down their arms. It is up to us to shoulder the security responsibility for our people.

We are at the start of a long road. We have changed the order of our national priorities and we embarked on a new path of economic growth and the creation of jobs for hundreds of thousands of new immigrants, to whose absorption we are fully committed, and young Israelis. Our economy has made good progress, including in the privatizing of Governments corporations. As we continue, we need your support, we need you.

My message to you and through you, to all the Jewish homes in America, is:

Cherish your Judaism and strengthen it. Nothing has preserved the Jewish people through all its trials as its ancient and rich heritage. Look to education, to the furtherance of Jewish values and the preservation of our unique identity. We are so few in the world and each one of you represents the hope of our people.

Let us preserve the vibrant and dynamic relationship between the American Jewish Community and Israel.

Dear brothers,

In a few days we shall all sit at the Passover Seder. We shall recall how our people left Egypt from slavery to redemption, from dark to a great light.

In Asuncion, in Sydney, in Addis Ababa, in Riga, in Zagreb, in Miami, in Brussels, in Kiev, in Moscow, in Washington and in Jerusalem. Jews will sit at the same festive table, with the same Maror and Matzo and will say "Ma Nishtana".

The story will go on in millions of houses and Jewish families - the story of freedom and redemption.

It is our sacred mission to preserve this freedom through all our efforts for peace, security and economic prosperity. With your help, understanding and encouragement, we shall reach this destination. In each Jewish home they will soon say:

"לשנה הבאה בירושלים הבנויה."
"אמן, כן יהי רצון."