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THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Meeting with Israeli Chief Rabbi Avraham Shapiro (U)

PARTICIPANTS: The President
Brent Scowcroft, Assistant to the President
for National Security Affairs
Edward Djerejian, Assistant Secretary for
Near East and South Asian Affairs
Richard Haass, Senior Director for Near East
and South Asian Affairs
Mark Levine, Interpreter

Chief Rabbi Avraham Shapiro
Zalman Shoval, Israeli Ambassador to the
United States
Rabbi Eytan Eisemann, Director General of
Rabbinat
Rabbi Milton Balkany, Dean, Bais Jaakov of
Brooklyn
Michael Shilo, Deputy Chief of Mission

DATE, TIME March 10, 1992, 11:45 a.m. - 12:00 p.m. EST
AND PLACE: The Oval

The President and Rabbi Shapiro met in the Oval Office at 11:45 a.m.

The President: I am very pleased you took the time to drop by.
(U)

Rabbi Shapiro: I am pleased to have the honor of meeting with an American President. Today you are carrying the burden of the world on your back. I have come to bless you from the holy land. May you have great success in all you do. I also come to thank the American people for all you have done. In part I want to give my thanks for your help in freeing a great many people from the Soviet Union. We know that your role is great in this matter. Gratitude is a well known Jewish concept. Jewish exile in the Soviet Union was a very difficult one. The Jewish culture was nearly eradicated. Now we are trying to re-create it for the

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Russian immigrants. It is a wonder that after 70 years of exile these people survived with the help of the United States President. As it is said in the Bible, all the Diaspora of Israel will be returned to the land of Israel. I myself am a seventh generation Jerusalemite. My ancestors came from all over the world - one even from America. When they first arrived, there were only 50,000 Jews in the Holy Land. Now there are over 5 million. We've seen how a small, desolate land has become a small developed country. Today it is the center of Jewish cultural life. I'm a Rabbi, not a diplomat. I can only see things in a religious context. The bible is the birth certificate of the Jewish people. We can't exist without it. We must obey its rules. We cannot change them according to convenience. We cannot divide what we want to accept from that which we do not. Inhabiting the land of Israel is one of our commandments. Being in Jerusalem is an integral part of the Jewish faith. A Jew cannot not chose among commandments any more than a mother can chose among her children. One who begins a task must complete it as a gift from God. The President's role in resettling Jews from Ethiopia and the Soviet Union is great. He will be held by God to complete this task. Together we will see the establishment of peace. Peace is also a good deed and also a commandment. We wish you good luck and success and the American people prosperity. We hope for peace between the people of the world. In conclusion, I hope you can help those held hostage. It is a human tragedy only the President can help with.

(Ø)

The President: Thank you for your lovely message of peace. Let me see if I can find a proper forum to speak out about those who are held against their will. Even though the American hostages are returned, we remain concerned. I appreciate your comments about Jews returning home from Ethiopia and the Soviet Union. A lot of people worked hard to facilitate this. There is much to be grateful for. Regarding peace, the talks that are going on may be difficult for Israel and the others but they can bear fruit. The very fact that there are talks is good. Are you optimistic? (Ø)

Rabbi Shapiro: Rabbis always have to be optimistic. (U)

The President: I appreciate your message of faith. I truly believe a person cannot be President without having faith and having religious beliefs. They are necessary to lift him up. Every President has found this out. I am sure every Prime Minister in Israel has learned the same thing. (U)

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Rabbi Shapiro: A Chief Rabbi also feels that way. (U)

The President: You'd better. Thank you for coming here. We have great respect for those such as yourself who dedicate their lives to religion. (U)

(Exchange of Gifts)

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