



Veteran White House reporter Helen Thomas announced Monday that she is retiring, effective immediately, in the wake of a controversy over her comments on Israel, according to a report from her employer, Hearst News Service.

Thomas told a rabbi at a White House event last week that Jews should "get the hell out of Palestine" and go back to Germany and Poland.

"I deeply regret my comments I made last week regarding the Israelis and the Palestinians," Thomas said in a statement on her Web site. "They do not reflect my heart-felt belief that peace will come to the Middle East only when all parties recognize the need for mutual respect and tolerance. May that day come soon."

Thomas's comments provoked sharp criticism within the close-knit world of White House reporters, and drew a rebuke from the White House podium Monday. With her seat conspicuously empty at the daily briefing, White House press secretary Robert Gibbs assailed Thomas for her words.

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TVNL Comment.□ Thomas committed the unpardonable sin: lashing out against Israel.□ Freedom of speech, once again, is determined by AIPAC.