

a conflict which has lasted for more than half a century—before and after.

The President. Well, we can talk in a little more detail now as to how you see it and what you think we might be doing. But I, again, I say welcome.

Q. Do you believe the process has not succeeded, Mr. President?

The President. He doesn't remember that I don't take questions at these photo opportunities. But I'm glad and appreciate your—

Q. Are you boycotting the talks today, Mr. Ambassador?

Ambassador Aloaf. We are not boycotting the peace process. We are protesting against what's happening today when more than 400 people, human beings, sitting blindfolded, their hands tied behind their back, in buses, waiting for a decision about something which is, to begin with, really not acceptable in neither an international nor in humanitarian roles. So we shall tell our

Israeli counterpart how we feel about that. And we believe that this is not really helpful to the peace process.

Q. But you will remain in the peace process.

Ambassador Aloaf. We are in the peace process because we believe in the seriousness of the United States of America. We consider this invitation by President Bush to us as an indication of that importance and also as a message to the successor of President Bush, President-elect Clinton, a message that the peace process is important not only to the parties but also to the United States of America and to the world.

The President. I can assure you it is. And we'll see where we go. But we'll discuss that item here now as soon as we have our private talks.

Note: The President spoke at 10:20 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House.

Statement by Press Secretary Fitzwater on the Middle East Peace Talks

December 17, 1992

The President met today with Lebanese, Syrian, Jordanian-Palestinian, and Israeli delegations involved in the bilateral negotiations of the Middle East peace process. He did so to emphasize the continuing value of the process begun in Madrid, one that aims at a just, lasting, and comprehensive peace based on United Nations Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338.

The President commended the parties for their sustained commitment to this process and for the progress they have achieved. It is significant that all of the parties have engaged seriously on the key issues of land, peace, and security. Substantial achievements are within reach if the parties make additional efforts to address the legitimate concerns of their negotiating partners.

The actions and statements of the parties away from the table are no less important than the negotiations themselves. Both Arabs and Israelis need to elaborate their

visions of peace. This will build public support for the negotiating process. They also need to form a concerted voice calling for an end to all forms of violence and avoid reactions such as deportations that risk complicating the search for peace.

Peace between Israel and its neighbors has never been more achievable. A way has been created whereby the people of the Middle East can escape the wars that have too often defined the region's history. Making peace a reality through these negotiations is the only way to frustrate those who would sabotage the peace process by violence.

The U.S. role as catalyst, honest broker, and driving force was instrumental in achieving the historic breakthrough at Madrid. The United States remains an essential participant in the search for peace, willing to assist actively in making the negotiations succeed.