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As you undertake the hard work of harnessing this new freedom to your rich culture, to your deep history, to your bold dreams, I hope you will remember that the American people are with you. We wish to be your partners and your friends because we have faith in your courage and confidence in your future. I hope that partnership will come about, will last a long time, and will bring to you the peace and prosperity that I wish for this country and for all the world.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:17 p.m. at the Academy of Sciences. In his remarks, he referred to Chairman Stanislav Shushkevich of Belarus.

Exchange With Reporters Prior to Discussions With President Hafiz al-Asad of Syria in Geneva, Switzerland

January 16, 1994

Q. President Clinton, are you going to talk about terrorist issues at this meeting today?

President Clinton. We'll have a statement later when we finish. We just met. We haven't started the meeting yet.

Q. Are you happy to be here, and can you tell us what you expect from the meeting, sir?

President Asad. I'm delighted to be meeting with President Clinton and his assistants. We are at the table not to think about expectations but to do the work.

NOTE: The exchange began at 10:15 a.m. at the Intercontinental Hotel. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this exchange.

The President's News Conference With President Hafiz al-Asad of Syria in Geneva

January 16, 1994

President Asad. At the conclusion of the important and constructive talks which were conducted today between President Clinton and myself, I wish to express my deep satisfaction for what these talks have effected in terms of the United States determination to do all it can in order to bring the peace process to its desired objective, the objective of establishing the just and comprehensive peace in the region through the implementation of the U.N. Security Council Resolutions 242, 338, and 425, as well as the principle of land for peace. In this respect, I appreciate the fact that, notwithstanding the great importance that President Clinton attaches to the internal affairs of his country, he has attached a special importance as a full partner and honest intermediary to helping the parties reach a comprehensive peace that is in the interest not only of the peoples of the region but also the people of the world at large.

Today's meeting between President Clinton and myself came to crown a number of exchanges and telephone communications between us over the last year. I hope that our meeting today will contribute to the realization of the aspirations of the peoples in the region, mainly that this new year will be the year of achieving the just and comprehensive peace which puts an end to the tragedies of violence and wars endured by them for several decades.

During our meeting, I had the opportunity to stress to President Clinton Syria's firm commitment to the principles and bases of the peace process and our strong conviction that peace cannot be genuine and lasting unless it was comprehensive and based on the principles of international legitimacy and justice. This means endeavoring to reach a just solution on all tracks.

Historical evidence, both past and present, have proved that separate peace and partial solutions were not conducive to the establishment of real peace in the region. In this regard, I would like to express my satisfaction that President Clinton himself has committed to the objective of comprehensive peace.

On this basis, we have agreed to work together for the successful efforts aimed at putting an end to the Arab-Israeli conflict and at reaching a genuine and comprehensive peace that enables the peoples of the region to focus on the development, progress, and prosperity.

This meeting has also provided us with the opportunity to exchange views over a number of issues including those related to bilateral relations between our countries. We have agreed that the noble objective toward which we are working requires a qualitative move

in these relations. We have also discussed questions related to the regional situation, as well as all matters that might constructively contribute to the achievement of security and stability in the Middle East.

Syria seeks a just and comprehensive peace with Israel as a strategic choice that secures Arab rights, ends the Israeli occupation, and enables all peoples in the region to live in peace, security, and dignity. In honor we fought, in honor we negotiate, and in honor we shall make peace. We want an honorable peace for our people and for the hundreds of thousands who paid their lives in defense of the countries and the rights.

There is hardly a home in Syria in which there is no martyr who had fallen in defense of his country, nation, and of Arab pride. For the sake of all those, for our sons, daughters, and families, we want the peace of the brave, a genuine peace which can survive and last, a peace which secures the interests of each side and renders to all the rights. If the leaders of Israel have sufficient courage to respond to this kind of peace, the new era of security and stability in which normal peaceful relations among all shall dawn anew.

President Clinton. I believe you could tell from that statement that I have just completed a constructive and encouraging meeting with President Asad.

From the first days of my administration, the achievement of a comprehensive peace between Israel and its Arab neighbors, based on Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338 and the principle of territory for peace, has been one of my highest foreign policy objectives.

In pursuit of that priority, I have always viewed Syria's involvement as critical. That is why, from the outset of our administration, I have engaged President Asad in a regular correspondence by telephone and letter, and why I'm now pleased to have had this opportunity to hear personally President Asad's views about how best to make this a year of breakthroughs on all fronts.

During our meeting, I told President Asad that I was personally committed to the objective of a comprehensive and secure peace that would produce genuine reconciliation among the peoples of the Middle East. I told him of my view that the agreement between Israel and the PLO constituted an important first step by establishing an agreed basis for resolving the Palestinian problem. I also told him that I believe Syria is the key to the achievement of an enduring and comprehensive peace that finally will put an end to the conflict between Israel and her Arab neighbors.

President Asad, as you have just heard, shares this objective, not just an end to war but the establishment of real and comprehensive peace with Israel that will ensure normal, peaceful relations among good neighbors.

Crucial decisions will have to be made by Syria and Israel if this common objective is to be achieved. That is why President Asad has called for a "peace of the brave." And it is why I join him now in endorsing that appeal. Accordingly, we pledged today to work together in order to bring the negotiations that started in Madrid over 2 years ago to a prompt and successful conclusion.

Critical issues remain to be resolved, especially the questions relating to withdrawal to peace and security—excuse me—the question of relating withdrawal to peace and security. But as a result of our conversation today, I am confident that we laid the foundations for real progress in the negotiations between heads of delegation that will begin again next week in Washington.

President Asad and I also discussed the state of relations between the United States and Syria and agreed on the desirability of improving them. This requires honestly addressing the problems in our relationship. Accordingly, we've instructed the Secretary of State and the Syrian Foreign Minister to establish a mechanism to address these issues in detail and openly.

For too long, the Middle East has been denied the benefits of peace. And yet, it is within our power to create the conditions that will enable Israeli and Arab, Moslem, Christian, and Jew to live together in peace. Today's meeting was an important step toward fulfilling that vision. We have a lot of work to do, but we are closer to our goal.

Thank you.

Middle East Peace Process

Q. Mr. President, do you feel that you have a firm commitment from President Asad to normalize relations with Israel? And by that I mean open borders, free trade, and diplomatic relations.

President Clinton. The short answer is yes. I believe that President Asad has made a clear, forthright, and very important statement on normal, peaceful relations.

Now, in order to achieve those relations, a peace agreement has to be negotiated in good faith and carried out. But this is an important statement, the first time that there has been a clear expression that there will be a possibility of that sort of relationship.

Q. Mr. President, it has proven that separate agreements were unsuccessful, and the proof is the Lebanese accords and the Jericho accords. Don't you think that we need a very clear commitment on a comprehensive peace? Then regarding the implementation of U.N. resolutions, regarding Iraq, U.N. resolutions were implemented. But as far as Lebanon and Resolution 425, until now the Security Council Resolution was not implemented despite the American approval. So how can this situation be improved? How can we get the commitment to implement these resolutions?

Thank you, sir.

President Clinton. First of all, as to the specifics of implementation, that will be part of the process of negotiation. But let me answer the first and more important question, I think.

I think all the parties in this process recognize that it cannot succeed unless all the tracks are brought to a successful conclusion. That is, I think even—President Asad was very eloquent in our meeting today about the question of Lebanon, and Jordan for that matter, in saying that even Syria, if it were fully satisfied with its differences with Israel, that they could be worked out, that there still would have to be a comprehensive peace in which the issues affecting Lebanon, issues affecting Jordan, and the issues relating to the PLO would, in addition to the Syrian issues, would all be resolved. We are all committed to that.

Q. This is a question for President Asad. Mr. President, President Clinton is the fourth President that you're now meeting. Do you think you can afford to wait for a fifth one, or have you decided to sign peace now?

President Clinton. I'm glad you got that question.

Could you repeat the question in Arabic, please?

Q. No, I cannot repeat the question in—[*laughter*]—in English. Mr. Asad, President Clinton is the fourth American President you're meeting now. Do you think you can afford to wait for a fifth one, or have you decided to sign peace now?

President Asad. Yes, we are ready to sign peace now.

Q. President Clinton, beyond the broad assurances that you and President Asad have spoken of here about the willingness to seek peace and to negotiate it, do you have, sir, as a result of these meetings, any of the kinds of specific, detailed concessions or a sense of willingness to make concessions that might make a successful negotiation possible? And if so, can you tell us in what areas they are?

President Clinton. Well, as you know, I have a very strong conviction that the specifics of this agreement will have to be negotiated by the parties themselves. And even though I have in my mind several things, I think that it is very important that those of us who are trying to facilitate these discussions not discuss the details of them. The parties are going to have to work that out.

Let me say that an indication has been given here by the very important statement that President Asad has already made, stating clearly that it is time to end the conflict with Israel, make peace with Israel, that the peace should lead to normal and peaceful relations. I would hope that this would provoke a positive response in Israel and that then the parties would get together and work these details out. That is not for the United States to dictate.

Q. Mr. Clinton, despite the peace negotiations, ever since the Madrid Conference, Israel continues with its policy of settlements in the occupied Arab countries. Although Syria has signed the Non-Proliferation Treaty and has been asking for years for the denuclearization of the Middle East as a region, Israel refuses, in fact, to sign and ratify

this Non-Proliferation Treaty and is still accumulating and amassing weapons. Don't you think, sir, that such practices go counter to the concept of peace for which you are striving? Thank you.

President Clinton. First, sir, I believe the question of settlements in disputed areas is one of the things that clearly will have to be resolved in connection with this peace process, consistent with United Nations resolutions and the concept of territory for peace. I said that in my opening statement. I expect that to be worked through.

Secondly, on the question of weapons, I believe the best chance we have to stop the spread of weapons of mass destruction, that include not only nuclear but also biological and chemical weapons, and indeed, to slow the sophisticated conventional arms race in the Middle East, is to finish this peace process successfully. I think that is, as a practical matter, the only way to do it, and the United States will work as hard as we can toward that objective.

Q. President Asad, are you clearly stating unequivocally today that in exchange for a full Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights, Syria would be prepared to establish normal diplomatic relations with Israel, including open borders, including tourism, the same kind of peace treaty that Israel established with Egypt?

President Asad. As we all know, especially the United States of America and President Clinton, we are endeavoring for a comprehensive peace in order for it to be lasting, in order for it to be just. In this context, we are striving for the achievement of true peace which guarantees the rights of all, a stable life for all. Here lies the interests of the peoples in the region and the peoples of the world.

Myself and President Clinton completely agreed on these issues, the requirements for peace. We will respond to these requirements. And you know, of course, this will hinge on the discussions and the peace negotiations and not to be solved in a press conference.

Syria-U.S. Relationship

Q. The U.S.A. is a partner and an honest intermediary. Syria responded favorably in order to achieve this peace process in the interest of the world. Yet, the U.S.A. is still treating Syria in a different manner, different from the manner in which it treats Israel, especially in terms of financial and military aid. How would you explain this, sir?

President Clinton. Well, as we have made clear, we have had differences over the years with Syria over a number of issues, including our differences over questions relating to certain groups, the PKK, the Hezbollah, the Jibril group, and others—other issues. We talked about these differences for about an hour today without any view toward trying to resolve them.

We agreed on two things, and I think this is very important. One is that if we can maintain one another's confidence working toward a peaceful solution in the Middle East, that that will do a great deal for our bilateral relations and for a better future. And the second is that we needed to have a process that had integrity, established by the Secretary of State and the Syrian Foreign Minister, that would go beyond public exchanges to a very specific delineation of the differences between us and an honest effort to resolve them or to make progress on them.

So, sir, I think the best answer to your question is that we think that the progress perhaps can be made. We've set up a mechanism to deal honestly with the differences between us, and we believe maintaining each other's confidence by good faith and effort in the Middle East peace process is the most important thing we can do at this moment in our history.

Press Secretary Myers. We'll take one more.

Lebanese Peace Process

Q. Mr. President, the subject is so close to your heart, but you evaded answering whether you felt that Israel should sign the Non-Proliferation Treaty. But my real question is, did you discuss and set a timetable for Israeli and Syrian troops to come out of Lebanon?

President Clinton. We did not have any discussions today about the details of any phase of the Middle East peace process because the other parties are not here present,

and it would not have been an appropriate thing to do.

Q. [*Inaudible*]——

President Clinton. Excuse me. I got one of those helpful little hints from one of my staff members down here. I apologize to interrupt you. I want to be perfectly forthright, because I don't want to leave a false impression that might be adversely interpreted against President Asad.

We did discuss the importance of having the Lebanese peace process go on parallel to the Israeli-Syrian process. I reaffirmed my support for the Taif Accords, and President Asad agreed that there should be a successful conclusion of the peace process which left Lebanon free and independent as a nation. So there was no difference between us on the objective. And I didn't want anything I said to be read unfairly against him on that score. We actually, I think, reached complete meeting of the minds.

Syrian Role in Middle East Peace

Q. In my view, on the 15th of September at the White House, you called for a bigger Syrian role in the peace process and on His Excellency President Asad to play a personal role in forging ahead a breakthrough in the peace process. Now that you've met President Asad face-to-face for the first time, what is your impression of President Asad, and how do you view his personal role in achieving that breakthrough?

President Clinton. Well, first of all, I had heard a lot about President Asad's legendary stamina in these meetings. [*Laughter*] And when we called a break 4 hours and 20 minutes into our meeting, I can tell you that his reputation does not exceed the reality; he deserves every bit of it.

Secondly, we had the opportunity—because we did talk for so long, we had the opportunity to exchange not only our views about the issues in play at present, but also I had the opportunity to learn President Asad's perspective over a period exceeding 20 years now on some of these issues. And it reinforced my belief as expressed in September that there would be no comprehensive peace in the Middle East unless he were willing to take a leadership role and that he has decided to take the risks that all these leaders, if they really want peace, are going to have to take.

And so I guess I would have to say that that is the most important thing to me, the thing that was most impressive. I believe that he is committed to trying to work through this as quickly as possible. And I think others will see that commitment and will respond in an appropriate way.

U.S. Role in Middle East Peace

Q. President Clinton, peace is an international issue. The U.S. administration is striving seriously to achieve peace. It is an international need; it's a need for the U.S.A. and Syria and Israel. One wonders why the peace process tumbles every now and then. And how will the U.S. administration, as the major sponsor of the peace process, tackle obstacles bound to face us in the future? Thank you.

President Clinton. First of all, I think it tumbles every now and then because it's difficult to do. If it were easy to do it would have been done before. The parties have been at odds for a long time. There is a lot of mistrust to overcome. There are a lot of details to be worked out. And whenever there is any ambiguity at all or uncertainty, then that is likely to lead to other problems down the road. So there are lots of reasons why it happens.

What the United States is trying to do is to take advantage of what I think is an appropriate moment in history when you have leaders committed to getting this done, leaders who understand that the interests of their people will be served over the long run by comprehensive peace. And so what we can do, I think, is to try to keep the process going, keep the trust level up among the parties, try to be an honest broker, and work through the problems. And when these difficulties do arise, as they have, as you implied, in the aftermath of the PLO-Israel accord, to try to help work through them as quickly as possible and get things back on track.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President's 45th news conference began at 4:15 p.m. at the Intercontinental Hotel. President Asad spoke in Arabic and his remarks were translated by an interpreter. A tape was not

available for verification of the content of this news conference.

Interview With Reporters on Air Force One

January 16, 1994

The President. Are you all exhausted?

Q. Yes.

Q. Aren't you?

The President's Trip

The President. Yes, I really just wanted to say that I think we had a good trip, and I'm sorry I put you through so much. You must be tired. I know I am. But I think it was really a good trip. And I appreciate how much work was done on it.

I thought we might just talk for a few minutes about it, kind of in a wrap-up fashion. But before we do, I wanted to say that after I got back on the plane, I called Prime Minister Rabin and President Mubarak to report on my meeting with Asad. And I attempted to call but was unsuccessful in reaching King Fahd. I'm going to talk to him probably tomorrow morning, just to tell them what had gone on in the meeting and what the statement was and get their sense of what was going to happen. Rabin had watched it live.

Q. What?

The President. Rabin had watched it live. And I couldn't tell whether Mubarak did or not. I think he did, but we had kind of a staticy connection, so I couldn't be sure. But everybody seemed to be pretty positive about it.

Anyway, looking back over the trip, I can say without any hesitation that it certainly met all of our objectives when we went on the trip. Everything that we hoped would happen did. And I think there were basically three big elements to it.

The first was the prospect of really uniting Europe for the first time since nations have been on the landscape there. I'm very encouraged by the initial reaction to the Partnership For Peace. All the Central and Eastern European countries and the Visegrad nations have said they want to join. Russia, Ukraine expressed an interest. We've now heard some interest from Romania. So I'm feeling quite good about that. Even the Swiss said they wanted to think about whether there was some way they could support it even if they didn't join, given their historic neutrality. I feel very good about it.

The second important thing, of course, was the nuclear breakthrough, the agreement with Ukraine following the agreement that had been reached earlier in the year with Belarus and Kazakhstan, not having our nuclear weapons targeted at anybody, not having their nuclear weapons targeted at us. It's a really important next step. And we also had some important discussions with the Russians about going in and making sure that START I is completely ratified and implemented and that START II is ratified and implemented and that we keep thinking about what further steps there ought to be. So this was a very good meeting in the trip in that respect.

And then the third aspect of the trip was the whole movement toward not only uniting Europe economically and politically but kind of getting growth back into the system. I met with the leaders of the European Union. We talked about how to implement the GATT agreement, how to follow up on it, how important it was to get the growth rates up in Europe again, how important it was to open new markets to Eastern Europe and states of the former Soviet Union. And then, of course, I talked about economics in Prague and then spent a lot of time dealing with it in Russia. And I must say, even though they've had a really tough time, I think they're on the verge of having some good things happen economically.

For all the criticism of the pace of reform in Russia, one of the little known facts about it is that in terms of privatizing companies, Russia's actually running ahead of the pace of the other former Communist economies. There's some other problems they have to deal with, their inflation problems and just having a legal framework that will attract more investment, but I feel quite good about that. Just from my experience in Moscow, I really think that while there are, as you would imagine, uncertainties among the people there because of all the hardships and the difficulty of sort of visualizing the future, I think there's a lot of emotion to the idea that the people ought to rule the country.