

And while we had our disagreements, I always respected him because I felt that he was open and straightforward with me and because I felt he meant it when he said he had made a strategic choice for peace. I regret that that peace was not achieved in his lifetime, and I hope that it can still be achieved, in no small measure because of the commitment he made.

I think today, rather than speculating about the future, it would be best for all of us just to send our condolences and our best thoughts to his family and to the people of Syria.

Thank you.

Middle East Peace Process

Q. Mr. President, since he was such an integral link in the process, is this going to delay the future of the process? How is it going to affect the expediency of the process that you've been trying to jump-start recently?

The President. Peter, [Peter Maer, CBS News] I think it's premature to say. There will be a period of mourning in Syria. There will be a period of sorting out, and the Syrian people will make some decisions, and then we'll see what happens. But you know, we've been at this now for years because of the decision that he made to go back to negotiations and try to move away from conflict, and it's certainly a path I hope the country will stay on.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:17 p.m. at the Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport. In his remarks, he referred to President's al-Asad's son, Bashur Asad. A portion of these remarks could not be verified because the tape was incomplete.

Statement on the Death of President Hafiz al-Asad of Syria

June 10, 2000

I am saddened by the news of President Asad's death and want to offer my condolences to his family and to the Syrian people.

Over the past 7 years, I have met him many times and gotten to know him very well. We had our differences, but I always respected him. Since the Madrid Conference, he made a strategic choice for peace, and we worked together to achieve that goal.

Throughout my contacts with him, including our last meeting, he made clear Syria's continued commitment to the path of peace.

We look forward to working with Syria to achieve the goal of a comprehensive peace.

Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Luncheon in Minneapolis

June 10, 2000

Thank you very much, Vance. Thank you, Darin. And thanks for being my friend for such a long time, and thank you for giving us a little walk through memory lane. [Laughter] I'm still proud I was a child of the sixties. [Laughter]

I never have known what I was supposed to be embarrassed about. I remember President Bush used to refer to me as the Governor of a small southern State. I was so dumb, I thought it was a compliment. [Laughter] I still feel that way.

I want to thank my friend of more than two decades, Joan Mondale, for being here, and for all the years that we've shared together. I'd also like to thank your former secretary of state, Joan Growe, for being here. Thank you, Joan. Sandy Novak, thank you. And I'd like to thank the people here from the Minnesota Teachers Group for their leadership in this event and for sticking with the Democratic Party and for their support of education reform.

Let me say, first of all, I am glad to be standing here, because in the last week I have been to Portugal, Germany, Russia, Ukraine. I came back to the United States to meet with the King of Jordan, and then I flew to Japan to the funeral of Prime Minister Obuchi, then came back to meet with the President of Mexico. And now I'm here. [Laughter] I feel like a character in that H.G. Wells novel, "The Time Machine." [Laughter] But if by some chance I should slip a word or two here, you'll just have to make some allowances for me. [Laughter]

I would also like to thank Mayor Rendell. He didn't really plan on leaving the mayoralty of Philadelphia and taking this little part-time job that I talked him into.