

Remarks Following Discussions With Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu of Israel and Chairman Yasser Arafat of the Palestinian Authority and an Exchange With Reporters

September 28, 1998

President Clinton. First of all, I would like to publicly welcome Prime Minister Netanyahu and Chairman Arafat. We have had a very, very good meeting today, following the one-on-one meeting that the Prime Minister and the Chairman had last night, their first face-to-face meeting in a year.

I believe that we all agree that we have made progress on the path to peace. There has been a significant narrowing of the gaps between the two parties across a wide range of issues that were in the American initiative that we've been working on for months. I think also, to be candid, there's still a substantial amount of work to be done until a comprehensive agreement can be reached. And because I'm convinced that the two leaders and the people they represent want an agreement, I have asked them to come back to the United States in mid-October with their teams to do the intensive work necessary to see if we can conclude this.

Meanwhile, I've asked the Secretary of State and Ambassador Ross to go back to the region in early October to try to see how much preparatory work can be done to narrow the differences further and to agree on at least the modalities for what we will do here in mid-October.

So, all told, it was a good day. And again I want to thank both these men for the open, candid, respectful way in which they worked, and we worked, together. And we're going to work at this now to see if we can get it done.

Q. What are the major sticking—

Q. Mr. President, there was—

President Clinton. Wait, wait. One, two, three. We'll do them all.

Go ahead.

Palestinian State

Q. Mr. President, do you support the Palestinian state in principle, and do you think the Palestinians have the right to have a state made for—or in principle, and self-determination for them?

President Clinton. In the Oslo accords, that question was left for the final status negotiations.

Because of the heavy involvement of the United States in the peace process, I believe it would be in error for me to comment on that. I think the important thing is, that has to be resolved in the final status negotiations as provided for in the Oslo accords. As long as the peace process is going forward, whatever the United States says on that publicly will be unhelpful to the ultimate outcome.

Q. Mr. President, the First Lady commented on this in public—

Q. Mr. President, is it your assumption—

President Clinton. She did, but she's not the President, and she's not trying to manage this peace process. That's a different thing. But I'm telling you the—we gave our word, when we agreed to try to be an honest broker, to respect the Oslo process. And therefore—I have to tell you, when I'm in Israel or when I'm with American Jewish groups, they also try to get me to say things that I said before I was the President and the broker of the process, that I can no longer say. So it's a different—I gave my word that I would be faithful to the process that these two parties set out for the resolution of their agreement, and I have to try to do that.

Middle East Peace Process

Q. Mr. President, are you saying that the deadline is mid-October when you expect both Chairman Arafat and Prime Minister Netanyahu to come back to the United States for a settlement?

President Clinton. Well, let me say this. In the end, whether there will be this agreement depends upon how badly they want it, how much we can work together, how much trust can be built and sustained, what kind of process for ensuring the agreement can be agreed upon by the two parties. So I think what I'm telling you is that they have made a very unusual commitment; they have committed several days, and not only their own time but the time of their appropriate administration and staff people, to try to resolve the remaining gaps.

I can also tell you that I personally was very impressed by the way, the manner, and the substance of their conversation today with me. And so we all said we needed to continue to change the dynamics of the process to try to increase the likelihood of completion. We made significant progress on the path to peace, and I think we could finish it in mid-October, and I certainly hope we do.

Q. Mr. President—

Q. You promised me the question. Please. There was today—Mr. President—

Q. Could we hear from Chairman Arafat and Mr. Netanyahu—

Q. Mr. President, today there was a terror attack in Hebron, a shooting, and an Israeli woman was injured. The Israelis are saying that Arafat, Mr. President, Arafat is not fighting terrorism. Did you get any answers from Mr. Arafat concerning the implementation of the reciprocity principle? Is Mr. Arafat willing to stick to his commitments according to the Hebron accords and Oslo accords to fight terrorism?

President Clinton. Perhaps I should let him answer that. But he certainly affirmed that to us. And keep in mind, that's a part of the whole peace process, those kinds of agreements, and that's one of the things that the Prime Minister, representing the people of Israel, would raise, and something that has to be talked through.

But if either one of these gentlemen want to say—

Q. Chairman Arafat, what's your assessment of the talks today?

Chairman Arafat. What he has mentioned is covering everything—and instead of saying the same thing—

Q. —Palestinian state today in—

Q. Mr. President, where has there been progress in the peace process—

Q. —Mr. President.

Q. Chairman Arafat, are you convinced—

President Clinton. I believe there's been progress in all major areas. I think we're closer together on virtually—on every major issue that either Chairman Arafat has mentioned to me or that Prime Minister Netanyahu has mentioned to me than there was before. But we have an operating agreement here that we will all say that nothing has been agreed to until everything has been agreed to. I think that is a good operating agreement. If they ever decide to change it, then I will honor their decision. Otherwise, our position is that you cannot conclude that anything has been agreed to until everything has been agreed to.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:45 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Message on the Observance of Yom Kippur, 1998

September 28, 1998

Warm greetings to all those observing Yom Kippur.

On the Day of Atonement, Jews across America and around the world fervently seek the blessing of forgiveness and reconciliation. The most solemn of Jewish holy days, Yom Kippur is a time of profound prayer, fasting, and self-examination.

Amid the clamor and distraction of everyday life, Yom Kippur is a call for silence and reflection, a summons for believers to remember and

repair their fundamental relationships with God and with their fellow human beings. It is a challenge to Jews and a reminder to Americans of all faiths to live our lives according to our beliefs: to have faith in God's mercy and to have the humility and strength of spirit to begin again.

Best wishes for a blessed and meaningful Yom Kippur.

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