

## Clinton and Assad discuss peace in Syria

JERUSALEM — In extraordinary talks in Syria, President Clinton said Thursday that President Hafez Assad "went beyond anything he said before" on making peace with Israel. Clinton then sped to Jerusalem to meet with Israeli officials who said progress, indeed, had been made.

Assad, who has built his career on confrontation with Israel, spoke anew of "full peace" in return for the Golan Heights and Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon. Clinton told the Israeli Knesset, "Something is changing in Syria."

Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin expressed confidence Israel could overcome differences with Syria and Lebanon, the last two hold-outs to peace among Israel's neighbors.

"It might take time. One has to be patient," Rabin said. "I believe that

*"In the Middle East every phrase has a certain weight, a certain significance."*

**BILL CLINTON**  
U.S. president

it will not take long and hopefully we'll find ways and means by which to overcome these gaps."

Clinton announced Secretary of State Warren Christopher would return to the Middle East in a few weeks on a followup peace mission.

"We have been urging President Assad to speak to you in a language of peace that you can understand," Clinton said in an evening address to the Knesset. "Today he began to do so."

"Perhaps there's been a softening, but a softening of opening positions is still required and that still hasn't happened," Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres said after being briefed by Secretary of State Warren Christopher.

Christopher cautioned, "There's long, tough negotiations ahead."

Clinton bade farewell to King Hussein in Jordan, flew to Syria for talks at Assad's hilltop palace and then went on to Israel where he placed a wreath at a monument outside the Knesset to Israel's fallen soldiers.

En route to Israel, Clinton admitted, "I'm really tired."

Clinton decided against visiting Jerusalem's holy places after a tentatively planned tour stirred up a political ruckus between Israelis and Palestinians, who dispute jurisdiction over the areas.

Mrs. Clinton visited the Western Wall, bowing her head and slipping a written prayer into a crack between the ancient limestone blocks of Judaism's holiest shrine.

On Friday, Clinton flies to Kuwait to visit American troops and then to Saudi Arabia before returning home

early Saturday.

Remarking on his talks with Assad, Clinton said, "He drives a hard bargain. He's a tough man."

At a joint news conference with Clinton, Assad flashed anger, first at questions about the sincerity of his commitment to peace with Israel and

then when asked if Syria sponsors terrorism, as the United States charges.

"There's nothing we have that proves our design for peace except our saying we want peace," Assad snapped.

Questioning Israel's intentions, he said, "What also makes us believe that they want peace?"

Although Assad denied any role in terrorism, Secretary of State Warren Christopher said later, "It continues to be an issue between us and Syria." He said the United States believes Syria gives safe harbor and support to terrorists.

Clinton softened Assad's comments by saying the Syrian leader told him he opposed the killing of innocent civilians.

Despite questions about visiting a country on the terrorism list, Clinton said, "I'm certainly confident I did the right thing."

Negotiations between Israel and Syria broke off in February after more than two years of inconclusive talks. The major obstacle is Assad's insistence that Israel withdraw completely from the Golan Heights, which Israel captured from Syria in the 1967 war. Israel has offered a partial withdrawal over several years.

Syria also wants Israel to withdraw from Lebanon and to dismantle Jewish settlements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Assad stressed the principle of "full withdrawal for full peace."

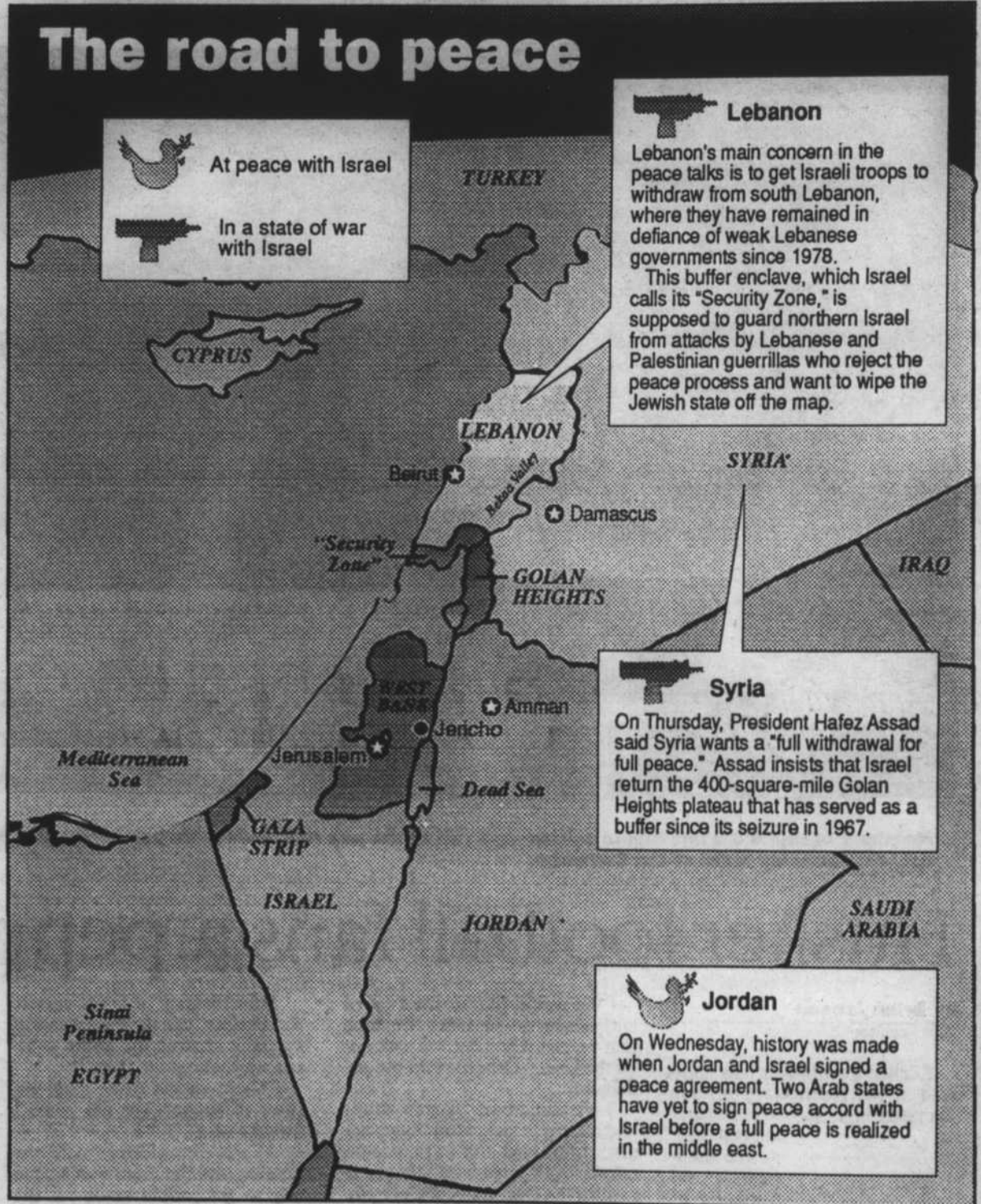
He made a somewhat similar comment last winter after meeting with Clinton in Geneva. American officials felt it was particularly significant that Assad did not mention the West Bank and Gaza or the status of Jerusalem. They were encouraged by his direct references to Israel within the context of a "peaceful, normal relations."

"His statement plainly went beyond anything he had said before and he very carefully prepared it to go beyond what he had said before," Clinton said. "In the Middle East every phrase has a certain weight, a certain significance."

Clinton said Assad "calibrated it, I think, to advance the public diplomacy."

Israelis had hoped for a resumption of direct negotiations with Syria.

"I do not foresee that for some time," Christopher said. "The parties seem to prefer to negotiate through the United States."



## Storage tank blast fatal

MARION, (AP) — Two people welding a tank used as storage for liquid fertilizer caused an explosion Thursday that killed one of the men and injured the other.

Killed was Robert Hanchera, 35 of the Marion area in southwest Nebraska, the Red Willow County Sheriff's Department said.

Injured and in stable condition at a hospital with burns and cuts was Raymond Havel, 53 of rural Indianola.

The explosion occurred at about 2:30 p.m. CDT on the Scott Hanchera farm one mile east and two miles north of Marion, or about 25 miles southeast of McCook, Sheriff Gene Mahon said.

The Hancheras are brothers.

Hanchera died instantly in the blast, Red Willow County coroner Paul Wood said.

The explosion occurred as Hanchera and Havel were welding a used fuel storage tank being used as storage for liquid fertilizer. There was fertilizer in the tank at the time of the explosion, Mahon said.

Hanchera was on top of the tank and Havel was on his way down from the top when the explosion occurred, the sheriff said.

Cause of the explosion was being investigated, but it appeared that fumes of some kind inside the tank might have ignited, Mahon said.

## Car thief takes toddlers

UNION, S.C. — The father of two boys reportedly taken in a carjacking begged for the gunman to return them Thursday as frustrated investigators checked out leads and turned up nothing.

"I plead to the guy ... to please return our children to us safely and unharmed," David Smith said.

He and his wife, Susan, were going over police pictures, trying to identify a suspect. "It is harder as time goes by to deal with," he said.

Mrs. Smith told authorities a man forced his way at gunpoint into her car Tuesday night and told her to drive. She said he forced her out a short time later and drove away with 3-year-old Michael and 14-month-old Alex, both still strapped in their safety seats.

"I just feel hopeless. I can't do enough. My children wanted me. They needed me. And now I can't help them," Mrs. Smith said. "I just feel like such a failure."

About 50 investigators were sifting through tips from around

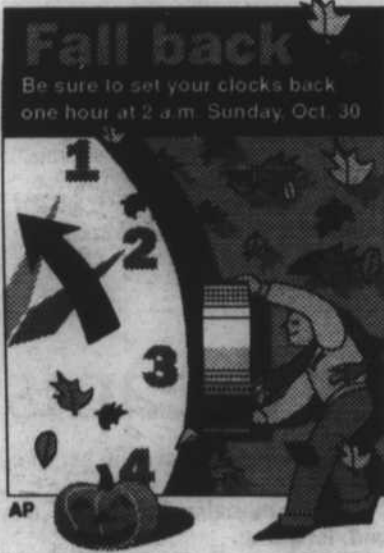
the nation that the Smiths' burgundy car, the children or both were sighted. Few of the reports panned out.

"It is frustrating to us because we are getting the information and it is so far apart," Union County Sheriff Howard Wells said.

There was a report that a man who robbed a convenience store at gunpoint 90 miles northeast of Union in Salisbury, N.C., matched Mrs. Smith's description of the suspect. He fled in a burgundy car, but witnesses didn't report seeing any children, Salisbury detective Tom Lowe said.

On Wednesday, police checked a report that a burgundy car had stopped for gasoline at a convenience store between Union in north-central South Carolina and Charlotte, N.C. Photos from the store's surveillance cameras weren't clear enough to identify the man.

"It's like they dropped off the face of the Earth," state police spokesman Hugh Munn said.



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