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Message: Newspaper & wire reports
on Reagan in Middle East.

From: Ann

White House Denounces Carter for Criticism Abroad

By NORMAN KEMPSTER, *Times Staff Writer*

22/174

WASHINGTON — President Reagan's White House staff, rekindling the rancor of the 1980 election campaign, denounced former President Jimmy Carter on Friday for criticizing Administration policy in a speech in Cairo.

"We are deeply disappointed by his comments," White House spokesman Marlin Fitzwater said. "If he wants to be helpful in the area of foreign affairs, he might want to forgo criticism of U.S. leaders while he's on foreign soil."

According to news service accounts, Carter told a group of American businessmen in Egypt on

Thursday that Reagan has neglected the Middle East peace process and opportunities for diplomatic negotiations in Central America while relying on the use of force—for example, sending the Marines to Lebanon and supporting anti-government rebels in Nicaragua.

Uses Military Strength

"President Reagan has not been inclined to use negotiation and diplomacy as a means to achieve our nation's goals nearly so much as have his Democratic and Republican predecessors," Carter said. "He's more inclined to exert America's military strength, either the actual use of it or the threat of it."

Fitzwater, in remarks that a White House aide said reflect Reagan's thinking, although they were not specifically approved in advance by the President, said that Carter was wrong in his analysis of Administration foreign policy.

"We're working on several fronts with the problem in Central America," Fitzwater said. "One is military resistance and trying to

keep [up] pressure for change inside Nicaragua. Another one is the negotiating process and the peace process."

Fitzwater insisted that the Administration is active in pursuing Middle East diplomacy, although he conceded that there have been no breakthroughs to rival Carter's Camp David negotiations involving Egypt and Israel, which led to the 1979 peace treaty between the two longtime foes.

"It is simply not true that this Administration has neglected diplomatic channels in the Middle East," Fitzwater said. "When you talk about the peace process in the Middle East, you talk about gains that come in inches and not miles, and there have been a lot of gains. There have also been setbacks."

Reminded that the Israeli-Egyptian treaty mediated by Carter was a substantial gain, Fitzwater said: "What's wrong with that? I congratulate them on that. That's outstanding. I don't mean to detract from that in any way. I'm simply saying, it is not right to say that we

have not been pursuing the peace process in the Middle East.

"The point is, we keep trying," he added. "I didn't suggest there had been any breakthroughs—there haven't been."

Carter, who has been on a personal fact-finding tour of the Middle East that will also take him to Syria, Jordan and Israel, said he was reluctant "to criticize my own government" while abroad. Nevertheless, he said, Washington had failed to provide the necessary leadership to bring opposing factions together, either in Central America or the Middle East.

His Beef Is Criticism

Fitzwater was asked if his chief complaint about Carter was that the former President was making his comments on foreign soil.

"My beef is that he criticized Ronald Reagan," Fitzwater said.

Asked if Reagan planned to apologize to Carter for Reagan's stinging past criticism of the Carter Administration, Fitzwater said, "That's pretty tough."

Carter to Ask Assad For Help on Hostages

Syria Welcomes Talks on Peace

22/174 By David Zenian
United Press International

DAMASCUS, Syria, March 21—Former president Jimmy Carter arrived in Syria today to ask President Hafez Assad to use his influence to free the hostages in Lebanon and to urge him to ease his hard-line stance and stop hindering peace in the Middle East.

Carter was met at Damascus airport by Foreign Minister Farouk Charaa, who said he hoped the former president's three-day visit would help improve strained U.S.-Syrian relations.

Carter pledged to raise the issue of the hostages when he meets Assad Sunday, telling reporters, "These are innocent people, innocent of any crime against anyone."

Before leaving Cairo on the fourth day of his free-lance Middle Eastern trip, Carter said he planned to advise Assad "to stop being an obstruction to the peace

process and add the influence of Syria in a positive way to try to seek out an avenue to renewed peace talks."

While in the Egyptian capital for a meeting with President Hosni Mubarak, Carter also criticized President Reagan and former Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin for blocking plans for regional peace set out in the Camp David accords on the Middle East.

"I am not representing my government in any way," Carter said. But he added, "I will certainly urge President Assad, if and when he has information about the hostages, to add his influence to seek their release."

Syria has maintained a troop presence in Lebanon since 1976, and on Feb. 22 Assad sent 7,000 reinforcements into Beirut to suppress fighting between rival Moslem militias.

Foreign Minister Charaa said Carter was welcomed "as a special guest" in Syria. "We look forward to better relations and a much more constructive dialogue with the United States and I hope Mr. Carter's visit will be constructive," he said.

Washington has diplomatic relations with Syria but withdrew its ambassador in October after Britain

severed ties with Damascus over the conviction of a Jordanian man for plotting to blow up an Israeli passenger jet leaving London. The Jordanian, Nezar Hindawi, was alleged to have been paid by Syria, a charge Damascus denied.

Carter, who plans to visit Jordan and Israel during his Middle East tour, also said he was prepared to meet with leaders of the Palestine Liberation Organization.

"I reserve the right to meet with whomsoever I choose," he said of the proposed meeting with leaders of the PLO, which U.S. administrations have refused to meet.

Carter reiterated his criticism of present U.S. policy in the Middle East, saying President Reagan had lost the initiative begun under previous presidents.

"The U.S. has not taken a leadership role in the past six years," he said.

3RD STORY of Level 1 printed in FULL format.

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MARCH 23, 1987, MONDAY, PM CYCLE

LENGTH: 532 words

HEADLINE: CARTER IN SYRIA ON MIDEAST TOUR SHRUGS OFF WHITE HOUSE ATTACK

BYLINE: BY EDMOND KHLEIF, REUTERS

DATELINE: DAMASCUS, MARCH 23

KEYWORD: CARTER

BODY:

FORMER U.S. PRESIDENT JIMMY CARTER HAS SHRUGGED OFF WHITE HOUSE CRITICISM OF REMARKS ACCUSING HIS SUCCESSOR PRESIDENT RONALD REAGAN OF FAILING TO PURSUE NEGOTIATED SOLUTIONS TO FOREIGN POLICY DISPUTES.

"I AM A FREE CITIZEN," DECLARED CARTER, AS HE PREPARED TO RESUME TALKS LAST NIGHT WITH SYRIAN PRESIDENT HAFEZ AL-ASSAD.

REPORTERS HAD ASKED HIM ABOUT A CALL BY WHITE HOUSE SPOKESMAN MARLIN FITZWATER TO REFRAIN FROM CRITICISING U.S. LEADERS WHILE ON FOREIGN SOIL.

WHITE HOUSE CHIEF OF STAFF HOWARD BAKER SAID LATER CARTER WAS OUT OF LINE IN ATTACKING REAGAN'S POLICIES IN CAIRO AND DAMASCUS.

"I HAD NO IDEA, AND I DON'T BELIEVE THE PRESIDENT OR ANYONE ELSE I KNOW OF IN THE ADMINISTRATION HAD ANY IDEA THAT HE WAS GOING TO SAVAGE PRESIDENT REAGAN IN CAIRO," BAKER SAID IN A TELEVISION INTERVIEW.

"I THINK THAT WAS UNFORTUNATE AND I THINK IT WAS A MISTAKE."

CARTER, HERE ON A FIVE-NATION TOUR OF THE MIDDLE EAST, HAS SAID REAGAN HAD FAILED TO FOCUS THE ATTENTION ON THE MIDDLE EAST THAT WAS EVIDENT DURING CARTER'S ADMINISTRATION AND THOSE OF HIS PREDECESSORS, RICHARD NIXON AND GERALD FORD.

SYRIAN TELEVISION SHOWED ASSAD AND HIS WIFE ANISAH GIVING A DINNER FOR CARTER AND HIS WIFE ROSALYN IN DAMASCUS. IT SAID THE TWO MEN HELD FURTHER DISCUSSIONS, BUT GAVE NO DETAILS.

CARTER FLIES TO NORTHERN SYRIA TODAY TO VISIT THE CITIES OF ALEPPO AND LATAKIA.

LEBANON, THE MIDDLE EAST AND INTERNATIONAL ISSUES WERE THE MAIN TOPICS DISCUSSED AT EARLIER TALKS YESTERDAY, ACCORDING TO SYRIA'S OFFICIAL NEWS AGENCY SANA.

CARTER TOLD REPORTERS ON HIS ARRIVAL FROM CAIRO ON SATURDAY HE WOULD COVER A WIDE RANGE OF SUBJECTS AND APPEALED TO SYRIA TO HELP FREE U.S. HOSTAGES HELD IN LEBANON.

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HE EXPRESSED HOPE THAT MIDDLE EAST PEACE EFFORTS WOULD TAKE A HIGHER PRIORITY IN THE LAST TWO YEARS OF REAGAN'S ADMINISTRATION.

"THE PRESIDENT AND SECRETARY OF STATE CAN THEN PLAY A LEADING ROLE IN TRYING TO PRECIPITATE AN INTERNATIONAL DISCUSSION OR BILATERAL TALKS AND, WHEN IT IS PROPER, PLAY THE ROLE OF A MEDIATOR," HE SAID.

SYRIA FAVOURS A U.N.-SPONSORED INTERNATIONAL PEACE CONFERENCE TO DISCUSS A RETURN BY ISRAEL OF OCCUPIED ARAB LAND, INCLUDING THE SYRIAN GOLAN HEIGHTS SEIZED IN 1967.

BUT IT REJECTS DIRECT TALKS BETWEEN ISRAEL AND ARAB STATES SUCH AS THOSE CARTER HOSTED WHILE IN OFFICE BETWEEN EGYPT'S LATE PRESIDENT ANWAR SADAT AND FORMER ISRAELI PRIME MINISTER MENACHEM BEGIN AT CAMP DAVID IN 1978.

THE CAMP DAVID ACCORDS PRODUCED THE 1979 EGYPT-ISRAEL PEACE TREATY WHICH SPLIT THE ARAB WORLD AND LEFT SYRIA AS THE ONLY FRONTLINE STATE PROPOSING MILITARY CONFRONTATION WITH ISRAEL.

CARTER, TOURING THE MIDDLE EAST AS A PRIVATE CITIZEN, PLANS TO BRIEF U.S. SECRETARY OF STATE GEORGE SHULTZ ON HIS RETURN.

HIS ARRIVAL COINCIDED WITH STRONG ATTACKS BY SYRIA'S STATE- CONTROLLED MEDIA ON U.S. POLICY TOWARDS THE MIDDLE EAST.

"ISRAEL ... IS THE MEANS FOR WHAT WASHINGTON CALLS THE INSURANCE OF ITS INTERESTS IN THE AREA, AND MAY ARAB INTERESTS ... GO TO HELL," THE SEMI-OFFICIAL ATH-THAWRA NEWSPAPER SAID.

DAMASCUS RADIO SAID WASHINGTON HAD FORFEITED ANY CHANCE TO ARBITRATE IN THE REGION AND THE GOVERNMENT DAILY TISHRIN CRITICISED U.S. IDEAS FOR AN INTERNATIONAL PEACE CONFERENCE.

6TH STORY of Level 1 printed in FULL format.

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MARCH 22, 1987, SUNDAY, AM CYCLE

LENGTH: 648 words

HEADLINE: CARTER, ASSAD DISCUSS MIDDLE EAST AND LEBANON

BYLINE: BY MOHAMMED BERJAQUI, REUTERS

DATELINE: DAMASCUS, MARCH 22

KEYWORD: CARTER

BODY:

FORMER U.S. PRESIDENT JIMMY CARTER DISCUSSED LEBANON AND THE MIDDLE EAST WITH SYRIAN PRESIDENT HAFEZ AL-ASSAD TODAY, SYRIA'S OFFICIAL NEWS AGENCY SANA SAID.

SANA SAID THE TWO MEN MET FOR THREE-AND-A-HALF HOURS FOR TALKS ON "ISSUES RELATING TO THE INTERNATIONAL SITUATION, THE MIDDLE EAST AND LEBANON". IT DID NOT ELABORATE.

CARTER AND HIS WIFE ROSALYN, WHO ARE BAPTIST CHRISTIANS, LATER VISITED AN ANCIENT MONASTERY IN MAALULA, 40 KM (25 MILES) NORTHEAST OF DAMASCUS. MAALULA IS ONE OF ONLY TWO VILLAGES WHERE PEOPLE STILL SPEAK ARAMAIC, THE LANGUAGE OF JESUS CHRIST.

CARTER SAID ON ARRIVAL HERE LAST NIGHT THAT HIS TALKS WOULD BE WIDE-RANGING AND APPEALED TO SYRIA TO USE ITS INFLUENCE TO HELP SECURE FREEDOM FOR SOME EIGHT U.S. HOSTAGES IN LEBANON.

SYRIA, WHICH MOVED TROOPS INTO WEST BEIRUT LAST MONTH, IS THE MAIN POWERBROKER IN LEBANON AND HAS HELPED IN THE RELEASE OF TWO AMERICAN AND FIVE FRENCH HOSTAGES IN THE PAST TWO YEARS.

SYRIA'S STATE-CONTROLLED PRESS SET THE SCENE FOR CARTER'S VISIT WITH A BITTER ATTACK ON U.S. SUPPORT FOR ISRAEL.

"WASHINGTON CAN NEVER ABANDON SUPPORT FOR ITS STRATEGIC ALLY AND CAN NEVER STOP ITS MILITARY, FINANCIAL AND POLITICAL SUPPORT (FOR ISRAEL)," THE SEMI-OFFICIAL AL-THAWRA DAILY SAID.

"ISRAEL ... IS THE MEANS FOR WHAT WASHINGTON CALLS THE INSURANCE OF ITS INTERESTS IN THE AREA, AND MAY ARAB INTERESTS AND FORTUNES GO TO HELL," THE NEWSPAPER ADDED.

CARTER MET ASSAD IN GENEVA IN 1977 AT THE START OF HIS FOUR-YEAR TERM IN OFFICE AND VISITED DAMASCUS IN 1983.

HE MEDIATED THE 1978 CAMP DAVID ACCORDS WHICH LED TO THE 1979 ISRAEL-EGYPT PEACE TREATY, REPEATEDLY DENOUNCED BY SYRIA.

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LAST NIGHT CARTER REPEATED CRITICISMS OF U.S. MIDDLE EAST POLICY HE VOICED EARLIER IN CAIRO, INDIRECTLY BLAMING PRESIDENT RONALD REAGAN FOR FAILING TO MAINTAIN MOMENTUM TOWARDS PEACE.

HE SAID THAT AN EMPHASIS ON THE MIDDLE EAST PEACE PROCESS DURING HIS TERM AND THOSE OF HIS PREDECESSORS, GERALD FORD AND RICHARD NIXON, HAD "NOT BEEN APPARENT IN THE LAST SIX YEARS."

"MY HOPE IS THAT IN THE REMAINING TWO YEARS OF PRESIDENT REAGAN'S ADMINISTRATION THERE CAN BE A RE-EMPHASIS ON THIS MATTER," CARTER DECLARED.

"THE PRESIDENT AND SECRETARY OF STATE CAN THEN PLAY A LEADING ROLE IN TRYING TO PRECIPITATE AN INTERNATIONAL DISCUSSION OR BILATERAL TALKS AND, WHEN IT IS PROPER, PLAY THE ROLE OF A MEDIATOR," HE ADDED.

CARTER HAS ALREADY VISITED ALGERIA AND EGYPT DURING HIS FIVE-NATION MIDDLE EAST TOUR.

BEFORE HIS ARRIVAL STATE-RUN DAMASCUS RADIO SAID CARTER'S REMARKS IN CAIRO HAD "PROVED THE VALIDITY OF SYRIA'S THINKING ... WASHINGTON HAS LOST THE POSSIBILITY OF HANDLING THE MIDDLE EAST PROBLEM AS A FAIR ARBITRATOR OR MEDIATOR."

SYRIA CHAMPIONS THE IDEA OF A PEACE CONFERENCE UNDER U.N. AUSPICES TO DISCUSS ISRAELI WITHDRAWAL FROM OCCUPIED ARAB TERRITORIES, INCLUDING THE SYRIAN GOLAN HEIGHTS, AND RESTORATION OF PALESTINIAN RIGHTS.

DAMASCUS FEARS THAT AN INTERNATIONAL PEACE CONFERENCE ON LINES PROPOSED BY EGYPT, WASHINGTON AND ISRAELI FOREIGN MINISTER SHIMON PERES WOULD SERVE AS AN UMBRELLA FOR DIRECT TALKS BETWEEN ISRAEL AND INDIVIDUAL ARAB STATES.

"THERE IS A DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THIS CONFERENCE AND THE CONFERENCE ADVOCATED BY THE ARAB NATION ... THE FIRST LEADS TO CAMP DAVID AND THE SECOND LEADS TO PEACE," THE GOVERNMENT NEWSPAPER TISHRIN SAID TODAY.

ASSAD AND HIS WIFE ANISAH WERE TO HOST A DINNER FOR THE CARTERS TONIGHT. THE AMERICAN COUPLE FLY TO NORTHERN SYRIA TOMORROW TO VISIT THE CITIES OF ALEPPO AND LATAKIA.

CARTER HAS STRESSED THE PRIVATE NATURE OF HIS VISIT, BUT TOLD JOURNALISTS HERE THAT HE WOULD REPORT TO U.S. SECRETARY OF STATE GEORGE SHULTZ ON SOME ASPECTS OF HIS TOUR.

ON SATURDAY, WHITE HOUSE SPOKESMAN MARLIN FITZWATER SAID CARTER'S REMARKS IN CAIRO WERE "DEEPLY DISAPPOINTING" AND THAT IF THE FORMER PRESIDENT WISHED TO BE HELPFUL "HE MIGHT WANT TO FOREGO CRITICISMS OF U.S. LEADERS WHILE ON FOREIGN SOIL."

23RD STORY of Level 1 printed in FULL format.

The Associated Press

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March 21, 1987, Saturday, AM cycle

SECTION: International News

LENGTH: 165 words

HEADLINE: Carter Says He Opposes Star Wars

DATELINE: CAIRO, Egypt

KEYWORD: Carter-Star Wars

BODY:

Former President Jimmy Carter said Saturday he opposes President Reagan's "Star Wars" program and considers it a serious violation of arms control agreements signed with the Soviet Union.

Carter said Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative for a space-based missile defense system _ Star Wars _ would be "enormously expensive, and it would be unfeasible in my judgment as an engineer and a fairly knowledgeable person." He said the program is a "major impediment" to progress in arms control talks with the Soviets and that it was a "serious violation of the anti-ballistic missile treaty" signed by the superpowers in 1972.

The treaty limits missile defense systems on both sides, and the Soviet Union says the treaty forbids Star Wars research. Reagan says Star Wars testing is permitted under the treaty.

Carter made the remarks in Egypt, his second stop on a private five-nation tour of North Africa and the Middle East. He spoke to reporters before flying to Syria later Saturday.

29TH STORY of Level 1 printed in FULL format.

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March 21, 1987, Saturday, AM cycle

SECTION: International News

LENGTH: 535 words

HEADLINE: FORMER PRESIDENT JIMMY CARTER STARTS THREE-DAY VISIT TO SYRIA

DATELINE: DAMASCUS

KEYWORD: CARTER

BODY:

Former U.S. President Jimmy Carter arrived in Damascus today on a key stage of his five-nation Middle East tour amid reports that he might ask Syria to help win the release of American hostages in Lebanon.

He flew in from Cairo, where he accused the Reagan administration of being less committed than his own to the Middle East peace process.

Carter, greeted at Damascus airport by Foreign Minister Farouq al-Shara, told reporters he looked forward to meeting President Hafez al-Assad to discuss Middle East, Lebanese and Palestinian issues.

His 16-day tour, which started with a visit to Algeria, will also take Carter to Jordan and Israel.

Carter said in Cairo he was not directly involved in talks to free the hostages but would discuss their fate with President Assad and meet people in Syria who have information about them.

Syria, the main power broker in Lebanon, has so far helped in the release of two American and five French hostages held in Lebanon, over the past two years.

Carter, ending his four-day visit to Egypt, said he was not surprised by White House criticism of an attack he made yesterday on President Reagan's foreign policies.

"The evidence is very convincing that in my own time in office and that of Presidents Ford and Nixon, there was a constant and an unswerving commitment to the Middle East peace process ... That particular commitment has been missing in the last six years," he told a news conference.

White House spokesman Marlin Fitzwater told reporters yesterday: "I think we are deeply disappointed by his comments and if he wants to be helpful in foreign affairs, he might want to forego criticisms of U.S. leaders while on foreign soil."

Carter, who was in office from 1977 to 1980, supported calls for an international Middle East peace conference and said the regional parties concerned should decide whether to invite the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council.

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Referring to the 1978 Camp David agreements between Egypt and Israel, which he helped to engineer, he told the Cairo news conference that the late President Anwar Sadat took the initiative and former Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin responded.

"This made it possible for us to make peace," he said.

Carter said that in the past, he had met members of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and would meet more during his current tour.

"I reserve to meet whoever I choose to meet," he said when asked whether he intends to meet PLO members. He said he would do so as a private American citizen.

Washington refuses to meet with PLO officials and, even when Carter was in office from 1977 to 1980, insisted they should first recognize Israel and accept United Nations resolutions on the Middle East.

"Any agreement concerning Palestinian rights or the occupied territories will have to be approved by the Palestinian leadership and I assume that will be the PLO," Carter said.

Carter criticized President Reagan's policies on the strategic defence initiative or "Star Wars" anti-ballistic missile defense system.

"I have always been against the 'Star Wars' program during my time in office and during Ford's time before me," he told the Cairo press.

28TH STORY of Level 1 printed in FULL format.

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MARCH 21, 1987, SATURDAY, PM CYCLE

LENGTH: 281 words

HEADLINE: SOVIET PAPER QUOTES JIMMY CARTER AS DENOUNCING "STAR WARS"

DATELINE: MOSCOW, MARCH 21

KEYWORD: SOVIET-CARTER

BODY:

AN OFFICIAL SOVIET NEWSPAPER QUOTED FORMER U.S. PRESIDENT JIMMY CARTER TODAY AS SAYING IN AN INTERVIEW THAT HE STRONGLY OPPOSED THE REAGAN ADMINISTRATION'S "STAR WARS" PROGRAM FOR A SPACE-BASED DEFENCE SYSTEM.

"WHY AM I AGAINST STAR WARS? FIRST, IT DOES NOT HAVE ANYTHING IN COMMON WITH AN ANTI-MISSILE DEFENCE. IT IS AN OFFENSIVE WEAPON, AND ONLY OFFENSIVE," CARTER WAS QUOTED AS SAYING IN THE YOUTH DAILY KOMSOMOLSKAYA PRAVDA.

"SECONDLY, THE VERY IDEA OF PUTTING A NUCLEAR UMBRELLA OVER THE AMERICAN CONTINENT IS SENSELESS AND FAULTY," HE SAID.

THE NEWSPAPER SAID THE INTERVIEW WAS CONDUCTED IN ALGERIA DURING CARTER'S CURRENT TOUR OF THE MIDDLE EAST.

CARTER SAID SOME CORPORATIONS, ESPECIALLY IN CALIFORNIA, HAD BEGUN RESEARCH DURING HIS 1977-80 PRESIDENCY INTO MILITARY USES OF SPACE. "THIS IDEA STRUCK ME AS ABSURD AND DANGEROUS," HE WAS QUOTED AS SAYING.

CARTER WAS ASKED FOR HIS VIEWS ON SOVIET LEADER MIKHAIL GORBACHEV'S PROPOSAL TO ABOLISH ALL NUCLEAR WEAPONS BY THE END OF THE CENTURY.

"I SINCERELY SUPPORT THE PROPOSAL FOR THE COMPLETE LIQUIDATION OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS BY THE YEAR 2000, AND I WOULD BE TRULY GLAD IF I COULD BE A WITNESS TO THAT," HE SAID.

"I AM AN OPTIMIST, EVEN THOUGH, REGRETTABLY, IT IS DIFFICULT TO EXPECT RESPONSIBLE AND POSITIVE DECISIONS FROM OUR ADMINISTRATION," HE ADDED.

HE SAID HE WAS GLAD HE SIGNED THE 1979 SALT-2 TREATY ON LIMITING STRATEGIC NUCLEAR WEAPONS WITH THE SOVIET UNION AND BELIEVED IT SHOULD BE A STARTING POINT FOR FURTHER AGREEMENTS.

THE TREATY HAS NOT BEEN RATIFIED BY CONGRESS AND THE REAGAN ADMINISTRATION RECENTLY DELIBERATELY OVERSTEPPED ITS LIMITS BY DEPLOYING MORE THAN 130 B-52 BOMBERS ARMED WITH CRUISE MISSILES.

12TH STORY of Level 1 printed in FULL format.

Proprietary to the United Press International 1987

March 22, 1987, Sunday, AM cycle

SECTION: International

LENGTH: 584 words

HEADLINE: Carter meets with Syrian leader Assad

BYLINE: By DAVID ZENIAN

DATELINE: DAMASCUS, Syria

KEYWORD: Carter

BODY:

Former President Jimmy Carter met Sunday with Syrian leader Hafez Assad in a 'broad-based discussion' but neither would say if it included Carter's pledge to ask Syrian help in freeing Western hostages in Lebanon.

Western diplomatic sources said Carter and Assad discussed improving relations between their countries and an international peace conference to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict.

'My meeting with President Assad was very pleasant, but I think I'd rather let him reveal what we discussed. We had a broad-based discussion,' Carter said after the 2-hour meeting.

Carter, who arrived in Damascus Saturday for a three-day visit as part of his unofficial Middle East tour, declined further comment. Syrian government officials also did not discuss the meeting.

The Georgia Democrat said in Cairo before leaving for Damascus, 'I will certainly urge President Assad, if and when he has information about the hostages, to add his influence to seek their release.'

Western diplomatic sources said the meeting gave the two men the chance to air the grievances of their countries against each other and what could be done to improve relations.

Assad was vehement about what he said were 'unfair, unjustified and false labels' the United States has attributed to Syria, the sources said.

'The Syrians do not like to be called names and certainly do not like it when the United States says they are supporting terrorism,' a Western diplomat said.

Assad cited his government's 'constructive role' in Moslem west Beirut and said it has 'helped free two Saudi Arabian hostages,' the source said. Two Saudi Arabian kidnap victims were freed last week in Beirut.

Syria has maintained troops in Lebanon since 1976 and sent 7,000 reinforcements into west Beirut Feb. 22 to end fighting by Moslem militias. But the troops have not entered the city's southern suburbs, a Shiite neighborhood

Proprietary to the United Press International, March 22, 1987

where the Western hostages are believed to be held.

The Syrians in recent weeks have repeatedly said they would spare no efforts to help free the captives.

Twenty-three foreigners are believed held hostage by pro-Iranian fundamentalists in Lebanon, among them eight Americans and Church of England envoy Terry Waite, who disappeared in west Beirut Jan. 20 while trying to negotiate with the hostages' Moslem captors.

Assad told Carter an international peace conference was needed to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict, Western diplomats said. The United States has been unenthusiastic about the concept, but Carter, in an arrival statement, said the approach should not be dismissed.

Carter, architect of the Egyptian-Israeli peace agreement, also criticized the Reagan administration, charging Washington has not taken "the leadership role" since Reagan took office.

Carter was received by Syrian Foreign Minister Farouk al Sharaa at Damascus Airport Saturday. Welcoming Carter as a "special guest in Syria," Sharaa said his country wanted better relations with Washington.

Political sources said Sharaa's remarks reflected Syria's "genuine desire" to improve relations with Washington.

Washington has diplomatic relations with Syria but withdrew its ambassador in October after Britain severed ties with Damascus over the conviction of a Jordanian man for plotting to blow up an Israeli passenger jet leaving London.

Carter, who plans to visit Jordan and Israel during this Middle East tour, also said he was prepared to meet with leaders of the Palestine Liberation Organization.

GRAPHIC: PICTURE