

Interview With Lukman Ahmed of BBC Arabic
May 12, 2008

Jenna Bush Hager's Wedding

Mr. Ahmed. Thank you so much, Mr. President, for this. And first, I must congratulate you for your daughter's wedding. And how does it feeling, being a father? I know you are listening to your mom; I know you are a father, and you are having a daughter's wedding. How does it feel?

The President. You know something, I was emotional, and—because I was so happy and proud. And she's marrying a good guy, Lukman. And we were out there on our ranch, which is a part of the world Laura and I love, and it was just a special evening, and it was great. I feel great. Thank you.

Lebanon/Iran

Mr. Ahmed. All right. You have given—we are going to Lebanon. You are giving Hizballah the choice of being terrorist organization or a political party. What do you think would prompt Hizballah to abandon its—[inaudible]? Why Hizballah claim the existence of legitimate concern for these weapons?

The President. Yes. I don't know. I mean, it's hard for me to get inside Hizballah's head. I do know that they are destabilizing Lebanon. I do know that they were viewed at one time as the protectors against Israel, and now, in fact, they're turning against the Lebanese people themselves.

And I do know that Lebanon's success is very important for peace in the Middle East. And so our position—the—my Government's position is to support the Siniora Government, is to beef up his army so that he can have a chance to respond to people who are acting outside the confines of government.

And you know, Hizballah wouldn't be—would be nothing without Iranian support. And Iranian is the crux of many of the problems in the Middle East, whether it

be funding of Hizballah, funding of Hamas, or obviously, actions within the young democracy of Iraq. And so a lot of my trip is going to be to get people to focus not only on Lebanon and remember Lebanon, but also to remember that Iran causes a lot of the problems around the Middle East.

Lebanese Armed Forces

Mr. Ahmed. We are going to touch that Iranian support and Syrian support to Hizballah. Many supporters of the U.S. policy in Lebanon criticize the lack of practical American support to the Siniora Government. That's what we are seeing right now. The USS *Cole* is now heading to the region, in what you call a—or previously mentioned, the support of an American ally. Does this mean the USS *Cole* is willing to offer this practical assistance?

The President. Well, the most practical assistance, really, is to help the Lebanese Armed Forces become effective. And that's what we're doing. A couple years ago, I sent one of our top admirals to Lebanon to assess the needs of the military. And as well as I've been watching very carefully to assess the courage of the leadership, like Prime Minister Siniora. I'm impressed by the Prime Minister. He's a good guy who cares deeply about the future of his country. And he needs a military that has got the practical equipment necessary to deal with elements in this society that are destabilizing. And that's really where our practical help is going to be.

Situation in Lebanon

Mr. Ahmed. And as supporting the Lebanese military, that means they should go, or do you think would go, to disarm Hizballah?

The President. Well, of course, I don't see how you can have a society with

Hizballah armed up the way they are. I mean, any time they feel like moving, they try to do it. In this case, though, they moved against the Lebanese people. They're not moving against any foreign country; they're moving against the Lebanese people. And it should send a signal to everybody that they're a destabilizing force. And—but the first step, of course, is to make sure that the Siniora Government has got the capacity to respond with a military that's effective, that can move point A to point B in a quick fashion, and that's got the capacity to get the job done.

Syria/Iran

Mr. Ahmed. You are calling both Iran and Syria to halt their support to Hizballah. But in the absence of any direct contact with Iran and Syria, your administration—how do you think both countries should stop doing this? You are not negotiating with them. You are not exploring other means to have them halt their support.

The President. So what's there to negotiate? I mean, they know my position. Early on in my administration, we sent the word to the Syrians, with top administrative officials, that if you want better relations with the United States, stop supporting these extremist groups that are trying to stop the advance of free societies. And every time, their response was nothing. So they know our position, the Syrians and the Iranians.

I have made it abundantly clear there's a better way forward. If the Iranians want to have relations with us, they ought to verifiably suspend their enrichment, and then they will—they can visit with us and other nations involved with the—through the U.N. process.

But they—both sides, both countries have made the decision to not take up offers. And they're very destabilizing influences. And they're—I truly believe that the Middle East is where the world ought to spend a lot of time, attention, and focus to help bring prosperity and peace, and that when people do pay attention closely,

they'll recognize the destabilizing influence that the Iranians and the Syrians are having.

U.S. Foreign Policy/Iran

Mr. Ahmed. So what are the other means that you think you could take to have them stop their support?

The President. Well, you know, there are sanctions, of course. There's international—working with the international community to send common messages, working with the financial community. And we're doing that. The problem is, some folks just don't see the same—the threat that Iran poses in the Middle East, for example, as others do. I view them as a serious threat to peace, and therefore, I spend a lot of time trying to convince other nations, other leaders to join in this common concern.

Palestinian State

Mr. Ahmed. We are going to the Palestinian and Israeli issue. And we know that you are going there to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the establishment of Israel, and you are the President who put the idea of the two-state solution. There are the other sayer in the Palestinian side. They call this anniversary as *Nakba*, or disaster. What do you say to them, Mr. President?

The President. I say to them that I care deeply about the Palestinian people and their future. They're going to have a choice to make, hopefully, and that choice is, here's what a state's going to look like, or do you want the kind of state that Hamas has brought you? And there needs to be a vision that people can see, that's clearly spelled out, with defined borders and the refugee issue settled and something on how to move forward on the holy sites, security discussions.

And those discussions are ongoing right now. And our job in the United States, it seems like to me, is to encourage the parties to come and reach a common solution so that they can then say, the world

can say, here's what a state will look like, and now you suffering Palestinians have a choice to make: You can accept that, or you can continue to follow or accept in your presence these extremists who murder innocent people.

Isn't it interesting that as the talks begin to emerge, there's more rockets flying into Israeli neighborhoods? Why? Because they want to stop the advance of a Palestinian state. And so no, I got a good message for the people of the Palestinian Territories.

Middle East Peace Process

Mr. Ahmed. In fact, I'm going to carry on that message. I'm given 30 seconds, so I hope if you could allow me to ask this question here. In your last meeting with Abu Mazen here in the White House, you stated, as I quote here, that "I'm confident we can achieve the definition of a state." Actually, Abu Mazen, he expressed some concern after that meeting that he couldn't see anything that would suggest that the possibility of establishing the state before the—

The President. Yes.

Mr. Ahmed. —end of your term. And he's hoping, and you are hoping, right now you are heading there. Are you willing to tell me that before the end of your administration, there will be an agreement to be concluded, based on the assurance you get from the—both sides?

The President. I think we can; I really do. We're going to work hard for that end. Look, it's hard. I understand that. And Abu Mazen was expressing frustrations with the process, and that's okay. He's sending a message. He wasn't speaking necessarily to the American people. He was sending a message back home that he's frustrated, and he expects there to be more progress made to his liking. I understand that. That's what negotiations are all about.

Abu Mazen and Olmert are, of course, necessary to get a good deal, but there's still—Tzipi Livni and Abu Ala are talking now. There's a lot of discussions going on.

And it's just a process. And the fundamental question is, when it gets down to it, will they be able to agree? They've closed the gap, closed the gap. Will they be able to agree at that last minute? And that's why Condi Rice and Hadley and others are going out there all the time to encourage them to get a deal done. It's in their interests. It's in the Israelis' interests that there be a state living side by side with them in peace, and it's in the Palestinians' interest. The status quo is unacceptable; Gaza's unacceptable. What they need is a state that responds to the will of the people. And the first step is to define what the state looks like. And we'll work hard for the next months to see if we can't get it done.

Palestinian State

Mr. Ahmed. And the agreement that you are trying to get it done, is it going to be a description of the state or the establishment of the state?

The President. No, it will be a description of the state. Remember, I told everybody earlier that there's got to be some roadmap obligations that have to be met. Everybody understands that. Step one is the description. And the state can't look like Swiss cheese. It has to be contiguous territories with defined borders—and the refugee issue concluded as well.

Mr. Ahmed. And that's what we're going to get before the end of your administration—

The President. I think so.

Mr. Ahmed. —is a description of the state?

The President. I'm working hard to get there.

Iran

Mr. Ahmed. Thank you so much. With regard to Iran, President—

The President. Yes.

Mr. Ahmed. —Bush, it's very vital, as you say it always, that their cooperation to have stability in Iraq. Do you think that

it—you consider one day that—talking direct to them to have them achieve that goal to—

The President. They know—look, if I thought talks would matter, we'd talk. But they know our position. We have had talks between our Embassy and their Embassy. They know, and they know that the Iraqi Government, along with the U.S. Government, wants them to stop sending their weapons from Iran into Iraq, all aiming to kill innocent people. That's what they're doing. They're being very—they're not being constructive at all. But they absolutely know our position. And when we catch them doing it, they'll be brought to justice. And we are catching them doing it right now.

Syria/North Korea

Mr. Ahmed. And the issue of the possible cooperation between Syria and North Korea on the weapon of—nuclear weapons, actually—

The President. Yes. Well, their—yes, that was a troubling development, wasn't it? That all of a sudden, out of the blue, there's—in the middle of a kind of a remote area, a reactor is there, built with the help of Koreans—North Koreans. And it just goes to show, unless there's transparency and openness, unless there's a strong inspection regime, what could happen. And that's why it's very important that the world stay diligent and pay attention to what goes on in the Middle East, and not hope for the best, but remain active.

Mr. Ahmed. But thus, the evidence is seriously being—my last question, last

question. This evidence, Mr. President, seriously being questioned. Obviously, the people have in mind that—the presentation at the U.N. with regard to the Iraqi weapon of mass destruction. So how do you see that, how—

The President. Yes, look, I mean, it's—the difference was, in this case, there was concrete examples. I mean, everybody that analyzed the data realized it was true. I mean, are people saying that it didn't exist? Is that what the line of reasoning is? Well, I just—just not the case or the truth. The truth is, is that out of nowhere was discovered this reactor that nobody talked about. The Syrians didn't tell anybody about it. The North Koreans didn't tell anybody about it. And it was discovered, and now it's destroyed.

Mr. Ahmed. Mr. President, thank you so much.

The President. You're a good man.

Mr. Ahmed. Thank you so much for this opportunity.

The President. Yes, sir.

NOTE: The interview was taped at 11:52 a.m. in the Map Room at the White House for later broadcast. In his remarks, the President referred to Henry Hager, husband of Jenna Bush Hager; Prime Minister Fuad Siniora of Lebanon; President Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) and former Prime Minister Ahmed Qurei (Abu Ala) of the Palestinian Authority; and Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Tzipora "Tzipi" Livni of Israel. The transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on May 13.

Message to the Congress Transmitting the Proposed Russia-United States Agreement on Cooperation in the Field of Peaceful Uses of Nuclear Energy

May 12, 2008

To the Congress of the United States:

I am pleased to transmit to the Congress, pursuant to sections 123 b. and 123 d. of the Atomic Energy Act of 1954, as amended (42 U.S.C. 2153(b), (d)) (the “Act”), the text of a proposed Agreement Between the Government of the United States of America and the Government of the Russian Federation for Cooperation in the Field of Peaceful Uses of Nuclear Energy. I am also pleased to transmit my written approval, authorization, and determination concerning the Agreement, and a Nuclear Proliferation Assessment Statement (NPAS) concerning the Agreement (in accordance with section 123 of the Act, as amended by title XII of the Foreign Affairs Reform and Restructuring Act of 1998 (Public Law 105–277), a classified annex to the NPAS, prepared by the Secretary of State in consultation with the Director of National Intelligence, summarizing relevant classified information, will be submitted to the Congress separately). The joint memorandum submitted to me by the Secretary of State and the Secretary of Energy and a letter from the Chairman of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission stating the views of the Commission are also enclosed.

The proposed Agreement has been negotiated in accordance with the Act and other applicable law. In my judgment, it meets all applicable statutory requirements and will advance the non-proliferation and other foreign policy interests of the United States.

The proposed Agreement provides a comprehensive framework for peaceful nuclear cooperation with Russia based on a mutual commitment to nuclear non-proliferation. It has a term of 30 years, and permits the transfer of technology, material,

equipment (including reactors), and components for nuclear research and nuclear power production. It does not permit transfers of Restricted Data, and permits transfers of sensitive nuclear technology, sensitive nuclear facilities, and major critical components of such facilities by amendment to the Agreement. In the event of termination, key non-proliferation conditions and controls continue with respect to material and equipment subject to the Agreement.

The Russian Federation is a nuclear weapon state party to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. Like the United States, it has a “voluntary offer” safeguards agreement with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). That agreement gives the IAEA the right to apply safeguards on all source or special fissionable material at peaceful nuclear facilities on a Russia-provided list. The Russian Federation is also a party to the Convention on the Physical Protection of Nuclear Material, which establishes international standards of physical protection for the use, storage, and transport of nuclear material. It is also a member of the Nuclear Suppliers Group, whose non-legally binding Guidelines set forth standards for the responsible export of nuclear commodities for peaceful use. A more detailed discussion of Russia’s domestic civil nuclear program and its nuclear non-proliferation policies and practices, including its nuclear export policies and practices, is provided in the NPAS and in the classified annex to the NPAS submitted to the Congress separately.

I have considered the views and recommendations of the interested agencies in reviewing the proposed Agreement and