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The President's Radio Address

January 5, 2008

Good morning. On Tuesday, I will board Air Force One and depart for a trip to the Middle East. This is a region of great strategic importance to the United States, and I'm looking forward to my visit.

My first stops will be in the Holy Land, where I'll meet with Israeli Prime Minister Olmert and Palestinian President Abbas. I will encourage both leaders to move forward with the peace negotiations they began last November in Annapolis. This is difficult work. It will require tough decisions on complex questions, but I am optimistic about the prospects. And I will make clear that America is deeply committed to helping both parties realize the historic vision we share: two democratic states, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security.

During the second part of my trip, I will visit five of America's key allies in the Arab world: Kuwait, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt. I will thank the leaders of these countries for their friendship. I will urge them to strongly support negotiations between the Israelis and Palestinians. I will discuss the importance of countering the aggressive ambitions of Iran. And I will assure them that America's commitment to the security of our friends in the region is strong and enduring.

I know it is not always obvious why events in the nations of the Middle East should matter to the American people. But in the 21st century, developments there have a direct impact on our lives here. As we saw on September the 11th, 2001, dangers that arise on the other side of the world can bring death and destruction to our own streets. Since then, extremists have assassinated democratic leaders from Afghanistan to Lebanon to Pakistan. They have murdered innocent people from Saudi Arabia to Jordan and Iraq. They are seeking new weapons and new operatives so they can attack America again, overthrow governments in the Middle East, and impose their hateful vision on millions.

On my trip, I will consult closely with our partners in the war against these extremists. I will reaffirm our pledge to use every necessary tool of intelligence, law enforcement, diplomacy, finance, and military power to bring our common enemies to justice. The terrorists and extremists will not let down their guard, and we must not let down ours.

At its core, the battle unfolding in the Middle East is more than a clash of arms; it is an ideological struggle. On one side are the forces of terror and death. On the other are tens of millions of ordinary people who want a free and peaceful life for their children. The future of the Middle East depends on the outcome of this struggle, and so does the security of the United States. We know that societies growing in tolerance and hope are less likely to become sources of radicalism and violence. So America will stay engaged in the region. We will support democrats and reformers from Beirut and Baghdad to Damascus and Tehran. We will stand with all those working to build a future of liberty and justice and peace.

Prevailing in this struggle will not be easy, but we know from history that it can be done. After World War II, many said that advancing freedom in Europe and East Asia would be impossible. Yet America invested the time and resources to help nations make the transition from dictatorship to democracy. There were trying moments along the way, and progress did not arrive overnight. But with patience and resolve, we have seen an extraordinary return on our investment: vital regions of the world that live in stability and prosperity and peace with America.

I believe a similar transformation can take place in the Middle East. At this decisive moment in their history, the people of the Middle East can have confidence in the power of liberty to overcome tyranny and terror. And all who step forward in freedom's cause can count on a friend in the United States. I look forward to sharing this message in the region.

Thank you for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 7:45 a.m. on January 4 in the Roosevelt Room at the White House for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on January 5. The transcript was made available by the Office

of the Press Secretary on January 4 but was embargoed for release until the broadcast. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of this address.

Interview With Yonit Levi of Channel 2 News

January 4, 2008

Middle East Peace Process

Ms. Levi. Mr. President, firstly, thank you so much for taking the time to talk to us.

The President. Welcome to Washington.

Ms. Levi. Thank you very much. You're just about to come to the Middle East. And in Annapolis, you said that the parties will make every effort to reach an agreement, until the end of 2008. And I—you know, I don't want to sound skeptic, but I'm an Israeli, and it's in our nature.

The President. Right. [*Laughter*]

Ms. Levi. Why do you believe that you can reach peace in 12 months, when it hasn't been attainable in the 7 years of your Presidency and long before that?

The President. Yes. I think we can reach a vision of what a Palestinian state would look like. But I have made it abundantly clear that the existence of a state will be subject to the obligations in the roadmap. And so the goal is to have a—something other than just verbs, words. In other words, that the state—here's what a state will look like. And what's important for that is that the Palestinians need to have something to hope for, something to be for. There needs—Abbas, who has agreed that Israel has the right to exist, must be able to say to his people: "Be for me; support me, and this is what can happen. If you follow the way of the terrorists and the killers, this will never happen."

And so I'm optimistic that we can have the outlines of a state defined. And in other words, negotiations on borders and right of return and these different issues can be settled. I'm optimistic because I believe Prime Minister Olmert and President Abbas want to achieve that objective. I know I'm willing to help. But I believe we can get that done, and I think it's in Israel's interest to get it done.

One reason why it was impossible to get a two-state solution moving forward previous to this is, one, when we first came into office, there was an intifada. Secondly, a lot of people didn't necessarily agree with the two-state solution as being in Israel's interest. Ariel Sharon changed that point of view. Prime Minister Olmert campaigned on that. And so we have a good chance.

I do want to emphasize, however, that the state won't come into being just because we defined a state. It will come into being subject to the roadmap, and that's important for the Israeli people to understand.

Ms. Levi. So there won't necessarily be a complete, ratified, signed agreement by the end of 2008.

The President. There will be an agreement on what a state would look like, in my judgment. I think it'll happen. I also believe that the leaders know me, and I know them, and that there's a—you know, they say, "Well, are you going to have a timetable?" One timetable is the departure of President George W. Bush from the White House—not that that I'm any great, heroic figure, but they know me, and they're comfortable with me, and I am a known quantity. And therefore, the question is, will they decide to make the efforts necessary to get the deal done while I'm President, as opposed to maybe the next person won't agree with a two-state, or maybe the next person will take awhile to get moving?

And so there's a—I am not going to try to force the issue because of my own timetable. On the other hand, I do believe Prime Minister Olmert and President Abbas want to see this done. And therefore, I'm optimistic it will get done by 2008.

Iran

Ms. Levi. So I am moving on to Iran, and I think the question on every Israeli's mind—and you're the best man to answer it—is, is Iran an immediate threat to the existence of Israel?

The President. Yes. First of all, if I were an Israeli, I would take the words of the Iranian President seriously. And as President of the United States, I take him seriously. And I've spoken very bluntly about what that