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peacefully off the Iranian border in territorial water—in international waters, and Iranian boats came out and were very provocative. And it was a dangerous gesture on their part. We have made it clear publicly, and they know our position, and that is, there will be serious consequences if they attack our ships, pure and simple. And my advice to them is, don't do it.

United States-Israel-Palestinian Authority Meeting

Q. Why is there no three-way meeting on this trip?

Prime Minister Olmert. We had a three-way meeting in the United States just a month ago. We are starting now a serious process directly with the Palestinians. The President met with the Israeli delegation and with me today. He will meet tomorrow with President Mahmoud Abbas, and I'm sure that all the necessary information will be provided and all the curiosity of the President will be satisfied. And ideally, this is a very good and comfortable—[*inaudible*].

I don't rule out, by the way, trilateral meetings. Maybe in the future we'll have trilateral meetings. We are not against it. We just found out at this time in life, considering what we have achieved already and what we are about to start now in a serious manner, that it was not essential in order to fulfill the desires that we all share, which is to move forward on this process between us and the Palestinians.

I can reassure you, and perhaps through you, many of your people in America, that we think, and I'm sure that the Palestinians think, that the visit of the President is very, very helpful to the process that we are engaged in and that it contributes—and it will contribute a lot to the stability and the very comfortable environment within which we will conduct our negotiations.

And therefore, I again want to take this opportunity, Mr. President—now you don't even get—[*laughter*]—to thank you very much, really to thank you for your friendship and your support and the courage that you inspire in all of us to carry on with our obligations. It's not easy. You know, sometimes it's not easy, but when I look at you—and I know what you have to take upon your shoulders and how you do it, the manner in which you do it, the courage that you have, the determination that you have, and your loyalty to the principles that you believe in—it makes all of us feel that we can also—in trying to match you, which we can, we can move forward. Thank you very much.

President Bush. Thank you, sir.

NOTE: The President's news conference began at 6:36 p.m. at the Prime Minister's Residence. In his remarks, he referred to President Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) of the Palestinian Authority; Lt. Gen. Keith W. Dayton, USA, U.S. Security Coordinator to Israel and the Palestinian Authority; and Quartet Representative in the Middle East Tony Blair. Prime Minister Olmert referred to Knesset member and Yisrael Beitenu Party leader Avigdor Liberman and Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Tzipora "Tzipi" Livni of Israel; and former Prime Minister Ahmed Qureia (Abu Ala) of the Palestinian Authority.

The President's News Conference With President Mahmoud Abbas of the Palestinian Authority in Ramallah, Palestinian Territories

January 10, 2008

President Abbas. Your Excellency, President George Bush, President of the United States of America, I welcome you in Ramallah, as well as in Bethlehem, on the land of Palestine, that welcomes you today as a great guest, that goes with him—commitment towards the peace process. It's a historic visit that gives our people great hope in the fact that your great nation is standing and supporting their dream and their yearning towards freedom and independence and living in peace in this area alongside their neighbors.

Our people will not forget, Your Excellency, your invitation and your commitment towards the establishment of an independent Palestinian state. You are the first American President that confirms and reiterates this right.

[*At this point, there was a problem with the translation earpiece.*]

President Bush. I haven't got it yet. You may have to start over. [*Laughter*] Not yet. You better stay awake. [*Laughter*]

President Abbas. Our people, Your Excellency——

President Bush. I agree completely. [*Laughter*]

President Abbas. Your commitment towards the establishment of the independent Palestinian state—you are the first American President to reiterate this right. The conferences of Annapolis and Paris were historic step from you and from the American people and the world as a whole to protect this commitment and push it forward.

Our Palestinian people, who committed to peace as a strategic option, want to see, through your support and your intervention, an end to its suffering and the suffering of its people and their families, and wants to move freely in their homeland and develop their life and their economy without any obstacles that hinder that progress; and without a separation wall that fragments the land; and without settlements that is governing its land and future. We want to see a different future, where prisons are not crowded with thousands of prisoners and where hospitals are not crowded with tens of innocent victims every day, without checkpoints and queues of ordinary people who suffer from humiliation and siege.

I would like to point out here that we instructed our Government to continue the work towards enhancing security and imposing public order and establishing good governance that is based on the rule of law and to consolidate the role of our democratic institutions and strengthen the work of the civil society, as well as work on consolidating development and administrative and financial reform and transparency so that we can lay the foundations for a modern and democratic state.

And the Government is taking intensive steps in that direction, and I would like to express our appreciation for the support of your administration in the economic sphere in order to develop the infrastructure and provide new job opportunities and improve the level of services and all other projects that contribute in improving the lives and the conditions of living for our people.

We and our Israeli neighbors, and under your direct sponsorship—bilateral negotiations that address all issues of final status are core issues—that we would like to end these negotiations during your term in office; and that we—it will be ending by the—ending of the occupation that started in 1967, and that establishment of an independent Palestinian state and its capital, Jerusalem, based on your vision and the international resolutions; and that we find a fair solution for the tragedy of refugees, according to the Arab initiative for peace and according to the U.N. resolutions.

And on this occasion, I would like to reiterate before you our full commitment to all our obligations that we agreed to. And we call upon Israel as well to fulfill its commitments according to the roadmap plan, because we firmly believe that peace is made by a will and a shared commitment among all parties.

Your historic visit today to the Palestinian Territories is highly appreciated by our people, and it's a new expression of your deep commitment towards establishing peace on the land of peace. We appreciate the complete seriousness that characterizes your visit and your efforts today to continue and build on, capitalize on this important opportunity that is available to us and to the Israelis.

We start with you a new year, hoping that this will be the year for the creation of peace. You will hear today in Bethlehem the call for prayers from the mosques and the heralding of bells at the Church of Nativity. That confirms our common message: The message of human tolerance and real peace that is deeply rooted in our conscience and in our heritage. Your presence today amongst us, Your Excellency, is a reiteration for the call for comprehensive and just peace that you called for and you committed yourself to. And the echo of this call reaches all the people and the countries in our region, because the voice that is now going out of Palestine is the closest and the deepest in reaching the hearts of all the people in the region.

Please, Your Excellency, trust that peace in the world starts from here, from the Holy Land. We welcome you again, our dear guest and our dear friend, here in Palestine.

President Bush. Mr. President, thank you for your hospitality. We have met a lot in the past, and I'm glad to finally have a chance to sit down in your office to discuss important issues.

[*There was another problem with the translation earpiece.*]

Is it working? [*Laughter*] Listen, they say I have enough problems speaking English as it is. [*Laughter*]

I have had numerous opportunities to visit with the President. And the fundamental question I have is whether or not he is committed to peace. It's the same question I had for the Prime Minister of Israel. And I've come to the conclusion that both men understand the importance of two democratic states living side by side in peace.

President Abbas was elected on a platform of peace. In other words, he just wasn't somebody who starts talking about it lately; he campaigned on it. He also said that if you give me a chance, I'll work hard to improve the lives of the average Palestinians, and that's what he has done. It's certainly not easy work. The conditions on the ground are very difficult, and nevertheless, this man and his Government not only works for a vision but also works to improve the lives of the average citizens, which is essential for the emergence of a Palestinian democracy.

I talked today about how—what we can do to help, and, as he mentioned, the United States has been an active financial giver. We helped at the Paris conference. I firmly believe that the Palestinians are entrepreneurial people who, if just given a chance, will be able to grow their businesses and provide jobs.

We talked about the need to fight off the extremists. The world in which we live is a dangerous world because there are people who murder innocent people to achieve political objectives, not just here in this immediate part of the world but around the world. That's what we're dealing with in Iraq and Afghanistan and Lebanon. And the fundamental question is, will nations stand up and help those who understand the ideological struggle we're in? And the President understands the ideological struggle. He knows that a handful of people want to dash the aspirations of the Palestinian people by creating chaos and violence.

And I appreciate that, Mr. President. And I appreciate your understanding that, ultimately, the way to achieve peace is to offer an alternative vision, and that's a vision based upon liberty.

Now, look, there are some in the world who don't believe in the universality of freedom. I understand that. They say, like, freedom is okay for some of us, but maybe not all of us. I understand it, but I reject it. I believe in the universality of freedom. I believe deep in the soul of every man, woman, and child on the face of this Earth is the desire to live in a free society. And I also believe free societies yield peace. And therefore, this notion of two states living side by side in peace is based upon the universality of freedom, and if given a chance, the Palestinian people will work for freedom.

And that's a challenge ahead of us—is, is it possible for the Israelis and the Palestinians to work out their differences on core issues so that a vision can emerge? And my answer is, absolutely, it's possible. Not only is it possible; it's necessary. And I'm looking forward to helping.

You know, there's a great anticipation that all the American President has got to do is step in and just say, okay, this is the way it's going to be. That's not how the system works. In order for there to be lasting peace, President Abbas and Prime Minister Olmert have to come together and make tough choices. And I'm convinced they will. And I believe it's possible—not only possible; I believe it's going to happen—that there will be a signed peace treaty by the time I leave office. That's what I believe. And the reason I believe that is because I hear the urgency in the voice of both the Prime Minister of Israel and the President of the Palestinian Authority.

Is it going to be hard work? You bet. And we can help support these negotiations, and will. I was asked yesterday at a press conference, you know, what do you intend to do? If you're not going to write the agreement, what do you intend to do? I said, nudge the process forward. Like, pressure; be a pain if I need to be a pain, which in some people's mind isn't all that hard. And they said, well, like—yesterday, somebody

said, well, are you disappointed? I arrived, and it nudged the process forward. In other words, we can help influence the process, and will. But the only lasting peace will be achieved when the duly elected leaders of the respective peoples do the hard work.

And so I want to help. And I want to help in the region as well, Mr. President. The rest of my trip will be talking about, obviously, security threats, but also the opportunity to achieve peace. And the Arab world has got an opportunity and obligation, in my judgment, to help both parties in these negotiations move the process forward.

I explained yesterday, and I just want to explain again today, there are three tracks to this process, as far as we're concerned. One is the negotiations to define a vision that will be subject to the roadmap.

Secondly is to resolve—help resolve roadmap issues. And today I introduced the President to the General—three-star Air Force General who will be running this process. We have agreed to a trilateral process and want to help the Israelis and the Palestinians resolve their differences over roadmap issues.

And thirdly is to help the Palestinians develop the infrastructure necessary for a democracy, an economy, and security forces that are capable of doing what the President and the Prime Minister want to have done. And we're very much engaged. I'm looking forward to seeing Tony Blair tomorrow, who is the Quartet's representative, and to find out what he has been doing and what progress is being made.

I am confident that with proper help a—the state of Palestine will emerge. And I'm confident that when it emerges, it will be a major step toward peace. I am confident that the status quo is unacceptable, Mr. President, and we want to help you. And I appreciate your vision; and I appreciate your courage; and I appreciate your hospitality; and I appreciate you giving me a chance to talk to the press, of course. [*Laughter*]

A couple of questions, I understand.

Palestinian Authority-Israel Security Situation/Israeli Settlements

Q. Mr. President Abu Mazen, what are the results of your—this visit? Mr. President Bush, you said more than once that the Palestinian side must fulfill its obligations. And Mr. Fayyad has had a security plan to help. And—[*inaudible*]—went to Annapolis, and he commended that security plan, and then Israel destroyed all those efforts in Annapolis. How can the Palestinian Authority do security efforts that are successful while Israel destroys and undermines all their efforts in the occupied territories?

The other side of the question: Are you willing to give guarantees for the Palestinian side to declaring a freezing on settlements immediately? And thank you.

President Abbas. We are fully satisfied with the outcome that we reached through this visit of Mr. President George Bush. We spoke about all topics that might occur to your mind and that might not occur to your mind as well. All the issues are in agreement. We are agreed on all topics. All topics are clear.

In the near future, in the coming few days, we are going to bilateral negotiations with the Israelis in order to discuss the final status negotiations, final status issues. And as Mr. President said, there are three themes. The other theme is implementing the roadmap through the committee, the trilateral committee. And the third point is the economic and security conditions in Palestinian Territories. We have great hopes that during 2008 we will reach the final status and a peace treaty with Israel.

President Bush. Each side has got obligations under the roadmap. Settlements are clearly stated in the roadmap obligations for Israel. We have made our concerns about expansion of settlements known, and we expect both parties to honor their obligations under the roadmap.

Secondly, we're spending—General Dayton is spending a lot of time trying to help the President and the Prime Minister develop security forces that are effective. There's no question in my mind the commitment to provide security for the average citizen is strong. The question is the capabilities. And the truth of the matter is, there needs to be a fair amount of work done to make sure that the security forces are modernized, well-trained, and prepared with a proper chain of command to respond. And

I will tell you, I firmly believe the security forces are improving.

I remember our visit in New York, and we discussed this during the U.N. General Assembly. And by any objective measurement, the Palestinian security forces in the West Bank are improving.

And so my message to the Israelis is that they ought to help, not hinder, the modernization of the Palestinian security force. It's in their interests that a government dedicated to peace and understanding the need for two states to live side by side in peace have a modern force.

It's got—very important for the Government to be able to assure people that if there is a need, there will be an effective force to provide security. That's just step one of having credibility with the people. And to the extent that Israeli actions have undermined the effectiveness of the Palestinian force or the authority of the state relative to the average citizen is something that we don't agree with and have made our position clear.

Myers, she just called on you.

Palestinian Authority-Israel Security Situation/Palestinian State

Q. [*Inaudible*]

President Bush. No, that's the roadmap obligation I was talking about.

Q. Mr. President, thank you. I understand you drove in today, and so I assume you passed through the security barrier on the way in——

President Bush. Yes.

Q. ——and President Abbas talked about some of the obstacles that confront Palestinians in their daily life. And I wonder if you could reflect on your own impression.

President Bush. Yes. He's asking me about the checkpoints I drove through and what—my impression about what it was like to drive through checkpoints. I can understand why the Palestinians are frustrated driving through checkpoints. I can also understand that until confidence is gained on both sides, why the Israelis would want there to be a sense of security. In other words, they don't want a state on their border from which attacks would be launched. I can understand that. Any reasonable person can understand that. Why would you work to have a state on your border if you weren't confident they'd be a partner in peace?

And so checkpoints create frustrations for people. They create a sense of security for Israel; they create massive frustrations for the Palestinians. You'll be happy to hear that my motorcade of a mere 45 cars was able to make it through without being stopped. But—[*laughter*]—I'm not so exactly sure that's what happens to the average person. And so the whole object is to create a state that is capable of defending itself internally and giving confidence to its neighbor that checkpoints won't be needed.

Now, the vision of the Palestinian state is one of contiguous territory. In other words, as I said earlier in my administration, I said, Swiss cheese isn't going to work when it comes to the outline of a state. And I mean that. There is no way that this good man can assure the Palestinians of a hopeful future if there's not contiguous territory. And we—that position is abundantly clear to both sides. Therefore, the ultimate vision, of course, is there be no checkpoints throughout the Palestinian state-to-be.

And, you know, this is the issue. We're working through how to gain enough confidence on both sides so that checkpoints won't be necessary and a state can emerge. My judgment is, I can understand frustrations. I mean, I hear it a lot. I heard it but—you know, the chief negotiator spent 2 hours at a checkpoint. All he was trying to do was go negotiate. And I can see that—I can see the frustrations. Look, I also understand that people in Israel—and the truth of the matter is, in the Palestinian Territories, the average citizen wants to know whether or not there's going to be protection from the violent few who murder.

The security of a state is essential, particularly in a day and age when people simply disregard the value of human life and kill. And so these checkpoints reflect the reality, Myers. And what we're trying to do is alter the reality by laying out a vision that is much more hopeful than the status quo.

Question.

Middle East Peace Process/Israeli Settlements

Q. [*Inaudible*]—Mr. President George W. Bush, you lead the superpower in this world. You launched war against Iraq after the Iraqi leadership refused to implement the United Nations resolutions. My question now is, what the problem to ask Israel just to accept and to respect the United Nations resolutions relating to the Palestinian problem, which—[*inaudible*]—facilitating the achievement of ending the Israeli occupation to the Arab territories and—[*inaudible*]—facilitating also the solution between Palestinians and the Israelis?

And for Mahmoud Abbas, did you ask President George Bush to ask Israel to freeze settlements fully in order to enable negotiations from success?

President Bush. Yes, but tell me the part about the U.N. thing again? What were you—I couldn't understand you very well.

Q. I just asked, why you ask Israel to accept the United Nations resolutions related to the Palestinian problem just to facilitate the solution and to end the occupation?

President Bush. Actually, I'm asking Israel to negotiate in good faith with an elected leader of the Palestinian Territory to come up with a permanent solution that—look, the U.N. deal didn't work in the past. And so now we're going to have an opportunity to redefine the future by having a state negotiated between an elected leader of the Palestinian people as well as the Prime Minister of Israel. This is an opportunity to move forward. And the only way for—the only way to defeat the terrorists in the long run is to offer an alternative vision that is more hopeful. And that's what we're attempting to do, sir.

We can stay stuck in the past, which will yield nothing good for the Palestinians, in my judgment. We can chart a hopeful future, and that's exactly what this process is intending to do: to redefine the future for the Palestinian citizens and the Israelis.

I am confident that two democratic states living side by side in peace is in the interests not only of the Palestinians and the Israelis but of the world. The question is whether or not the hard issues can be resolved and the vision emerges so that the choice is clear amongst the Palestinians—the choice being, do you want this state, or do you want the status quo? Do you want a future based upon a democratic state, or do you want the same old stuff? And that's a choice that I'm confident if the Palestinian people are given, they will choose peace.

And so that's what we're trying to do, sir.

President Abbas. The settlement for us is considered an obstacle for negotiations. And we have spoke more than once with Mr. Prime Minister Olmert very frankly. And we also spoke in this meeting with President George Bush, and consequently, the President understood this issue. And we have heard the statements given by the Secretary of State, Dr. Rice, and she had her—her point of view regarding settlements was very positive.

Gaza/Hamas

Q. Good morning. President Bush, Prime Minister Olmert said that peace is unlikely as long as Gaza militants continue their attacks on Israel. How do you see President Abbas getting control of Gaza?

And you, Mr.—President Abbas, how do you intend, actually, to get control of Gaza, and do you think this is feasible by the end of the year and by—at the end of Mr. Bush Presidency?

President Bush. First of all, Gaza is a tough situation. I don't know whether you can solve it in a year or not. But I know this: It can't be solved unless the Prime Minister—the President has a vision that he can lay out to the people of Gaza that says, here's your choice: Do you want those who have created chaos to run your country, or do you want those of us who negotiated a settlement with the Israelis that will lead for lasting peace?

There is a competing vision taking place in Gaza. And in my judgment, Hamas, which I felt ran on a campaign of, we're going to improve your lives through better education and better health, have delivered nothing but misery. And I'm convinced his Government will yield a hopeful future. And the best way to make that abundantly clear is for there to be a vision that's understandable.

See, the past has just been empty words, you know. We—actually, it hasn't been that

much—I'm the only President that's really articulated a two-state solution so far. But saying two states really doesn't have much bearing until borders are defined, right of return issues resolved, there's—Jerusalem is understood, security measures—the common security measures will be in place. That's what I'm talking about. I'm talking about a clear, defined state around which people can rally.

And there's going to be—there will be no better difference, a clearer difference, than the vision of Hamas in Gaza and the vision of the President and the Prime Minister and his team based here in Ramallah. And to me, that's how you solve the issue in the long term. And the definition of long term—I don't know what it means. I'm not a timetable person. Actually, I am on a timetable; I've got 12 months. [*Laughter*] But it's—I'm impressed by the President's understanding about how a vision and a hopeful future is—will help clearly define the stakes amongst the Palestinian people.

President Abbas. Gaza is considered a coup by us; we consider it a coup d'etat what happened in Gaza.

[*A call to prayer could be heard in the background.*]

President Abbas. Now, with a call to prayer—we consider it a coup d'etat. [*Laughter*] And we deal with Gaza at two levels. The first is that we deal with the people as part of us, and we take full responsibility that is necessary towards our people. We spend in Gaza 58 percent of our budget. This is not to—it is our duty towards our people that we provide them with all they need.

As for the issue of Hamas, we said that this is a coup; and they have to retreat from this coup; and they have to recognize international legitimacy, all international legitimacy, and to recognize the Arab peace initiative as well. In this case, we can—we will have another talk.

President Bush. Thank you all.

NOTE: The President's news conference began at 11:12 a.m. at the Muqata. In his remarks, the President referred to Prime Minister Ehud Olmert of Israel; Lt. Gen. William M. Fraser III, USAF, U.S. monitor of the Israeli-Palestinian roadmap peace plan; Lt. Gen. Keith W. Dayton, USA, U.S. security coordinator to Israel and the Palestinian Authority; and Quartet Representative in the Middle East Tony Blair. A reporter referred to Prime Minister Salam Fayyad of the Palestinian Authority. President Abbas and some reporters spoke in Arabic, and their remarks were translated by an interpreter.

Remarks Following a Visit to the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, Palestinian Territories

January 10, 2008

Madam Minister, thank you very much for your hospitality. It's been a moving moment for me and the delegation to be here at the Church of the Nativity. For those of us who practice the Christian faith, there's really no more holy site than the place where our Savior was born.

And I want to thank the Government for arranging this trip. I also thank very much the three different churches for welcoming me here. It's a fascinating history in this church, and so not only was my soul uplifted; my knowledge of history was enriched.

I want to thank the people of Bethlehem for enduring a Presidential trip. I know it's been inconvenient for you. I very much appreciate your tolerating my entourage. Someday, I hope that as a result of a formation of a Palestinian state there won't be walls and checkpoints, that people will be able to move freely in a democratic state. That's the vision, greatly inspired by my belief that there is an Almighty and a gift of that Almighty to each man, woman, and child on the face of the Earth is freedom. And I felt it strongly here today.

Anyway, thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:46 p.m. In his remarks, he referred to Minister of Tourism and Antiquities Khouloud Daibes of the Palestinian Authority.

Remarks on the Middle East Peace Process in Jerusalem

January 10, 2008

Good afternoon. I'd like to, first, thank Prime Minister Olmert and President Abbas for their hospitality during my trip here to