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Editor's Note: The President was in Kuwait City, Kuwait, on January 11, the closing date of this issue. Releases and announcements issued by the Office of the Press Secretary but not received in time for inclusion in this issue will be printed next week.

WEEKLY COMPILATION OF

PRESIDENTIAL DOCUMENTS

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Week Ending Friday, January 11, 2008

Interview With Nahum Barnea and Shimon Shiffer of Yedioth Ahronoth

January 2, 2008

President's Upcoming Visit to Israel/ Former Prime Minister Ariel Sharon of Israel

Q. First of all, we would like to thank you very much for your readiness to see us and to have this interview for us. We can assure you that in Israel, you can be elected for the third term—[*laughter*]—with one exception: The day after the first day in office, the media will kill you. [*Laughter*] This is Israel. But you have so many really admirers in Israel.

The President. Well, thank you. I'm really looking forward to going again. As you know, this is my first trip as the President. I had the honor——

Q. I saw you. I had the opportunity to shake your hand in the Knesset.

The President. I was thrilled to go in 1998. One of the great ironies of my first trip to Israel was that, as well documented, I was given a tour of the West Bank by Ariel Sharon. Little did we both realize then that we would be sitting together in the hopes of constructing peace; that we knew we'd be—we didn't know that we'd be President and Prime Minister at the time.

Q. And yet he was the leader of the opposition at the time.

The President. Well, he was in the Cabinet. He was a settlements man. And we were flying—and it was a very interesting moment. And I can remember so well Prime Minister Sharon pointing to a hill, and he said, "This is where I engaged, as a young tank officer, my first battle, and see how far it is to our capital and our civilization." In other words, it was—his purpose was to make it clear to me the strategic issues facing Israel. And then we flew over the West Bank, and it was a fascinating moment.

And it was—history works in odd ways, and sometimes you're never sure about the twists and turns that life will bring. And so I'm looking forward to meeting with the Sharon family and express my admiration for a man with whom I was able to——

Q. Two years from today he had his stroke.

The President. Yes, 2 years to this day.

Q. Today; today.

The President. Anyway, it will be an interesting moment for me, to express my sympathies to his family. He was an interesting man and—anyway, I'm looking forward to going to see the current leadership in Israel as well as the Palestinians and the Arab region.

President's Upcoming Visit to Israel

Q. Could we ask—could we start asking questions?

The President. Please, yes.

Q. Your visit to Israel—what is the vision you would like to convey to the Israeli public?

The President. The vision is, one, that I fully understand that the world is confronting extremists—the world must confront extremists who want to impose their ideology on peaceful people by the use of terror; and that we're engaged in an ideological struggle that requires resolve and vision; and that the best way to defeat the ideology of hate is with an ideology of hope, and that is manifested in a society based upon liberty; that the two-state solution is in Israel's long-term security interests, and that there's hard work to be done by the leaders of the Palestinians and the Israelis.

I will also assure Israel that there is no way that a Israeli democracy can accept a terrorist state on her border; that there is a way, and I'm optimistic that there are enough Palestinians committed to a state based upon liberty, that we can achieve—that they can achieve, with U.S. help, the vision of two states side by side in peace.

Iran

Q. Mr. President, the Israeli people are worried, first and foremost, because of the danger that Iran will acquire nuclear weapons. Can you, Mr. President, assure the Israelis that such a danger will never occur under your watch?

The President. Well, I can assure the people of Israel and others in the Middle East that an Iran with a nuclear weapon would be a danger to world peace. I have said so very explicitly. I believe that the—and I believe we have put in place a system that encourages pressure on the Iranians to come up with—to either have a choice between isolation and financial difficulty or a rational approach to what they claim is their sovereign right, which is the ability to have nuclear power.

Now, they have been untrustworthy; they have been unwilling to be transparent and open. And so our demands are to the Iranians, not only with our voice but the voice of the international community thus far, is, you must be transparent; you must be open; and you—because of your failure to report programs, that you cannot be trusted with the ability to learn how to enrich. And so my message to the Israeli people is, I fully understand the threat; that we spend a lot of time on this issue; and that we will continue to exert maximum pressure through the international community to peacefully resolve this issue.

Q. I'm sure you've heard the report by the American intelligence——

The President. Yes, I have. [*Laughter*].

Q. Unfortunately for us, we followed it too. How it affected the chances to stop Iran from becoming a danger?

The President. Actually, if you study the report carefully, it basically said—not basically—it said that Iran had a secret program——

Q. In the year 2003.

The President. Right. But my message to the American people was, is that a nontransparent society that had a program could easily have another program. And therefore, the intensity of the effort must not decline, but must stay strong—and the intensity of the effort being to prevent them from developing the know-how.

Secondly, there are three stages to the development of a nuclear weapon: one, materials out of which to make a weapon. That's why we've got to stop them from enriching, and that's where our focus is. Two, the ability to take materials and to make it into a warhead or a bomb—and we don't know their capacities at this point in time, but it's fairly general knowledge on how to produce a weapon out of materials. And three, rockets—well, two of the three continue to exist. And therefore, to say a weapons program does not exist is not the complete truth. And so our focus is to prevent the one thing over which we believe the international community can have influence, which is to stop the capacity to enrich.

Thirdly, the report did say that as a result of pressures, the Iranians suspended their military program. Well, if pressures worked in the past, my hope is that pressures will work in the future. Part of the reason I'm going to the Middle East is to make it abundantly clear to nations in that part of the world that we view Iran as a threat, and that the NIE in no way lessens that threat, but in fact, clarifies the threat.

Middle East Peace Process/Iran

Q. If Israel comes with a smoking gun during the year 2008, are you going to back an Israeli operation—military operation?

The President. My message to all in the region is, I believe we can solve this diplomatically, and that pressure must work. I have said, of course, that the United States keeps all options on the table. That's the United States policy. And that—but I believe the best solution is going to be one that encourages Iranian isolation through international pressures that will cause the Iranians to have to make a strategic choice. Now, people say, "Well, what do you mean by that? What kind of pressures?" Well, there are financial pressures that we have exerted and will continue to work with others to exert.

Now, look, I readily recognize that one of the real challenges is to convince people that peace is more important than market share; that achieving long-term peace in the Middle East is more important than someone's companies having a share of equipment——

Q. American or——

The President. Well, I'm saying any company. Of course, American companies are not involved with the exportation of goods and services to Iran. Therefore, in this case, I mean, the logic would say that extends to not only European countries but countries from around the world. Same with financial institutions; that we expect there to be significant pressure placed upon Iranian financial institutions, particularly those that are known to be involved in proliferation.

And so the strategy is more than just words; it is an action-oriented strategy, aimed at convincing people inside of Iran that there's a better way forward. If you look at my speeches or listen to my speeches, you'll notice that I constantly speak to the Iranian people and make it clear to them that the isolation that they're now suffering and the economic deprivation that is occurring as a result of isolation is a result of their Government's decisions. Our beef is not with the Iranian people; our beef is with a Government that has hidden the program.

And by the way, back to the NIE very quickly. The international response ought to be that, okay, whether or not you agree with the NIE or not, at least recognize that they had a program at one point in time, and demand that Iran explain it. We shouldn't be trying to explain why we know what we know. We ought to be focusing on the Iranians to say, you tell us why you had a program; you tell us about the—if you want to be an international player, it's up to you to explain.

U.S. Foreign Policy

Q. Mr. President, I'll try to put the question another way. If the Israeli Prime Minister will present you with a smoking gun and will tell you, look, we can't live with such a threat, and we'll destroy the Iranian nuclear sites, you will support Israel; you will give Israel—you will let Israel to do so?

The President. The policy of the United States is to solve this diplomatically.

Prime Minister Ehud Olmert of Israel/ Middle East Peace Process/President's Upcoming Visit to Israel

Q. You know, Israel is—Israeli people are confused regarding our own Government. There is now a big discussion in Israel regarding the blunders of the second Lebanon war. And at the same time, you are familiar with the September 6th—whatever happens there, we don't know; I'm sure you know. Can you tell us what is your impression of the, I would say, of the way the Israeli Government is handling our own military.

The President. I can only tell you about my personal relationship with Prime Minister Olmert. That's the person with whom I have spent the most time. I, of course, see the Foreign Minister or the Defense Minister at meetings, but my time is spent with Prime Minister Olmert. I trust him; I like him; and I think he's a man of strength.

Prime Minister Olmert—first of all, one thing I look for is, I look for vision: Can somebody see a hopeful future? A lot of times in the—this complicated world in which we live, we stay so focused on the moment that it's hard to see a vision that reaches beyond the immediate. And so when I talk to Prime Minister Olmert, I listen very carefully about his vision for the future because what we're talking about at Annapolis is vision, is giving people something to be for, something to hope for.

The whole purpose of our discussions at Annapolis has been to advance what a state would look like. The state is subject to the roadmap, the obligations of both sides before the state can come into being; it's subject to the roadmap. But there's got to be a vision because a vision is inspirational, a vision is hopeful. There's got to be something that the Palestinians can say, if—"Here's what we're for; therefore, let us renounce our desire to destroy Israel; let us recognize that it must exist as a neighbor. So, support us." I believe there's enough people in the Palestinian Territories who are sick of the failures of the past, sick of broken promise. And yet they have yet to have something specifically defined around which they can rally. That's the purpose.

And so when I talk to Prime Minister Olmert, I listen very carefully to whether or not he's able to think beyond the moment. And I've come to the conclusion that, yes, he is a man of vision. He understands the significance of defining a hopeful state. And it's hopeful not just for the Palestinians, but it's hopeful for Israel as well. After all, he

ran on a platform that said—now, this is a major shift in Israeli policy; it started with Ariel Sharon, as you know—which is two states, based upon the premise that liberty will bring peace. Now, of course, his concern is that the imposition of a state before certain conditions have been met—that's why I say, "subject to the roadmap." And the United States, as I said early, recognizes that there cannot be a state that harbors the desire to destroy its neighbor. No government can accept that, and I understand that.

And so I trust Olmert. His——

Q. Do you?

The President. I do trust him.

Q. You trust Olmert, period?

The President. I trust him. I hope—hopefully he'll say the same about me. Hopefully—you see, one of the things in politics that happens often is, people sometimes won't tell you really what's on their mind. It happens here in America. For example, you'll have politicians walk in the Oval Office and say, "Hey, President, I'm with you." And then all of a sudden, the heat gets on—[*laughter*]—and it turns out, they're not with you.

Q. You feel it at your back.

The President. Yes. Well, I feel—and I've had enough conversations, heart-to-heart conversations with the Prime Minister. I understand Israeli politics is very complicated. It's tough. It is full-contact karate. [*Laughter*] And——

Q. Not unlike American——

The President. Not really. Not really. Because the President is—even though we've got our politics and even though I've got tough relations at times with Congress, the President sets foreign policy. He is constantly worried about a coalition. And I understand that. I understand the difficulty he faces. But in spite of those difficulties, I'm interested in strategic visions based upon peace. And I firmly believe he has that vision. And obviously, he's going to have to work his way through the Israeli politics, and he's going to have to be mindful of what's happening elsewhere.

And the United States, by the way, can help both parties. That's why I'm going, to help boost the confidence of both parties to reach out for a vision. And by the way, the trip is more than just going to Israel and the Palestinian Territories. I'm also going to the Arab world—for two reasons. One is to convince the Arab nations that Israel is a partner—should be a partner in peace; that this vision is in the interests not only of Israel and Palestinians, but it's in the interests of the Arab world.

Q. You expect to achieve something tangible?

The President. Well, we achieved something very tangible. Look, you got to understand that in a matter as complicated as this issue, that it requires a lot of diligence and a lot of time and a lot of effort. There was a major breakthrough at Annapolis when the Israeli Prime Minister and the Palestinian President addressed a roomful of diplomats, high-ranking officials from the Middle East, as well as the rest of the world. And so now we must follow up on that success. In other words, they were in the room listening very carefully to the visions of both nations. And the American President can help move the process forward by reminding friends and allies in the Middle East about the importance of the two-state solution and what they can do to help.

And the third thing, of course, is to spend time talking about the strategic implications of a U.S. presence in a way that bolsters governments and, at the same time, helps serve as a bulwark against aggressive regimes such as Iran. And so it's a multifaceted agenda that I'm really looking forward to carrying on there in the Middle East.

Middle East Peace Process

Q. But still, Mr. President, do you see a chance to sign a comprehensive peace agreement between Israel and the——

The President. Yes, I do, before I leave.

Q. Before you leave?

The President. Yes, I do. I do. I'm an optimistic guy.

Q. ——by initials or by full execution?

The President. Well, first of all—no. First of all, the—I envision Israel and Palestine sitting down at a table, signing—this is what a state would look like, subject to the roadmap. There's work to be done.

Q. And concluding an agreement?

The President. On what the state would look like, absolutely. Yes, I do. I think it can happen. And I believe both parties want it to happen. Now, they got work to do, and one of the reasons I'm going is to remind them of the work they got to do. See, people say to me, "All you got to do is go over there and say—impose the solution." No, we want the solution to last. This has got to be negotiated in good faith, and it's hard work. Both leaders have got constituencies they've got to deal with—skeptical publics. And I believe the U.S. President can help keep the process moving, and that's what my trip is all about.

Israeli Settlements/Middle East Peace Process

Q. Unauthorized settlement, it is something which—an issue which is between the United States and Israel for a long time.

The President. Yes, we expect them to honor their commitments. The Israeli Government has said that they're going to get rid of unauthorized settlements, and that's what we expect. That's what we've been told.

Q. Not before you come, you know.

The President. Well, that will be on the—that will, of course, be an agenda item. But Prime Minister—both Prime Ministers with whom I have worked understand our position. Both have agreed, by the way, of unauthorized settlements.

Q. They agree?

The President. Both understand, as well, that I said conditions on the ground, the realities of the situation will help determine what a—the borders look like. And so I have made some—at least from what the U.S. perspective looks like—some statements that will help move the process forward. But the unauthorized settlements, which is different from authorized settlements, is an issue we've been very clear on. But I've also made statements on the settlements as well.

As I said, realities on the ground will help define the border—the eventual border of what the Palestinian state will look like. And the state will come into being subject to the conditions set out in the roadmap, which means we've got a lot of work to do. One of the things I'll be doing is visiting with Tony Blair there in order to make—to catch up on what he is doing to help the Palestinians. Look, developing a state out of—is difficult. There's got to be institutions that provide stability, and it's hard to do.

That's what happening in Iraq. It's hard to go from dictatorship, like they had in Iraq, to one in which there is solid institutions that will enable a democracy to survive. I have come to the conclusion that it's absolutely necessary work for the sake of peace because if we're in an ideological struggle, the only way to defeat the ideology that preys upon fear and hate is through the development of societies that respond to the will of the people. And democracies—it turns out, democracies throughout our history tend not to fight each other because democracies respond to the will of the people, and most people do not want war and bloodshed and violence. Most people just want to live a normal, peaceful life.

I tell the American people all the time that Iraqi mothers want the same thing for their children that American mothers want for theirs, a place for their child to grow up and get a good education and be able to realize dreams. Same thing for the Palestinian mothers and the Israeli mothers. There's a commonality there, and yet, unfortunately, in the world in which we live today, there are people who simply do not like the idea of societies based upon the will of the people and will use violence to stop the advance of freedom. And it's not just in the Palestinian Territories that you find the violence; you find it in Lebanon; you find it in Iraq; you find it in Afghanistan; you find it in Pakistan.

Q. You find it in Gaza.

The President. Yes. You find people who will kill innocent life to stop the advance of freedom, which should call the world to—should cause the world to rally. If killers want to stop liberty, it should be a clear signal to all of us that we must do everything we can to advance liberty. And one of the things I find very hopeful about a Palestinian state is that many in the world want to help the Palestinians develop institutions and stability. And I—President Abbas and Prime Minister Fayyad are committed to the development of a state. They need a lot of help. And one of the things we can provide help for—besides some practical help on organizing their security forces and, obviously, to encourage

investment—is to—there's got to be a vision, see. People have got to be for something. And that's where we're trying to take the process over the next year.

Iraq/U.S. Foreign Policy/President's Decisionmaking

Q. Mr. President, you just mentioned Iraq. Can you clarify to us whether there was any Israeli involvement in your decision to invade Iraq?

The President. No, not at all. None whatsoever. My decision was based upon U.S. intelligence, based upon the desire to provide security for our peoples and others. It was based upon my willingness to work with the international community on this issue. Remember, if you look back at the history, there was a unanimous vote in the Security Council: disclose, disarm, or face serious consequences. And when he defied, when he refused to allow the inspectors in, when he made a statement by his actions that he didn't really care what the international community said, that I decided to make sure words meant something.

And so I acted based upon our own security interests. And—but it also fit into this notion of—and remember, Zarqawi—there was some terrorist connections, not with the 9/11 attacks, but terrorist connections—Abu Nadal; he had been using—he'd been funding families of suicide bombers. In other words, as far as we were concerned, he had weapons of mass destruction, which could have been used in a deadly way. It turns out, he didn't have the weapons, but he had the know-how on how to make weapons, which could easily have been reconstituted. The sanctions regime turns out to have been corrupt and wasn't working. In other words, there's a variety of aspects to my decision, all of which were aimed at making sure that U.S. security, first and foremost, was enhanced.

National Security Council Press Secretary Gordon Johndroe. One last question.

2008 Presidential Election

Q. You follow the primaries now, in America.

The President. Yes. [*Laughter*]

Q. We wonder if there is a moment when you tell yourself, wow, why can't I join the fray?

The President. That's interesting.

Q. I can do it better. [*Laughter*]

The President. No, no, I appreciate that question. It's a very interesting question. I believe strongly that democracies are enhanced by change—by the peaceful change of government. And as much as I'll miss being President—and there will be a lot of aspects I'll miss about it—it is in our Nation's interests that there be a healthy debate and that the process move on. And so I'm realistic about what's going to happen this year.

You know, I loved campaigning. We were reminiscing at the ranch this weekend, Laura and I and some friends were, about how exciting Presidential campaigns can be. And I also understand how grueling they can be. This is a time of high anxiety for campaigns and candidates as they come in the final day of the Iowa caucuses. I can remember distinctly what it felt like campaigning in these States——

Q. In the snow.

The President. ——in the snow—on the last day. And so there's a lot of excitement to it. But I'm very comfortable about this year. We've got a lot to do. We've got a lot to do domestically and a lot to do internationally. I fully understand there's going to be a lot of focus on the Presidential primaries and the Presidential general election, which is good; there ought to be a healthy debate. In the meantime, however, I am not going to allow domestic politics to get in the way of implementing a vision, of doing—laying that foundation for peace, one of the things history will look back on.

President's Legacy

Q. When you are talking about vision, Mr. President—and this will be our last question—how do you wish to be remembered in world history?

The President. Well, first of all, I'll be dead before the true history of the Bush administration is written. Here in the Oval Office, there are portraits of two Presidents, George Washington and Abraham Lincoln.

In the past couple of years, I have read extensive analyses of both of those men's Presidencies. My attitude is that it's going to take awhile for objective historians to realize the contributions that this administration has made to peace.

Q. Like Harry Truman's legacy, which developed.

The President. Well, each President has his own set of circumstances with which to deal. I would hope that people, when they look back at this administration, would say that President Bush and his administration worked diligently to protect the American people from harm; that he recognized the threats of the 21st century; that he acted in a—when he needed to be tough, he acted strong, and when he needed to have vision, he understood the power of freedom to be transformative.

Our foreign policy is more than just confronting terrorists. Our foreign policy is to confront the conditions that enable these ideologues to recruit, such as HIV/AIDS on the continent of Africa or feeding the hungry or dealing with malaria. Our foreign policy is based upon our great trust in the capacity of the common person to dictate a peaceful course for government. But just so you know, I fully understand I'll be long gone before the accurate history of this administration is reflected in the history books.

Q. In our country, you won't have to wait so long.

The President. Well, I don't worry about it, sir. I just really don't. It's such an honor to be the President. You betray the office if you get so caught up in your own personal—your personal standing. I remind people that the President should—must understand, like in the Middle East, that the conditions must be ripe for people to go for peace, and that you cannot force peace based upon a President's calendar. You can use the calendar by saying to the parties, you know this guy; you know his vision; now is the time for you to come to conclusion. But a President must never try to force others to accept something that they themselves don't want to accept because there will be—it won't last.

Now, we can work hard—and I believe the time is ripe, that's what I'm trying to say to you. We've got leaders who have made commitments to a vision. They have both told me and told each other, we are committed. And these men know me. And so I believe—to answer your question—yes, there will be a comprehensive peace signed by the end of this year, because if they're committed, like they say they are—and I believe they are, and I believe their people, the majority of the people want there to be peace—now is the time to move.

Anyway.

Mr. Johndroe. Thanks, guys.

NOTE: The interview was taped at 9:55 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, the President referred to Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Tzipora "Tzipi" Livini and Minister of Defense Ehud Barak of Israel; President Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) and Prime Minister Salam Fayyad of the Palestinian Authority; and Quartet Representative in the Middle East Tony Blair. The transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on January 4. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this interview. This item was not received in time for publication in the appropriate issue.

Interview With Foreign Print Media

January 4, 2008

The President. How are you doing? Welcome. Pleasure to be with you all. Thank you.

What are the ground rules here, Dana, in terms of the American press?

Press Secretary Dana Perino. It's all on the record, but can't be used until after these fine folks are able to publish.

The President. Yes, so delay your stories, will you? [*Laughter*]

Q. It's very hospitable of you, Mr. President.

The President. A couple of things—one, I'm excited about going on the trip. I have never been to Saudi Arabia. I have never been to Bahrain. I have never been to Kuwait. I have been to Egypt. I have not been to the Palestinian Territories or Israel as a sitting President.

So this is a really good opportunity to travel and be with friends and have frank discussions about particularly three items: one, the United States commitment to the peace process; that what happened in Annapolis is

the beginning of serious discussions, a serious attempt by the United States to encourage the Israelis and the Palestinians to develop a vision of what a Palestinian state will look like.

And I am very optimistic that such a vision will come into being by the time I leave office. And the reason I am is because I know the two leaders well, and I believe both are committed to a two-state solution, and both understand that in order for that state to come into being, subject to the roadmap, that there has to be more than just words; there has to be clarity in what a Palestinian state will look like.

Secondly, I'm looking forward to sitting down with friends and allies to assure them of my commitment to Middle Eastern peace and to work with them to make sure they're committed to Middle Eastern peace; that I will remind them that we've got a three-track strategy: one is the vision; two is the implementation of the roadmap—in other words, the United States chairs a committee with the Palestinians and the Israelis to deal with roadmap issues; and three, a commitment by the United States and others to build the institutions necessary for a Palestinian democracy to thrive.

In other words, there's got to be a recognition that we need institution-building, there needs to be work. For example, the United States is very much involved in helping modernize their security forces and create a chain of command, so that when good men like President Abbas and Prime Minister Fayyad see a security situation needs to be taken care of, they can give a command and something happens, for the good of the Palestinian people. In other words, a state, in order to be credible and viable, must be able to provide security for its people.

The EU is very much involved with institution-building and basically enhancing the entrepreneurial spirit of the Palestinian people, which is very strong. So I'll be visiting with Tony Blair, for example, when I'm there to see the progress he's making. My only point is, is that it's going to be very important for the nations that I visit to be active participants in not only helping the Palestinians but recognizing that a two-state solution recognizes Israel's right to exist.

Thirdly, I will be also talking to our friends and allies about our strong commitment to regional security, that the United States is engaged and will remain engaged in the security of the region.

And so this is a trip that will be—it's going to be interesting; it will be stimulating; and it's going to be substantive. And as I say, I'm looking forward to it. I really am.

We'll start—Joyce, why don't you crank her up here? We'll go a couple of rounds.

Lebanon

Q. Thank you again, Mr. President, for having us. Happy New Year.

The President. Thank you. It is going to be a happy New Year.

Q. Hopefully—more peace in the region.

The President. It will be a joyous New Year. [*Laughter*] Isn't that right, guys? Very skeptical—[*laughter*]. Don't be.

Q. If I can open up by asking you about Lebanon. The country is entering the second month, and the Presidency is still void over there. Who do you think is responsible for creating this situation and maintaining it? And what is your administration and maybe the French—Mr. Sarkozy, good friend of yours—doing to end this stalemate?

The President. Thank you. First of all, the United States is strongly committed to Lebanese democracy. We believe that a Lebanon that is democratic and peaceful is in the interests of world peace.

I have been very impressed by Prime Minister Siniora, by the way, as a man who's committed to the well-being of all the Lebanese people. Secondly, I am disappointed that the Presidency has not been selected and believe very much that Syrian influence is preventing the selection. Thirdly, part of my trip is to remind our friends and allies how important it is for Lebanon to succeed and how important it is for all of us to work to free that Government from foreign interference.

My position has been that the March 14th coalition, if it had mustered a majority plus one, 50 percent plus one, should be allowed to go forward with the selection of the President. We are working with not only our friends in the region who share the commitment for Lebanon to be free of foreign interference but also the European countries.

And so there needs to be a clear message to the Syrians from all us that, "You will continue to be isolated; you will continue to be viewed as a nation that is thwarting the will of the Lebanese people." There needs to be a focused voice, and so our efforts diplomatically are to convince others that they must continue to pressure Syria so that the Lebanese process can go forward.

Sa'ad.

Iran

Q. Yes, again, Mr. President, I'd like to reiterate the remark of Joyce of thanking you for giving us this——

The President. Yes, thrilled to do it.

Q. ——historic opportunity. You talked about the regional security. And back in the Gulf States, the number-one issue nowadays, in terms of security of the region, is the Iranian nuclear profile and issue. And we'd like to know your position on that now, the development of that. The region is nervously—nervous about having another war, confrontation, on the one hand; yet they are also very nervous about the Iranians possessing the nuclear weapons. And I'd like to follow up on that.

The President. Well, thank you. First of all, the NIE, the National Intelligence Estimate, ought to be viewed as a clear signal that Iran is a threat to peace, that—the NIE said the following things: One, the Iranians had a covert military nuclear weapons program, and that international pressure caused them to suspend the program.

There are three elements to a nuclear weapons program: one, the ability to enrich uranium that can be converted into the basis of a bomb; secondly, the know-how to be able to assemble that enriched material into a bomb; and third, the capacity to deliver the weapon through rocketry. As far as we know, two of those programs still are ongoing. One is the rocketry program; two, there is a civilian enrichment program. And the danger of a civilian enrichment program is, once that knowledge is gained, that it could be easily transferred back to a covert military program. And therefore, the NIE should be a clear signal to all of us that Iran is a threat to peace. And they're a threat to peace because they have been nontransparent. They have not lived up to their obligations under the IAEA. They have not been truthful about their program.

And so one of my messages is that I too take the Iranian issue seriously, and that we have a plan to deal with it in a diplomatic way. It's important for the people in the region to know that while all options remain on the table, that I believe we can solve this problem diplomatically. And the way to do that is to continue to isolate Iran in the international community.

My message to the Iranian people is that there's a better way forward for you; that your Government has made decisions that have caused you to be isolated from the world, have caused there to be economic deprivation, because they refuse to be transparent and open about their enrichment programs.

And so I understand this is an issue, and it's going to be an agenda item on my travel. It's not going to be the only item, of course. The Middle Eastern peace process is something that will be on the leaders' minds. The commitment of the United States to remain active in the region will be on their minds. I'm sure that these leaders fear that the United States may become isolationist and basically throw up its hands and say, who cares what happens. I will remind them that what happens in parts of the world matters to the security of the United States of America, and that we look forward to being a constructive force and working with allies like allies should do.

And so I'm sure the subject will come up, and I'm looking forward to clarifying once again our position.

Jasim.

Bahrain

Q. Thank you, Mr. President, for this opportunity. It is a dream comes true.

The President. Thank you, sir. The American press feels the same way when they talk to me. It's a dream come true. [*Laughter*] You might want to clarify that? [*Laughter*] Some of them are very serious this morning. They're very grim, serious.

Q. It's cold outside, sir.

The President. It is cold outside.

Q. King Hamad of Bahrain has launched democratic reforms that included a new Constitution, and Bahrain now has an elected Parliament. How do you assess this experiment, especially in light of your drive to spread democracy in the region?

The President. I have complimented His Majesty on recognizing that Bahraini-style democracy, a democracy that reflects the traditions, customs of Bahrain, is a important part of dealing with real threats that we face in the world, which is extremism based upon hopelessness; and that there is a true threat to peace, and that is radicals who prey upon frustrations of people in order to convince them to become suicide bombers and to kill in the name of an ideology. And the best antidote to that is democracy.

And I applaud his efforts. And we are very active in helping nations, if they so choose to receive our help, in moving forward through the MEPI program, for example. And it is a way to help people build the institutions necessary for a, I repeat, a democracy that reflects their traditions and history of the respective countries.

And people go at different paces. And I don't expect Jeffersonian democracy to break out instantly, nor do I expect the forms of government to reflect that which we have in the United States. But I do hope that people recognize that popular sovereignty, that listening to people and responding to people, is how to build a stable and peaceful world.

And so I applaud His Majesty. I'm looking forward to bringing up the subject with the Amir of Kuwait as well. You know, women are now very active in the Kuwaiti Parliament. And I think—I feel these are constructive engagements. My friend King Abdallah of Saudi Arabia doesn't get enough credit for beginning to reform his society.

And again, I want to repeat, it is important for the American President not to insist that countries do it our way. I believe it is incumbent upon the American President to listen very carefully to the concerns of other leaders and to recognize obstacles and problems, but also remind them of this ideological struggle in which we're involved, all of us are involved; and that—I'll repeat it: Extremists prey upon hopelessness, and forms of government can create hopeless people, people who are frustrated, people who don't feel like the government is responsive to their needs.

The people that we—that kill the innocent have no positive vision. The only thing they can do is prey upon frustration—and that a way to deal with this ideological conflict is to defeat the ideology of hate with one of hope. And that's what's happening in the Middle East. It's—there's an awareness. And I'm looking forward to discussing that with the various leaders.

Yes, sir, Talat.

Saudi Arabia

Q. Yes, sir. Thank you for giving me this opportunity—and others. Sir, you're talking about the Middle East peace. I just would like to see, how do you see the role of King Abdallah in promoting the peace process and stability in the Middle East? And also, how do you evaluate the Saudi-American—comparing the terror in the region?

The President. Well, thank you. First of all, I admire King Abdallah. I admire him because he is a man who commands a lot of respect from me personally and a lot of respect in the region. When he speaks, people listen. It's not to say that other people don't listen as well, but Saudi Arabia is geographically important, is the guardian of holy sites, and he's a well-respected man.

And so in terms of the Middle Eastern peace process, the fact that he sent his Foreign Minister to Annapolis sent a very strong message that Middle Eastern peace is going to require the participation of more than just the United States and Israel and the Palestinians; that a true peace is going to require a commitment in the neighborhood of supporting two states living side by side in peace—two democratic states living side by side in peace. So he has laid out his own initiative in the past; it commanded great respect. It is a commitment to a process. And so I value him as—I view him as invaluable in the process.

Secondly, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia recognized that murderers threaten not only other parts of the world but threaten the Kingdom's own security. And the security forces there have done a magnificent job of using intelligence to find the few that would

murder the many. I have been impressed and any objective observer would be impressed by Saudi Arabia's commitment to finding those people that use murder as a weapon.

And so I—to answer your question, I am satisfied with our cooperation. I'm appreciative of the efforts that the intelligence community inside Saudi has been making to deal with these extremists, some of whom conduct murder in—within the Kingdom, some of whom leave the Kingdom to conduct murder. And the King is fully aware that this is a—such a presence is a threat to his own internal securities, as well as recognizing an obligation to prevent those from going outside the country to murder.

Talha.

President's Upcoming Visit to the Middle East

Q. Thank you. Thank you again, Mr. President. Mr. President, I wanted to ask you, your visit to the region will not include the Maghreb Arab.

The President. Will not include——

Q. The Maghreb Arab——

The President. Yes, that's right.

Q. ——Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia. Those countries actually played a very important role in the peace process in the past, and I think that they are willing to do it again. And my question, Mr. President, if there is any reason for excluding the Maghreb Arab from your visit?

The President. Only because I ran out of time. It's certainly not as a result of any lack of respect or understanding that the contribution of those—of that area would be a significant contribution to achieving peace. And I appreciate very much the leadership in the King of Morocco as well as President Bouteflika. I'd like to go sometime. I just—I don't want to make excuses, but I will. I've got to prepare the State of the Union Address. [*Laughter*] And so I'm leaving for a lengthy period of time and need to get back home.

And having said that, one of my great trips as a civilian—I guess you'd call me a civilian—non-President, non-political figure—was when I went to Morocco. I had the great pleasure of going to Marakesh, for example. And I'll never forget drinking crushed almond milk, and enjoyed the wonders of the desert and then was able to see snow-capped mountains shortly in the distance—in the short distance. And so it's—I threw snowballs in Morocco one time in the Atlas mountain range. So I had a wonderful experience there. Not to be kind of nostalgic, looking back, but—you know, it's interesting—for example, there are a lot of Moroccan Jews in Israel.

Q. And in Morocco also.

The President. What?

Q. And in Morocco.

The President. Yes, and in Morocco, which provides the King an interesting opportunity to be a healer and a unifier. And I believe he's committed to that. So I view these three countries as important, and I am—wish I could have gone, but I was unable to do so.

Middle East Peace Process

Q. I want to ask you about the peace process. You voiced confidence that there might be a deal before the end of your second term. However, previous attempts to broker such a peace between Palestinians and Israelis have not succeeded. President Clinton, when he tried with Camp David—the intifada broke. And today, with the situation on the ground, with Syria and Iran not being fully engaged in the process, what makes you more confident that this might really go through?

The President. First of all, the Annapolis meeting was able to happen because of a lot of work we had done prior to the meeting with the parties. Step one is for there to be a recognition that the two-state solution was necessary for the security of both peoples. There had to be a philosophical change of attitude. People had to recognize that two states was the vision necessary for Israel to feel secure and for the Palestinians to feel hopeful.

Secondly, leadership had to emerge on both sides that was committed to the two-state solution and leadership that was committed to recognizing that extremists are trying to undermine that solution and must be dealt with, particularly the Palestinian leadership. President Abbas understands that there are people, sometimes inspired by foreign

government, that will do everything in their power to stop the advance of a democracy. He is committed to dealing with that. Sometimes you've got to make sure, though, that the commitment is coupled with the capacity to deal with it, and that's one of the concerns that we're helping them deal with.

Thirdly, in order for there to be lasting peace, there has to be a regional commitment. In other words, the Palestinian leadership as well as the Israeli leadership has to know that when they negotiate a vision, it will be supported by people in the region. One of the failures of the past is that people attempted to lay out a state—lay out the vision of a state, and yet there wasn't regional support, which made the political—the politics on the ground much more difficult for the leadership. And so I—those three issues have been addressed in the runup to Annapolis.

Finally, this really is a leadership issue that we're talking about. There has to be a firm commitment by the leaders involved to do—to make hard decisions. The United States can help, and I will help, and the State Department under Condi Rice's leadership will help, and the National Security under Hadley's leadership will help. We will help them make hard decisions. But these decisions must be made by the leadership in order for there to be lasting peace. And when those decisions are made, they must be supported by the region. And so I think those ingredients are now in place, and I'm optimistic that it will get done by the time I leave office, and more importantly, so is President Abbas and Prime Minister Olmert.

Now, what's going to happen is, is that there will be moments—there will be issues over settlements or Katyusha rocket attacks. These are going to be opportunities for those who don't want the vision to go forward to keep the process mired. We have a way to deal with that, and that is through a trilateral—the roadmap group to deal with these issues. My job is to remind people that laying out a substantive, real vision around which people of good faith can rally is instrumental to peace.

Now, keep in mind, when we define the state, it will be implemented subject to the roadmap. That's why the roadmap—the trilateral committee on the roadmap is important. And so there's going to be a lot of work to be done. And it's being done now. Institution-building is being done; security force modernization and reform is being done. The entrepreneurial spirit, which is strong amongst the Palestinians, can be tapped into. It's hard to get capital to invest, however, unless there is certainty—or more certainty about security and a vision.

And so we're working a three-pronged strategy, and I believe all three of those prongs have come together in such a way as to give me confidence this deal can be done by the time I leave office.

Guantanamo Bay Detainees/Iran

Q. Mr. President, allow me to communicate to you a Kuwaiti sort of question or hope or plea. Needless to say that Kuwait is a true ally of the United States. There is so much gratitude for the role the United States played in the liberation of Kuwait back in 1991. Kuwait was the only launching pad for Operation Iraqi Freedom. When push came to shove, we were true allies.

Now, back in Kuwait, as your visit is approaching, the Kuwaitis are actually wondering if there will be an end to the four Kuwaiti detainees in Guantanamo. There are four of them; to the best of our knowledge, all paperwork has been done, all security assurances have been——

The President. To be transferred back to——

Q. To Kuwait.

The President. ——from Guantanamo to Kuwait. We'll look at it. Our strategy, by the way, is to transfer as many Guantanamo detainees back to their countries of origin as possible, subject to the no torture agreement.

Q. The security assurances and the paperwork——

The President. Security assurances, right, as well as the assurances that the people will be treated humanely. I just will have to look into this.

Q. That will be great news, Mr. President, actually.

The President. Okay, we'll look into it.

Q. If this is broken, that—the paperwork is done——

The President. I understand. Well, some of the detainees are going to need to be tried in our court system. The crimes were such that we believe they ought to be brought to justice in a U.S. court system, which is—it's having a little trouble getting started because we've had a few court challenges for our court system. The whole purpose of the exercise was to send people home and try those who remain. And I just have to check on the four.

Q. That's very kind of you. If I may follow up on that earlier question——

The President. Please.

Q. ——which is, also—I'm here actually to reflect on some sort of a conspiratorial thinking back in the region. You know that's a region——

The President. Has that ever happened? [*Laughter*]

Q. ——whose middle name is actually "conspiracy"—that everything seems to be going for the mullahs' regimes in Iran, over the past 20 years of the United States strategy. The United States had eliminated the northern ideological enemy of Iran, U.S.S.R.; the eastern sectarian enemy of Iran, Taliban regime; the old-time foe, Saddam Hussein, in the west, without having—for the Iranians to resume the 8 long war—8-year-long war, and everything seems to be going their way. And yet at the same time, here we are, as true allies, we want to have sort of a clear strategy of what exactly are we to adopt with our main ally, the United States of America——

The President. I appreciate that.

Q. ——in terms of the confrontation of the threat for peace that is coming from Iran.

The President. What you've just described is one way to look at it. I look—let me look at it a different way, that now on the Iranian border exists a democracy, with a Constitution that is the most modern Constitution written in the Middle East; a democracy that is beginning to grow in confidence; a democracy that will recognize the rights of all citizens within its border; a democracy that will be responsive to the people, which stands in stark contrast to the system of government in Tehran that's not a democracy; it is in many ways a theocracy.

Secondly, there is a—within Iran, there is—I mean, Iraq, there's a different attitude of the Shi'a. There's a quietus school; there's a school that says religion definitely has a part in society, but religion isn't going to run government, which is a—it's just an interesting way to view the neighborhood. Secondly, Afghanistan is now a democracy, a functioning democracy. Are these easy situations? No, they're difficult situations. Democracy takes awhile to grow and flourish. But nevertheless, there is a competing form of government in Afghanistan, a different kind of form of government in Afghanistan.

Thirdly, Russia is very much engaged in the region. Russia has been helpful with Iran. Russia has supported the U.N. Security Council resolutions. Russia put forth an interesting proposal, which I've supported, that said, if you want to have a civilian nuclear program, you say your program is civilian in nature, there's no need for you to enrich because we'll provide the fuel for you. In other words, Russia has basically taken that argument away from the Iranians that said, we are—have the sovereign right to have a civilian nuclear program, and they said, fine.

This, by the way, I have said publically. Of course they have a sovereign right to have a civilian nuclear program. The problem is, because this nation did not level with the IAEA, they are to be not trusted with the capacity to enrich because once you learn to enrich, you could easily transfer that to a covert military program.

And so I view the situation differently, and I will be—I'm looking forward to talking to the Amir about it. What he'll want to know is whether or not we take the Iranian threat seriously. That's what he's going to want to know. And, as my first answer to the question was, it should be clear to you I do. And secondly, he's going to want to know, do we have a strategy to deal with it? And I'll be glad to lay out again the strategy to deal with it. And thirdly, he'll want to know whether or not the United States is going to remain active in the region; will we be working with friends and allies on developing a security plan? And the answer to that question is, absolutely, we will be. That's one of the main purposes of the trip, to talk about U.S. commitment to the region.

Jasim.

Bahrain-U.S. Relations

Q. Bahrain and the United States are now benefiting from the free trade agreement——

The President. Yes.

Q. ——they signed in 2004. Are there any new initiatives to reinforce economic and military cooperation? And how true are the reports which are saying that the United States will abandon its base in Bahrain?

The President. Well, I can handle that one right now: They're not true. You're right about the conspiracy theory. [*Laughter*] He's asking whether we're going to pull the 5th Fleet out of Bahrain, and the answer is no. And if that's a concern of His Majesty, it won't take long for me to allay his concerns. As a matter of fact, I'm looking forward to not only dealing with the Bahraini officials and His Majesty, of course, but to talk to our troops there in Bahrain. I'm looking forward to thanking them for their service to the country, which ought to be a very powerful signal that the answer is no.

Bahrain is a very hospitable place for our Navy and other Armed Forces, and that in itself is a—should be a signal to people that we view Bahrain as a stable, strong country, which is all part of tracking investment. You asked about how do you enhance trade. Well, one way you enhance trade is to make sure that capital is—capital looks for secure places. Capital doesn't like to invest and have a high risk component based upon instability. So that in itself ought to—that signal in itself ought to facilitate division of a free trade agreement.

Talat.

Energy

Q. Yes, sir. Sir, you're talking about civilian nuclear, and you don't have any objection for that if it's going to be under the supervision of the international arena. DCC recently approached to have a civilian nuclear facility for water desalinization for power. What is your stand on that?

The President. It's a very interesting, Talat. First of all, desalinization requires an enormous amount of power. And the best power source for desalinization, to make it more economical, is nuclear power.

Secondly, I believe if the world is serious about dealing with global warming, emissions, then the best way to deal with it is for us to power up through nuclear power. And so therefore, I'm a advocate for nuclear power, with proper safeguards to make sure that untrustworthy nations, nations that will not subject themselves to IAEA scrutiny, are called to account. So I would support nuclear power for the sake of desalinization.

People say, "Well, you're awash with oil. Why do you need nuclear power?" Well, nuclear power is environmentally sound, and nuclear power is really the best way to deal with issues such as desalinization. If I were in the Middle East and worried about water—which is a valuable resource—I too would be looking for economic ways to desalinize the water. I think it's a smart policy.

Q. Thank you, sir.

The President. Final question. It's been an interesting session.

Q. Thank you.

The President. You're trying to—one more question, Joyce, quick? If I give you, then I have to go around again. [*Laughter*]

Situation in Darfur

Q. Thank you, Mr. President. You will visit Egypt, sir, which has recently deployed troops in Darfur——

The President. Yes.

Q. ——part of the hybrid force. You also signed a bill against Sudan, which it seems from my point of view again to affect the people—the Sudanese people, but not the Government. My question, Mr. President, if Darfur would be part of your agenda when you meet with President Mubarak?

The President. Absolutely. First, I'll thank him for sending troops. Secondly, I'm going to correct you on the sanctions. The sanctions were aimed at individuals within the Sudanese regime, people that were obstructing the peace process—including a rebel leader. They were aimed at the elite and companies owned by the elite, as opposed to the Sudanese people.

In order for there to be the peace that we all want—now, this is dealing with

Darfur—and as you know, the situation is very complicated because we're not only dealing with Darfur; we're dealing with the north-south agreement as well—in order to—well, let me do north-south very quickly. We have been working with the southern leaders to get them to participate in the Government of Khartoum, so long as the Government of Khartoum is forthcoming with their agreements, such as the sharing of oil revenues.

Secondly, we have insisted that both parties not be provocative when it comes to military incursions upon an ill-defined border.

Thirdly, we're providing aid to the people of southern Sudan. And it's interesting; one of the really interesting things about America is, total strangers are going to help total strangers all the time. And there's a lot of church and faith-based groups involved in southern Sudan trying to improve the lot of people living there—in other words, the great humanitarian outreach that takes place.

Darfur—in order for there to be the peace that we all want in Darfur, there has to be, one, a united rebel group willing to sit down at the table with Khartoum in good faith. And one of the reasons I put the sanctions on individuals in Sudan—we did have sanctions prior to that, general sanctions, but these ones you're referring to are targeted at folks—is because there was a lack of effort by the Government on truly trying to promote the peace process. I recognize, however, that there has to be a more united effort by the rebel groups. In other words, the rebel groups cannot take advantage of—continue to take advantage of this notion that they can do what they want without being serious about the peace. And so the United States is sending a dual message, one to the Government of Khartoum and two to the rebels.

When we first got going in the process, by the way, there was three major rebel groups, which made it easier to convince people to come to the table. Now there are 20; the groups are beginning to split. And so we support the U.N. process, coupled with the AU, one, to get troops in there as quickly as possible to be able to help the folks who are living in these dispersed camps have a normal life. And the United States, by the way, when you talk about direct humanitarian aid, has provided more direct humanitarian aid than any country in the world by far because we care about the human condition; we care about people's lives.

Secondly, that we support the U.N. efforts to get the rebels to the table. There was one attempt in Libya, as you know, recently, and our efforts are to support Jan Eliasson—he was the former Ambassador for Sweden here—as he works to bring cohesion so that there's a cohesive unit of rebels to negotiate with the Government.

And so I'm—I have been frustrated, frankly, with the pace of the United Nations and the AU to get troops in there because, as I say, my concern is about the individual that's out in the remote regions of Darfur, maybe going hungry, definitely worried about violence. But I would repeat to you that in order to solve this problem, there has to be cohesion amongst the rebels and a genuine, real peace process where people sit down seriously—to seriously discuss a better way forward. And the United States will participate. We have participated by sanctioning, to send the signal that we expect the Government to participate seriously. And we're also—by the way, as I told you, we sanctioned a rebel leader—trying to send the same message. It's a terrible situation and one that we hope can be resolved as quickly as possible.

With that, I want to thank you all. Looking forward to seeing you again.

Q. Thank you, same here.

The President. Enjoyed it.

NOTE: The interview was taped at 10:25 a.m. in the Roosevelt Room at the White House. In his remarks, the President referred to Prime Minister Ehud Olmert of Israel; President Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) and Prime Minister Salam Fayyad of the Palestinian Authority; Quartet Representative in the Middle East Tony Blair; Prime Minister Fuad Siniora of Lebanon; King Hamad bin Isa al-Khalifa of Bahrain; Amir Sabah al-Ahmad al-Jabir al-Sabah of Kuwait; Minister of Foreign Affairs Saud al-Faysal bin Abd al-Aziz Al Saud of Saudi Arabia; King Mohamed VI of Morocco; President Abdelaziz Bouteflika of Algeria; President Mohamed Hosni Mubarak of Egypt; and United Nations Secretary-General's Special Envoy for Darfur Jan Eliasson. A reporter referred to President Nicolas Sarkozy of France. A

tape was not available for verification of the content of this interview. This item was not received in time for publication in the appropriate issue.

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

would mean, what an attack on Israel would mean if Iran were to do that.

Ms. Levi. You said world war III, if I——

The President. Well, I did. And I said that we will defend our ally, no ands, ifs, or buts. And so—now, I am—one of the concerns I'm sure amongst the Israeli population is whether this intelligence estimate that came out—what does it mean. It means to me that Iran was a threat, and Iran is a threat. In other words, just because they had a weapons—a military covert program that it suspended doesn't mean, one, they could restart it, and two, doesn't mean that their capacity to enrich couldn't—in a so-called civilian program—couldn't be transferred to a military. So I see it as a threat.

Whether there's an imminent attack coming, I don't think so. The Iranians, I'm confident, know that there would be a significant retaliation. The key, however, is to make sure that they don't end up with a weapon. And one of the things I will talk to the Prime Minister about again is our strategy to solve this issue diplomatically.

U.S. Foreign Policy

Ms. Levi. You say "diplomatically," but is a military strike still an option until the end of your Presidency?

The President. Well, the U.S. always maintained a military option. I have told the American people that I believe we can solve this issue diplomatically. Diplomacy works best when all options are on the table. And we're making some progress. The Russians and the Chinese as well as the other members of the U.N. Security Council supported two Security Council resolutions, which some might say aren't very effective. I think they are.

I think they're effective in the sense that it creates a sense of isolation amongst the Iranians. And I constantly speak to the Iranian people when I say, you can do better than a Government which is causing you to be isolated; your economy can do better than it's doing. Because of your Government's decision not to be honest with the world, not to be transparent, not to listen to the IAEA, there will be continued economic sanctions, some of them unilaterally, some of them bilaterally. The sanctions on their financial institutions, for example, can be very effective.

And so the United States—we've spent a lot of time on this issue, keeping the pressure on the Iranians.

2008 Presidential Election

Ms. Levi. So we're looking to something a lot nicer, the upcoming U.S. elections. And I seem to recall you liked to be on the campaign trail. You were there twice, and you won. Are you a little bit, you know, envious of the candidates?

The President. It's an interesting question. I know exactly what they're going through. Laura and I—well, Laura and I were talking about what it was like the day before, like, the Iowa caucuses. You know, I've been through three Iowa caucuses: one, when my dad beat Ronald Reagan in 1980 and then lost; two, that when my dad came in third in Iowa in 1988 and won; and, of course, our own caucus, which then—you know, we win Iowa, go immediately to New Hampshire, lose, and eventually win.

And so there's a—it's just the beginning of a long process. And it's an important process for an American politicians because it does two things: One, it lets the electorate see how people handle stress; and equally importantly, it lets the candidate, the running—person running determine whether or not they have the inner fortitude necessary to be the President of the United States. Because if things were okay and everything is, you know, smooth, the job is kind of—it's interesting. And it's always interesting, don't get me wrong, but when times are tough is when you're really tested, when you have to make the tough decisions of war and peace. And it requires an inner fortitude that I think that you begin to develop when you're out there in those primaries.

So this is the beginning of a fairly long process, although it's been—to answer your question, I don't wish for things that are impossible to wish for. And so I'm an observer, but with a pretty intimate knowledge of the sentiments that these candidates are going through.

President's Legacy

Ms. Levi. I imagine so. You are, you know, reaching the end of your Presidency in a year, and it's sort of the season to summarize. Can you tell me what your—you consider as your biggest achievement, and what, if anything, do you regret?

The President. Yes. First of all, I'm going to get a lot done next year.

Ms. Levi. Of course.

The President. I really am. You know, there's this great myth about how the President, because there's an election or because it's the last year of his Presidency, not much is going to get done. Quite the contrary. We'll get a lot done.

I would think that—first of all, I don't believe there's such a thing as an accurate short-term history. I'm still—I read a lot of history these days. I like to read a lot about Abraham Lincoln, for example. And if they're still analyzing the 16th—the history of the 16th President, see, then I—the 43d guy just doesn't need to worry about it. I'll be long gone. But I do believe that——

Ms. Levi. Isn't that kind of sad, that you won't be appreciated enough until after you're gone?

The President. No, what really matters in life is, do you have a set of principles, and are you willing to live your life based upon those principles? That's what matters most to me. My priorities are really my faith and my family. And we're blessed with a lot of friends. And I just—I'm not the kind of person that's—I don't spend a lot of time looking in the mirror, I guess is the best way to say it. But I do believe that—I can predict that the historians will say that George W. Bush recognized the threats of the 21st century, clearly defined them, and had great faith in the capacity of liberty to transform hopelessness to hope and laid the foundation for peace by making some awfully difficult decisions.

President's Future

Ms. Levi. And finally, can I ask you, when you do leave the White House—you're still fairly young, you know—what's next for you after you're the leader of the free world?

The President. Yes, you know, I don't know. I do know where I'm going to live, and that's in Texas.

Ms. Levi. Texas.

The President. I tell my friends from Texas, I left the State with a set of principles, and I'm returning with the same set of principles. And I didn't compromise my beliefs in order to be the popular guy or the hip guy or the guy that every—you know, the cultural elite likes. But I don't know. I'm going to build a library with a freedom institute attached to it.

And it's not just freedom from tyranny; it's freedom from disease. One of the great initiatives of my administration has been the HIV/AIDS initiative on the continent of Africa. Laura and I are very much involved in an initiative to end malaria. And thanks to the taxpayers of our country, we've dedicated about $1.6 billion to help save babies' lives. It's the tyranny of hunger, the tyranny of ignorance. I mean, there's all kinds of ways that I think I can help others realize the great blessings of life.

But I haven't gotten there yet. I've got too much to do. I mean, I've been thinking about this trip to the Middle East today, and I'm excited to go; I really am. You know, my first trip to Israel, and only trip to Israel, was in 1998. And I remember being in a hotel room and opened the curtain over the Old City, and the sun was just coming up, and it just glowed. It was golden. And I told Laura, I said, I can't believe what I'm looking at. And after she got her contacts on—[*laughter*]—she came and looked.

And, you know, one of the great ironies of that trip was that I was on a helicopter tour of the West Bank with Ariel Sharon. You know, life works in funny ways. I had just finished a reelection campaign in Texas, and there was a lot of pressure and a lot of talk about me running for President. But I don't think either of us would have guessed that both of us would have been serving in our respective offices at a defining moment in history. And that defining moment is the willingness of free nations to confront the ideology of hate, those who use murder to achieve political objectives. And yet there we were.

I'm saddened by the fact that he's in the state he's in. But nevertheless, it was—the beginning of a relationship started in a helicopter flying over the West Bank in 1998, and I'm glad—I'm really glad to be coming back. And I'm looking forward to being with my friend Prime Minister Olmert and other leaders.

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

The President. You bet. Thank you.

Ms. Levi. And have a safe trip, and best of luck. We're all keeping our fingers crossed for you.

The President. We'll be fine.

Ms. Levi. Thank you.

NOTE: The interview was taped at 4:05 p.m. in the Map Room at the White House for later broadcast. In his remarks, the President referred to President Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) of the Palestinian Authority; Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and former Prime Minister Ariel Sharon of Israel; and President Mahmud Ahmadi-nejad of Iran. The transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on January 6. Portions of this interview could not be verified because the tape was incomplete.

Interview With Hisham Bourar of Alhurra Television

January 4, 2008

President's Upcoming Visit to the Middle East

Mr. Bourar. Thank you, Mr. President, for taking the time to do this interview on Alhurra TV. Big trip to the Middle East—what are your objectives, and why now?

The President. Now because I believe that it's possible to advance the Annapolis agenda; now because I believe it's just going to be an—that it will be a chance to be effective on my trip. I am going to talk—advance three things: one, the vision of two states, Palestine and Israel, living side by side in peace; two, to convince our friends and allies in the region that it is in their interest to support the peace process; and three is to remind people that the United States is committed to helping secure the region; that we have a active presence in the Middle East, and that presence is not going to wane; that we're committed to helping people realize—deal with the threats and the problems of the 21st century.

President's Role in the Peace Process

Mr. Bourar. What can you do personally to press both sides, the Israelis and the Palestinians, to reach an agreement this year?

The President. Yes. Well, first of all, the agreement—they must decide they want to reach agreement. In other words—and so the first thing I can do is to make sure there's a sincere desire on the parts of President Abbas and Prime Minister Olmert to achieve an agreement. I believe that desire exists. The Annapolis conference was a success because they wanted it to be a success. And it's to give them confidence and to encourage them to come up with what a state will look like, the—define that state so that people there in the region can have hope that this kind of a long-time conflict will finally come to an end. And the first step is the definition of a state.

I can press when there needs to be pressed. I can hold hands when there needs to be—hold hands. And so I'm—I will go to encourage them to stay focused on the big picture. There's going to be all kinds of distractions; and people will be trying to throw up roadblocks; and people will be trying to cause these gentlemen to—not to—to lose sight of what's possible. And my job is to help them keep a vision on what is possible.

Palestinian State

Mr. Bourar. Do you still believe that your vision of a Palestinian state can be achieved before you leave office?

The President. I think the outlines, the definition of a state can be achieved. The implementation of a state will be subject to a roadmap. In other words, there's a lot of work that has to be done. Palestinian security forces have to be reformed—which we're helping with, by the way. The entrepreneurial class of people has to be encouraged with new capital. The institutions of government need to be strengthened.

And so the state will come into being, subject to—but the first step is to—here's what

a state will look like. And I believe we can get that done by the time I leave office.

Middle East Peace Process

Mr. Bourar. Will you be asking Gulf countries, including Saudi Arabia, to normalize relations with Israel?

The President. I'll be reminding the Gulf countries, including Saudi Arabia, that in order for this to be successful, in order for this process to work, there has to be strong support for both the Palestinians and the Israelis in the neighborhood. And that's why the Annapolis conference—another reason it was an important conference, because in that room were the—my friend the King of Saudi Arabia kindly sent his Foreign Minister to that Annapolis meeting. I thought it was a strong signal. And so both sides are going to need to know that they'll have support from the neighborhood.

Iran

Mr. Bourar. Recently there has been some rapprochement between Gulf countries and Iran. Do you feel that the last NIE report makes it difficult for you to convince these countries that Iran still poses a threat to national security?

The President. Yes. I'm sure this subject will come up, and I will remind them that the NIE said that, one, Iran had a military covert program. They suspended the program. I will also remind them that a regime that once had a program could easily start the program up again, and that the key ingredients to having a weapons program is, one, the capacity to enrich uranium; secondly, the ability to take that uranium and make a bomb; and thirdly, the ability to deliver the uranium—the bomb by rockets.

Well, the rocket program still exists. As you know, they say they had—only for civilian purposes, they're learning to enrich. Well, if you can learn to enrich for civilian purposes, you can easily transfer that knowledge for military purposes. And therefore, Iran is a threat. And so that will be my message.

And my other message will be, we've got a strategy to deal with it, and that is to prevent them from learning how to enrich. And I'll explain to them the different types of sanctions and international efforts we're making and how they can help as well.

Syria

Mr. Bourar. Recent visits to Damascus by U.S. lawmakers, like a recent one by Senator Arlen Specter, a Republican, and Senator Kennedy: Do they help or undermine your position toward Syria?

The President. That's an interesting question. I don't know. But President Asad must understand that if he wants better relations with the United States—and, frankly, better relations in the region—the first thing he's got to do is stop interfering in the Lebanese Presidential process. And I would hope that those representatives sent that message to President Asad.

I don't know how he interprets these meetings, but one thing he can't be mistaken about is the position of the U.S. Government, the White House. And our position is, is that you can have better relations, a better way forward with the United States, but you have got to get out of Lebanon, in terms of the Presidential elections, and stop harboring Hamas, stop letting suiciders go into Iraq. And there's a better way forward.

Lebanon

Mr. Bourar. Speaking of Lebanon, what could the United States do to break the current stalemate which left the country without a President?

The President. Yes. We're making it awfully clear to—publicly and privately—that Sleiman, who was selected by the—by a lot of the players there inside Lebanon, is the right choice; if that's what they want, that's who we support—and that the obstacle to that Presidency going forward is Syria.

So I'll be spending some time there in the Middle East discussing this very subject because a free Lebanon is in the interests of everybody in the region. And there's a lot of common ground with the U.S. position, and—like the Saudis and other nations agree that we ought to have a free Lebanon, free of Syrian influence.

President's Legacy

Mr. Bourar. Last question, Mr. President. How do you think people in the Middle East will remember you?

The President. I hope they remember me as the guy who was willing to fight extremists who murdered the innocent to achieve political objectives and, at the same time, had great faith in the people, the average citizen of the Middle East, to self-govern; that the Middle East has got a fantastic future, and that I admire the great traditions of the Middle East and believe that the average man can succeed mightily; that societies are best served when they respond to the will of people, and that we must reject the extremists who have a different view of that, the people who only prey on hopelessness. That's what I would hope.

I would hope that they would say, President Bush respects my religion and has great love for the human being and believes in human dignity. I know my image can be different at times. I had to make some tough choices on war and peace. On the other hand, I hope people are now beginning to see the emergence of a free Iraq, based upon a modern Constitution, is part of my vision for achieving peace that we all want.

Mr. Bourar. Thank you, sir. Thank you very much.

The President. Yes, sir.

Mr. Bourar. Thank you.

The President. Happy New Year.

Mr. Bourar. Happy New Year to you.

The President. Thank you.

NOTE: The interview was taped at 4:22 p.m. in the Map Room at the White House for later broadcast. In his remarks, the President referred to President Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) of the Palestinian Authority; Prime Minister Ehud Olmert of Israel; King Abdallah bin Abd al-Aziz Al Saud and Minister of Foreign Affairs Saud al-Faysal bin Abd al-Aziz Al Saud of Saudi Arabia; President Bashar al-Asad of Syria; and Gen. Michel Sleiman, commander, Lebanese Armed Forces. The transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on January 6.

Interview With Nadia Bilbassy Charters of Al Arabiya Television

January 4, 2008

Middle East Peace Process

Ms. Bilbassy Charters. Mr. President, thank you very much for your time, as always, and thank you for the interview.

The President. Thank you.

Ms. Bilbassy Charters. The major obstacle to peace is the settlement activities. Would you request from Prime Minister Olmert a freeze on the settlements?

The President. I think the major obstacle to peace is going to be the politics of both Palestinians and Israelis trying to take advantage of the difficult work that these two leaders are going to have to do to define a state; that's what I think. I think that extremists, in some instances, will try to stop the peace. I believe there is a lot of forces at play in Israel that will try to stop these two men from defining what a state will look like. And my job is to help them stay on the big picture and have the confidence necessary to make tough decisions.

No question, the settlement activity is a problem. But there's a mechanism to deal with that, and that is the roadmap commission, for the best word—is the trilateral commission, which we head, to deal with these roadmap issues. Now, we can solve those—we can work through those problems, but the key is to define a state. Now is the time.

And I believe it's going to get done before my Presidency is over. And the reason I believe it is because these two men, with whom I've spent a fair amount of time, are committed. The state will come into being subject to a roadmap. But the first step is to define what is possible, here's what a state will look like. And that is very important for both the Palestinians and the Israelis.

Middle East Peace Process/President's Upcoming Visit to the Middle East

Ms. Bilbassy Charters. Well, in this case, what is exactly your strategy to implement your vision of a Palestinian state by 2008?

The President. Well, the key is for me to convince the two leaders to work through the hard issues. I'll help them, but in order for there to be lasting peace, they've got to

come to the table; they have got to negotiate it. And what ends up happening in this process is that the leaders will commit, and then they'll get their committees to work, and it gets stuck. And that's when I'll have to work with Condi Rice to unstick it, just to keep it moving.

One thing is, is that they know that they've got a good partner in peace in me. They also know that I'm not going to be in office a year from now, so there's a certain urgency to get this state defined. And my trip is going to be to just kind of keep momentum. The Annapolis conference was a successful conference for two reasons: One, it was a chance for the Palestinians and the Israelis to know that the United States is serious about helping them, and equally importantly, it gave the world a chance to come to the table. The rest of the Middle East was there. And that's an important movement. It's going to be important for both Israel and the Palestinians to know that an agreement they reach will be supported by the Middle East.

And so part of my—one of the goals of my trip is to remind our friends and allies in the Middle East that they have got to be supportive of the Middle East peace process as well. They're going to want to know whether or not I'm going to push. And I'm going to want to know—and I'm going to tell them, yes, I am, but we expect you to be constructive players too.

Ms. Bilbassy Charters. Exactly, but, I mean, can you elaborate a little bit about this? I mean, what more can you do? I mean, support is enough? I mean, one visit is enough? Will you be involved——

The President. But, you see, to get it to this place—I mean, a visit is important, but I'm on the phone a lot, and Condi is on the phone a lot. There's a little—look, visits are important, obviously. And there's a reason why the timing of this visit is what it is. I mean, there was an intifada when I first came into office. Secondly, there is a philosophical change about a two-state solution. I mean, I supported it as the first American President ever to support it. The Israelis, under Ariel Sharon, came to the conclusion that this is in their interests.

We're pushing a lot, let me put it to you that way. I repeat to you, though, that the notion that somehow America can impose its will on two parties, I don't think it works. I think the America can facilitate. And so you just got to—I hope that as a result of this interview and my trip, the people come away with the notion that George Bush understands now is the time to move.

Freedom Agenda

Ms. Bilbassy Charters. I mean, people know that you are close friend of Israel. What do you want to do to win hearts and minds of the Palestinians, to assure them that the United States is a fair broker in the peace process?

The President. You know, I've heard that. I've heard that, "Well, George Bush is so pro-Israeli he doesn't—he can't possibly care about the plight of the Palestinian person." I would hope that my record, one of liberation and—liberation, by the way, not only from dictatorship but from disease around the world, like HIV/AIDS or malaria—is one that will say to people, he cares about the human condition; that he cares about each individual; that my religion teaches me to love your neighbor.

I have spoken clearly about my belief that—I believe—I pray to the same God as a Muslim prays—that the freedom agenda is really aimed at liberating people, and that the hope is, is that there will be an active, real Palestinian state so people can realize their dreams. But they're going to have to be—they're going to have to do some work. They're going to have to have security forces that protect the average person. They're going to have to have institutions that bring confidence for the Palestinians. They have to have the ability to attract investment. The Palestinians are great entrepreneurs, and if just given a chance, I'm confident the business community will flourish. And most importantly, though, they're going to have to reject the extremists who murder innocent people. And by the way, we're engaged in a great ideological struggle.

Middle East Peace Process

Ms. Bilbassy Charters. Absolutely. I mean, in retrospect, would you regret not being involved earlier in the peace process, 7 years ago?

The President. I think that you would find that I have been very much involved in the peace process when you look at the facts. I mean, attitudinal changes don't happen overnight. And the reason we've been able to have this successful conference in Annapolis is because people's attitudes lined up in—kind of in the same direction. There was common interests; common ground has been now recognized. The two-state solution wasn't accepted for the first——

Ms. Bilbassy Charters. So this is the right time, you say?

The President. ——for the couple of years of my administration. It took awhile to convince people that the two-state solution was in the security interests of both parties. And plus, there was a couple of difficult—there was a difficult situation, the truth be known. One was the intifada, which made it awfully hard to discuss peace at that time. The other was the Iraq invasion. It just—it created the conditions that made it more difficult to get people's minds in the right place to begin the process. And so now I think we've got the stars lined up, and I think we got a shot, and I'm going for it.

Ms. Bilbassy Charters. Great. I know he's telling me——

The President. You're fine. Go ahead.

Iran/U.S. Foreign Policy

Ms. Bilbassy Charters. Thank you, sir. Part of the visit, as well, is Iran and the Gulf States. What exactly do you want from the Gulf States regarding Iran? And would you ask for their cooperation in case of a military strike?

The President. First of all, I will assure the Gulf States that I believe we can solve this problem diplomatically. Secondly, I will—they're going to want more from me than I'm going to want from them. They're going to want to know what this NIE was all about.

Ms. Bilbassy Charters. Exactly.

The President. And I'm going to remind them that at my press conference when I explained the NIE, I clearly said, Iran was, is, and will be a danger if they're allowed to enrich, because they can take the knowledge on how to enrich and convert it to a covert program. If they've had one—a program once, they can easily start a program.

And so I view the Iranian regime as a danger. I also believe that the Iranian people are not bad—they're good people—and that they can have a better way forward. We'll tell our—I'm sure the—our friends and allies will say, "Well, what are you going to do about it? It's one thing to define the problem; do you have a strategy? And if you say you can solve it diplomatically, what is your strategy?" And I'll explain the strategy of economic isolation, that—you know, it's sad; we really don't need to have to be in this position. If the Iranian Government would suspend their enrichment programs, like the international community has demanded, there's a better way forward for them.

But they say that they need this program. And my answer is, is that if you need it, then why haven't you been transparent and disclosed it and honest about it? And what were you doing with a military—secret military program in the first place?

And so I view Iran as a danger; I truly do. And I don't view the people as a danger; I view the Government as a danger.

Iran/President's Upcoming Visit to the Middle East

Ms. Bilbassy Charters. Of course. But will it be harder for you to try to convince the Gulf States what—the American position after the intelligence report?

The President. The fact that I'm having to explain it means it's harder after the report. But I believe I'll be able to convince them. What they want to know is whether or not I think they're a danger. They know Iran can be a danger. They want to know whether I think it's a danger and are we committed to helping people achieve security. And part of the trip is to tell people, yes, we've got—we are engaged to help you, if you want our help to enhance security.

Now, look, nobody wants to be dictated to, and I'm certainly not going to do that. I am there to reassure and to look people in the eye and say, I believe Iran is a threat; we have a strategy to deal with it; and we want to work with you.

U.S. Foreign Policy

Ms. Bilbassy Charters. Did you ever discuss a military option with the Gulf States?

The President. Will I ever do that?

Ms. Bilbassy Charters. Did you, or will you?

The President. No, I haven't, because I believe we can solve this diplomatically. On the other hand, as you've heard me say many times since you've covered the White House, that all options must be on the table in order to make sure diplomacy is effective.

Ms. Bilbassy Charters. Absolutely. Secretary Gates told Al Arabiya in an interview recently that the diplomatic option is still 100 percent in focus. Does that mean that you're going to still pressure Iran on the diplomatic front? And how far can you go before your patience will run out?

The President. Yes. Definitely, we'll continue to pressure them on the diplomatic front. And it's hard, because sometimes people are more interested in market share for their goods than they are for achieving peace. And so I've spent a lot of time with allies in Europe, for example, convincing them of the importance of working together to send a common message to the Iranian regime. So, yes, the diplomatic option is on the table, and it's active, and we're working hard.

Syria/Lebanon's Presidential Election

Ms. Bilbassy Charters. On the Syria issue—I don't know if I'm allowed to ask one——

The President. Keep going.

Ms. Bilbassy Charters. I'm sorry.

The President. All you got to do is ask; I'll handle it. [*Laughter*]

Ms. Bilbassy Charters. Thank you, sir. Thank you. On the Syria issue, I mean, we already talked about—you actually told me that you—patience with Asad is running out. But we still have no Lebanese election. What does it mean? What can you do? Is it negotiation? Is it a military strike? Is it sanction against Syria? What can you do?

The President. Well, what we can do is make sure that the world understands our position and try to convince them that we ought to work together to say to the Syrians, let Sleiman go forward. That's the President that the people want there in Beirut, and he ought to go forward. And that's going to be on my agenda when I talk to friends and allies in the Middle East, that—and we can collectively send the message to President Asad.

We've sanctioned Syria, and I'm looking at different ways to keep sending a tough message because, so far, he has shown no willingness to be constructive on Lebanon or in dealing with a militant Hamas or in stopping suiciders from heading into Iraq, in other words, some reasonable things that we would like to see done in order to improve relations which he has not done.

We're working very carefully—closely with the French, for example. I've had a conversation with President Sarkozy on the subject. I'll be talking to my friend King Abdallah of Saudi Arabia on the subject, who has got a very keen interest in seeing to it that the Lebanese democracy goes forward. And so we've got a very good chance to have a more focused, concerted, universal message that President Asad, I hope, will listen to.

Ms. Bilbassy Charters. But some will say they might wait for another year until you leave office, and then——

The President. Well, he could try that. But in the meantime, there will be others around who he will have irritated as a result of his stubbornness. And so, yes, I mean, he could try to wait me out, but there's other leaders in the world that are as equally concerned as I am about Syria not letting the Presidency go forward and really hurting this very important democracy in the Middle East.

Lebanon's survival as a democracy is, in my judgment, very important for the world. And Syria is—has been—when we passed the resolution out of the United Nations, it worked. President Chirac and I worked together, got our foreign ministries working together, and it worked. And yet as opposed to honoring the notion of staying out of the—and to stop obstructing politics, Syria has just not been helpful at all.

Ms. Bilbassy Charters. So will you impose sanction on Syria?

The President. We have already, and we're looking at different options, of course.

Ms. Bilbassy Charters. A tougher sanction.

The President. Well, we're always looking for ways to make sure that we're effective. It's—sanctions, individual sanctions are okay. They're much more effective when they're—other people join along.

Ms. Bilbassy Charters. Absolutely. To show that you actually supporting Prime Minister Siniora, why not visiting Lebanon on this trip?

The President. Good question. You have to just—I've got only so much time. There's other countries I won't be going to either. We've had plenty of high-ranking officials go to support Prime Minister Siniora. I think about Condi, and I think about Admiral Fallon, who I sent over there to help analyze what the Lebanese forces need.

Listen, I was very impressed when Prime Minister Siniora made the decision to move Lebanese forces into the extremist stronghold and dealt with them. That's what you're supposed to do. And in order to have a safe and secure society, the state has got to show that it can provide security for the people and not tolerate pockets of extreme radicals who are murderous in their intentions, and he did. And right after that, I sent Admiral Fallon in to say, look, we need to help strengthen this man. He showed courage and leadership, and he needs to have a military that is able to function at the behest of a state to provide security. And so we're in the process of inventorying and analyzing and seeing how we can help from that perspective.

Ms. Bilbassy Charters. But do you hope the election will go forward in Lebanon?

The President. Soon. I was hoping it would go forward last week. They keep delaying it, and I'm convinced a lot of it has to do with the fact that Syria is not helpful. And therefore, part of our strategy is to get others to send the same message that I've consistently been sending to President Asad: If you want to be isolated, if you want to be—or if you want—you have a choice: Do you want to be isolated or a part of the world? You can make the choice. You can hang out with a limited number of friends, like Iran, or you can have better relations in the neighborhood and in the world. It's your choice to make.

Step one is to get out of the way of these Presidential elections. They've got a good candidate. A lot of people agree that this is the person, and now Syria needs to get out of the way.

Progress in Iraq

Ms. Bilbassy Charters. Sir, on the Iraq issue, the security has improved. Does that mean you're going to withdraw troops by the end of the year?

The President. Our troops decisions will be made based upon the considered recommendations of our commanders. And success in Iraq is essential, and therefore, I'll make the decisions along with those recommendations based upon success. The surge has been successful. The economy is getting better, and the politics is getting better. There is still a lot of work to be done, however, and I am—you know what thrills me the most is that the average Iraqi's life is becoming more hopeful.

Here's what I tell people. I tell people here in America that an Iraqi mother wants the same thing for her children that an American mother wants, a chance for that child to grow up in peace and to realize dreams, a chance for the child to go outside and play and not fear harm. And it's beginning to happen. The average—you know, it's still tough. There's still too many suiciders, but the level of violence is declining. I didn't see this, but I was told that the celebrations at New Year's Eve in Baghdad were festive. And life is coming back, and it's—that's exciting to me.

War on Terror in Iraq

Ms. Bilbassy Charters. And just to follow up on that, the generals were saying that Iran and Syria actually has been playing a role in stopping the suiciders of coming to Iraq. Would you credit them for that at least?

The President. I'm not willing to credit the Iranians yet. I don't have enough evidence. One general said that, then he corrected his story. I think so long as we're finding sophisticated IEDs—that could only have been manufactured in Iran—that are killing innocent people inside Iraq, that's cause for concern. I'm willing to have dialogs with the Iranians about Iraq in Iraq, but our message will be, if we catch you providing arms and trained—training people, then we'll—we're

going to hold them to account. You just got to understand that.

I would give—if, in fact, Syria is trying to stop suiciders, I will give them credit, of course. I hope that's the case. It's certainly one way to begin to earning better relations with the United States, is to stop the exportation of suiciders who go kill innocent people.

I'm looking forward to the trip. I'm glad you're going.

President's Legacy

Ms. Bilbassy Charters. Me too. Finally, how do you want the people in the Middle East to remember you, sir?

The President. History is odd. I will be long gone before the true history of the Bush administration is written. I'm still reading analyses of Abraham Lincoln's Presidency. I would hope, at least, at the very minimum, people would say that George W. Bush respected my religion and has great concern for the human condition; that he hurts when he sees poverty and hopelessness; that he's a realistic guy, because he understands that the only way that these extremists who murder the innocent can recruit is when you find—when they find hopeless situations—they have no vision that's positive; and that he helped present an alternative, and that was one based upon liberty and the rights of men and women in a just and free society. That's how I hope you remember me.

Ms. Bilbassy Charters. Thank you very much, sir, for your time and for your generosity. Thank you very much.

NOTE: The interview was taped at 4:37 p.m. in the Map Room at the White House for later broadcast. In his remarks, the President referred to President Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) of the Palestinian Authority; Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and former Prime Minister Ariel Sharon of Israel; Gen. Michel Sleiman, commander, Lebanese Armed Forces; President Bashar al-Asad of Syria; President Nicolas Sarkozy and former President Jacques Chirac of France; Prime Minister Fuad Siniora of Lebanon; Adm. William J. Fallon, USN, commander, U.S. Central Command; and Gen. David H. Petraeus, USA, commanding general, Multi-National Force—Iraq. The transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on January 6.

Remarks at Horace Greeley Elementary School in Chicago, Illinois

January 7, 2008

The President. Thank you all. Please be seated. Thank you very much for coming. I am so honored to be at Horace Greeley. People say, "Why would you want to come to Horace Greeley?" Because it's a center of excellence. It's a place for this country to realize what is possible when you have a good principal that's supported by the community, when you've got teachers who work hard and students willing to learn.

Coming with me today is the Secretary of Education, Margaret Spellings. Madam Secretary, I'm honored you're here. She's—she and I share the same philosophy. It starts with our refusal to accept school systems that do not teach every child how to read and write and add and subtract and our firm belief that local folks can figure out the best way to chart a path to excellence.

I'm proud that Congressman Rahm Emanuel is here. Mr. Congressman, thank you. As you know, we're from different political parties. [*Laughter*] But we share a common concern, and that is doing what's right for America. Both of us understand that educational excellence is not a partisan issue; it is an issue that is important for the future of this country. So, Congressman, I'm proud you're here.

I'm also proud to be here with His Honor, Mayor Daley. I've come to know the mayor over 7 years of being your President. The first thing I learned about him: It's better to have him for you than against you when you run for office. [*Laughter*] He loves his city, and he's, in my judgment, one of our Nation's best mayors. He also has taken advantage of a reform that gave mayors the capability of setting the tone and the pace for education in our big cities. Some of the best reforms in America have taken place when the mayor has taken the lead, and, Mr. Mayor, you have certainly taken the lead.

And I'm proud of your passion. I can remember visiting with you earlier on—about education, before No Child Left Behind came into being. And the mayor had this strong sense and strong feeling that this country needed to do something differently

if we wanted to make sure every child got a good education.

I'm proud to be here with Rufus Williams. He's a Chicago Board of Education man. I appreciate you being here, Rufus. And I also want to thank Arne Duncan. These two men are very much involved in making sure that if something is working, it is enhanced, and if something is not working, it is changed for the sake of our children. Every good school—every school that succeeds—by the way, it's a blue ribbon school. So I asked Margaret—like, I remember coming up; everybody was a blue ribbon school. I don't know if you remember those days. It was kind of a feel-good era. Just say, okay, you're a blue ribbon school, and everybody feels better about education.

There's less than 300 blue ribbon schools across America this year. I think—what did you say, 13——

Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings. Two hundred and thirty-nine public schools.

The President. Two thirty-nine public schools are blue ribbon schools and maybe a dozen here in the State of Illinois. This is one of the blue ribbon schools. It's a blue ribbon school because it's excelling; it's meeting standards. And one of the reasons is, it's got a fine principal in Carlos. I'm proud to be with you, Carlos. Carlos understands that we have got to set high standards for our children and work with the teachers to achieve those standards.

I was honored to go to some of the classes. It was—it's exciting to go back to the classroom. One of my messages is to the teachers: America can't thank you enough for teaching. It's truly important to—for our teachers to be thanked. It's also important for parents to be involved, and for those of you who are parents, thank you for being here today.

Tomorrow is the sixth anniversary of the day that I signed the No Child Left Behind Act into law. And since that day, we've come a long way. Fewer students are falling behind. People are beginning to get used to the notion that there's accountability in the public school system. Look, I recognize some people don't like accountability. In other words, accountability says, if you're failing, we're going to expose that and expect you to change. Accountability also says that when you're succeeding, you'll get plenty of praise.

I think it's—I know No Child Left Behind has worked. And I believe this country needs to build upon the successes. The philosophy behind No Child Left Behind was, in return for money, there ought to be results. It's pretty commonsensical, it seems like to me. That's what the mayor asks when he is running his city. That's what corporations ask: If we're going to spend money, are we going to get a return on the money? That's what our schools ought to be asking too.

In other words, in return—and I—you know, I was an old Governor of a State. I didn't particularly like it when the Federal Government got involved with my business. I felt Texas could pretty well handle it on her own. On the other hand, I recognize that if we're spending Federal money, that we ought to be held to account for that money. And there's some Federal money involved in education, and it makes sense for those of us in Washington to say, "Sure, we'll spend it, but we want to make sure that that money is being spent for a good reason." And there's no better reason than to teach every single child how to read, write, and add and subtract.

And so we have set standards, expectations. And by the way, I believe if you have low expectations, you're going to get lousy results. As a matter of fact, I know that's what's going to happen. But if you have high expectations, it's amazing what can happen.

This school, Horace Greeley, set high expectations. It's easy to set low expectations, you know. It's easy to consign a whole group of students to mediocrity. That's the easy way out. What No Child Left Behind says is that we're going to take the hard way. We're going to set high standards, and then we're going to measure to determine whether or not those standards are being met. It's really important to measure. It's also important to disaggregate results, which is like a fancy word for, we want to know whether or not each student is learning. We want to make sure that no child is left behind.

Horace Greeley measures, and they measure for a reason. They want to know, first

of all, whether or not the curriculum is working, whether or not the instruction is working. And they also want to know whether or not they can—they need to tailor specific programs to meet the needs of specific children. One reason this school is a blue ribbon school: It is not afraid of accountability. It views the accountability system as a tool to enhance excellence. And so do I.

Now, the other thing that's important is, is that the accountability system allows each school to know where it stands relative to another school. You know, from my time as Governor, I can remember parents saying, "Oh, my school is doing just fine. I like my school, Governor." And then all of a sudden, the test scores came out—sometimes a school wasn't doing just fine. Sometimes—not sometimes, all the time, accountability lays out the truth. There's nothing better, in my judgment, to making sure that we have a educated workforce and everybody has a hopeful future than to just lay out some simple truths.

And one of the simple truths is, can this child read at grade level at the appropriate time? That's a simple truth. Another one is, can the person add and subtract at the appropriate time? And if so, we'll say thank you. And if not, the system ought to say, we better change early, before it's too late.

I found too often that in some schools, like in my State, it was just easy to move them through, you know; let's just shuffle people through. That's why—I can remember somebody standing up and saying, "No Child Left Behind Act is really one of the civil rights—it's a civil rights piece of legislation," because this person was sick and tired of the day when people were just moved through the school system, without wondering whether or not the child could read and write and add and subtract.

Test results are all a part of making sure we achieve a great national goal, and that is, every child be at grade level by 2014. The other thing it does is, as you measure, it lets us know how we're doing as a nation. There's an achievement gap in America that's just not acceptable. That means Anglo students are more proficient at reading than Latinos or African Americans. It's just not acceptable for our country. It's an indication to me that there is something wrong, and it needs to be addressed now.

And so—but we measure for that reason. We want to know whether or not this Nation is going to be competitive and whether or not it's going to be hopeful. And the achievement gap said, here's a problem. But the good news is, is that because of high standards and accountability throughout this country, the achievement gap is closing. We have what's called a National Report Card. One of Margaret's jobs is to herald the successes or failures of the National Report Card. Eighth graders set a record high for math scores last year. Our fourth graders are—more and more fourth graders are learning to read at grade level. Scores for minority and poorer students are reaching alltime highs in a number of areas, and the achievement gap is closing. If we didn't measure, we wouldn't know; we'd be just guessing, and it's not worthwhile to guess when a child's future is at stake.

The other thing that's interesting about measurement is that when you find a problem, there will be resources like after-school tutoring to help a child address those problems. And it's important to do this early, rather than late. People who have been involved in education can tell you that a school system that doesn't test and doesn't measure oftentimes wakes up at the end of the process and says, "We need remedial education as the child heads into high school or out of high school." That's just not acceptable anymore. The world is too competitive to have a lax system in place. And we don't now, with No Child Left Behind.

And so now is the time for Congress to reauthorize it. I'm sure a lot of people look around the country and say, it's impossible for Congress and the President to work together. I strongly disagree. We worked together to get the bill written in the first place, and I believe we can work together to get it reauthorized. If it's not reauthorized, then I've instructed our Secretary to move forward on some reforms or to analyze reforms that she can do through the administrative process. If Congress passes a bill that weakens the accountability system in the No Child Left Behind Act, I will strongly oppose it and veto it because the act will continue on. In

other words, this act isn't expiring; it just needs to be reauthorized.

And what are some of the things we can do? Margaret has been listening to Members of Congress, but equally importantly, she's been listening to Governors and local school boards. We need to increase the flexibility for our States and districts. We don't want the No Child Left Behind Act to be viewed as something that hamstrings innovation. There ought to be flexibility in the system. We're going to provide help for struggling schools—extra help. We want to make sure that a high school degree means something. We don't want people getting out of high school and it's not meaning something.

She's been talking with Members of Congress to give schools credit for growth and achievement that individual students make from year to year—in other words, flexibility in the accountability system without undermining the core principle of accountability. We're going to implement a more accurate system for measuring high school dropout rate and make it easier for our students to enroll in the tutoring programs. There are things we can do, and must do, by working together.

I am optimistic about the country because I come to places like Horace Greeley Elementary School, a little center of excellence; a place where, you know, some might say, "Well, these kids can't possibly achieve such high standards." But, in fact, they are. This is a school that's got a significant number of Latinos whose families may not speak English as a first language. This is a school where there's some newly arrived to our country here. This is a school that is exceeding expectations because of high standards and using the accountability system as a tool to make sure that no child is left behind.

It is my honor to be with you. Thank you for letting me come and share our philosophy about how to achieve educational excellence for every student. God bless.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:46 a.m. In his remarks, he referred to Carlos G. Azcoitia, principal, Horace Greeley Elementary School; Mayor Richard M. Daley of Chicago, IL; Rufus Williams, president, Chicago Board of Education; and Arne Duncan, chief executive officer, Chicago Public Schools.

Remarks Following a Meeting With the Chicago 2016 Bid Committee and United States Olympic Committee Members in Chicago

January 7, 2008

I want to thank the members of the 2016 Chicago bid to get the Olympics. Listen, Mr. Mayor, you and your committee have put together a great plan. It's a plan that will make America proud.

They say that the Olympics will come to Chicago if we're fortunate enough to be selected, but really it's coming to America. And I can't think of a better city to represent the United States than Chicago.

This is a well-thought-out venue. There will be—the athletes will be taken care of. People who will be coming from around the world will find that this good city has got fantastic accommodations and great restaurants. It will be safe.

And so I—this country supports your bid strongly. And our hope is that the judges will take a good look at Chicago and select Chicago for the 2016 Olympics.

Thank you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:35 a.m. at the Union League Club of Chicago. In his remarks, he referred to Mayor Richard M. Daley of Chicago, IL.

Remarks on the National Economy in Chicago

January 7, 2008

Thank you all. Thank you all very much. Thanks for coming. I'm glad to be here with the members of the Illinois Chamber. Mr. Mayor, thank you very much. You've given me a lot to do today. [*Laughter*]

First thing is, the mayor runs the school system. And I went by Horace Greeley Elementary, and the reason I did is because Horace Greeley is a blue ribbon school. I remember awhile back, everybody was a blue ribbon school. But that's not the way it is these days because we're judicious in who gets awarded a blue ribbon school. A blue ribbon school is one which sets high standards and measures and achieves results.

Mr. Mayor, you're a reformer when it comes to education because you understand when we find mediocrity, when we find schools that aren't teaching, we're going to have to do something about it if the United States wants to remain competitive in the 21st century.

Then the mayor had me briefed by the 2016 Olympic committee bid team, and you got a good bid. I'm absolutely convinced that Chicago will represent the entire country the right way if the Olympics are here in 2016. Mr. Mayor, you've put together an outstanding team, and I just want to—[*applause*]—I just want the judges to understand that the United States of America stands squarely behind Chicago's bid.

I am really pleased to be here at the Union League Club. I did a little research into the history, and it turns out, Winston Churchill came here in 1932, right before I was born. [*Laughter*] When people think of Churchill, of course, they marvel at what he managed to do with the English language. When people think of me—[*laughter*]—never mind, Congressman Emanuel. [*Laughter*] I appreciate the Congressman for joining us. He'd been with me all day long.

You know, there's a lot of partisanship in our Nation's Capital. I bet both of us would say, "too much." But it—I appreciate the fact that when the President of the United States came to his district, he showed up. It shows a lot about the man. I'm honored you're here. Thanks for coming.

I do want to talk about keeping our economy growing and creating jobs for our citizens. I had a New Year's resolution, and it was to make sure that Congress keeps the taxes low and to make sure that when we spend your money, we do it wisely or not at all. And it's a resolution I intend to keep.

Before I talk a little bit about the economy, I do want to thank Joe Dively, who's the chairman of the Illinois Chamber who's hosting this event. I want to thank the chamber members who are here. I'm honored that you'd take time out of your day to give me a chance to come and visit. I'm sure you know what I know, that many Americans are anxious about our economy. And this, frankly, is not unprecedented.

Over the last 7 years, over the span of my Presidency, we've had other challenges. There have been other times when people have been anxious about the economy. After all, we've been through a recession, terrorist attacks, corporate scandals, wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as devastating natural disasters. It's 7 years we've had experience in dealing with anxiety. Every time, our economy absorbed those shocks; we dealt with them and managed to grow and prosper.

In other words, this is a resilient economy because we rely on the free enterprise system. Our economy is flexible; it is—motivates people to take risk. We are the most prosperous nation in the world. There's a sense where we can be optimistic. We have seen anxiety—dealt with anxiety before; this isn't the first time.

We have a strong foundation in our economy, but we cannot take economic growth for granted. That's what I want to share with you. I understand that while there is a foundation that would be the envy of a lot of other nations, we cannot take growth for granted. We confront economic challenges, from the downturn of the housing sector to high energy prices to painful adjustments in some of the financial markets.

Recent economic indicators have become increasingly mixed. Last Friday, we learned that our economy has now had 52 months of uninterrupted job growth. That's a record. That's the longest period of job creation on record. Our entrepreneurs are taking risks. Our small businesses are expanding. Yet we also learned that our jobs are growing at a slower pace and that the unemployment rate ticked up to 5 percent. So in other words, on the one hand, we're continuing to set a record; on the other hand, there's mixed news. Same when it comes to pricing. Core inflation is low—except when you're going to the gas pump, it doesn't seem that low, or when you're buying food, it doesn't seem that low. So core inflation is low, but energy and food prices are on the rise—have risen. Consumer spending is strong, yet housing values are declining. The mixed report only reinforces the need for sound policies in Washington, DC, policies which do not create more regulation and create more lawsuits.

Policies include opening new markets for U.S. goods and services. One of the interesting adjustments that has happened in our economic horizon has been that trade has been a significant part of growth. In other words, when you open up markets where our goods and services are treated fairly, we can compete with anybody anytime.

It's in our interests that we open up markets. It's in our interests that we demand people treat us the way we treat them in the marketplace. And we got some trade votes that will be coming up this year: Colombia, Panama, and South Korea. It's in the interest of economic vitality and growth that we provide opportunities for businesses, large and small, to be able to sell goods and services.

Secondly, energy prices—there is no quick fix. As a matter of fact, I signed good legislation, passed by Republicans and Democrats, that enable us to begin to diversify away from oil and gas, and that's good. But the diversification isn't going to happen overnight. We ought to be exploring for more oil and gas in the United States of America, and I'm convinced we can do so in environmentally friendly ways. And the truth of the matter is, if we're deeply concerned about the environment and want to make sure we're wealthy enough to deal with environmental challenges, we ought to be using nuclear power.

We're working on policies to reform our mortgage markets. But most importantly, the smartest thing we can do is to keep taxes low. In a time of economic uncertainty, we don't need to be taking money out of your pocket. In a time of economic uncertainty, we ought to be sending a clear signal that taxes will remain low. Now, I've worked with Congress to cut taxes, and progrowth economic policies work. When you cut taxes, it means that people have more money to save, spend, or invest, more money in your pocket, more money where you can do—you can support your family, or if you're a small-business owner, you can reinvest to create more job opportunity in the community in which you live.

It turns out, tax cuts have helped our economy overcome uncertainties. Economic growth yielded more revenues for our Federal Treasury. And when you combine that with spending discipline, then that deficit is beginning to shrink, particularly as a percentage of GDP. Our deficit percent of GDP is low relative to historic averages. It's possible to keep taxes low, grow your economy, and deal with your deficit, is what I'm trying to explain to you.

In times of uncertainty, it's very important to make sure that the people on the frontlines of job growth—that would be the entrepreneur—knows taxes are going to remain low. And so one of the first basic principles that I'll be talking to Congress about is, this administration will use its authorities to keep taxes low.

I don't think there are many folks who believe that Washington really needs more of your money; I certainly don't. Unfortunately, Americans could be facing higher taxes unless Congress takes action to stop it. You see, in less than 3 years, the tax cuts that we passed are set to expire. That creates uncertainty. If you're an entrepreneur thinking about investing, and all of a sudden, you're looking at a horizon where your taxes may be going up, it creates uncertainty. We don't need more uncertainty in an uncertain market. If Congress allows this to happen, we'll see an end to the measures that have helped our economy grow, including the 10 percent individual income tax bracket, the reductions in the marriage tax penalty, and reduced rates on regular income, capital gains, and dividends.

And one of the interesting things that happens if taxes go up—people say, "Well, we're just going to tax the rich." The problem is, many small businesses pay taxes at the individual income tax rate because they're subchapter S's or limited partnerships. We don't need to be running up taxes on small-business owners. After all, 70 percent of new jobs are created by small businesses in America. Increasing the tax burden on small businesses will make it less likely people will be willing to create new jobs.

And so I will strongly urge that the Congress keep taxes low. One way to do it is to make sure that all the tax cuts we passed are made permanent. If you're interested in taking uncertainty—[*applause*]. One of the other taxes that's going to return will be the death tax, which is being phased out. And

in 2011, it kicks back in, which means it's going to be hard on estate planning, let me put it to you that way. I hope a lot of people don't decide to move on just because of the tax cut. [*Laughter*] I'm absolutely convinced we can do a better job of having the estate tax put on the road to extinction and then let it pop back up. It makes no sense.

Listen, the estate tax is a lousy deal, particularly for farmers and small-business owners. I mean, you get taxed twice. You tax it when you build your business, and then they tax you when you die. And I'm absolutely convinced that there is a deal to be done in getting rid of the estate tax once and for all for the sake of economic vitality and growth and fairness.

I want to tell you what it means if these taxes go up. If you're a single mom with two children and 30,000 in earnings, her taxes will go up by 67 percent, or about $1,600. If the taxes aren't made permanent, this is going to affect a lot of Americans in very negative ways. If you're an elderly couple with $40,000 in income, they would see their taxes go up by about 155 percent, or $900. Now, that may not sound like a lot to some of us in Washington, where they throw around numbers in billions; it means a lot to an elderly couple making $40,000 a year.

Twenty-six million small-business owners would see their taxes go up by nearly 17 percent, or $4,000 on average. For somebody struggling with health care costs and 4,000 more dollars goes over to the Federal Government, it's going to make it harder for you to stay in business. It just doesn't make any sense, in times of uncertainty, to be sending uncertain messages about the Tax Code. And so I'm looking forward to working with the Congress to get these Tax Codes—cuts made permanent.

Secondly, the Federal Government can play a positive role. We can play a negative role if we get too aggressive. If we overregulate, it's a negative role. If we pass law that—and opens up businesses and firms and small businesses to lawsuits, that's a negative role. We got too many lawsuits in America to begin with, in my judgment. But there are some things we can do to help.

For example, the housing market—what's interesting about the housing market is that, you know, in the old days, you'd sit down with your lender and work out a deal. And then if you came on a hard time and you're still creditworthy, then he would help you refinance the loan. Well, those mortgages that have been made in recent times have been bundled up into financial instruments and sold. So it's hard to get the borrower and the lender face-to-face to help the borrower stay in the home. That's the challenge.

Now, Hank Paulson and Alphonso Jackson, that would be the Secretary of the Treasury and the Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, have come together with an innovative plan called HOPE NOW. It doesn't cost one dime of your money, but it's the use of Federal influence to bring investors and counselors and lenders and servicers of loans together to help find those who have creditworthy—to help them stay in their homes. In times of uncertainty in the housing market, it makes sense to help people refinance loans.

And Congress can help as well. By the way, they passed good law. You know, I don't know if you know this or not, but if you refinance your home, it's a tax liability for you. The value of the—the computed value of the difference between what was viewed as your value of your home and the new one after refinancing—new value after refinancing was a tax liability. It made no sense. Somebody is trying to stay in their home, and they get refinanced, and then there's an additional tax liability. It makes it harder to stay in the home. And we passed good law to make that easier.

But there's some other things we can do together. In other words, there's a constructive role for the Federal Government that I believe will help us during these times of uncertainty, and one of them is to expand the reach of the Federal Housing Administration. In other words, this is a program all aimed at helping creditworthy people refinance their home so they can stay in it during this times of uncertainty.

Now, look, there are some people that probably shouldn't have bought a home in the first place. There are speculators that don't deserve help, in my judgment. But there are good, solid, hard-working Americans that we can help stay in their home by

providing a—by helping them on refinancing.

Another place where Congress and the administration can work together is dealing with tax-exempt bonds. Tax-exempt bonds, some of them for the housing purposes, can be used to help people buy a new house. I believe, in this time of uncertainty, we ought to have the authority for tax-exempt bonds to be used to help somebody stay in their current house. In other words, these are constructive ways to deal with the problem we face. Congress needs to pass a reform bill to strengthen the regulation of Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac so they can stay focused on their core mission, which is housing. And I'm looking forward to working with the Congress to help us through this period of correction in the housing market.

Now, secondly, we can help people deal with health care. There's a fundamental debate taking place in Washington. I'm on the side of, let's strengthen private medicine rather than weaken private medicine. I'm on the side that says, the more consumerism, the more choices people have in health care, the better off the health care system will be. I'm on the side of saying to small businesses, health savings accounts are a smart way for you to be able to insure your people. I'm on the side of small businesses by saying, I believe businesses ought to pool—be allowed to pool risk across jurisdictional boundaries. That's fancy words for, if you're a restaurant in Chicago, you ought to be able to put your employees in the same risk pool as a restaurant in Texas so you can get discounts on your insurance, just like big companies can get discounts on their insurance.

And I'm for changing the Tax Code. The current Tax Code penalizes people who go shopping for health care in the individual market. If you're a small-business owner, you know what I'm talking about. It's hard to go find insurance in the individual market because the Tax Code, frankly, discriminates against the individual relative to the person who gets tax—health insurance through corporate America. And I think all families ought to get a $15,000 deduction for health care or individuals a $7,500 deduction for health care, regardless of where they work.

And all of a sudden, the playing field gets level, and it's more likely an individual market begins to grow. And when you couple that with transparency of pricing and information technology, you can begin to see the emergence of a health care system that's patient-reliant, that focuses more on the doctor-patient relationship and less on instruction from Washington, DC. And there's a fundamental debate, and I strongly believe the Government, by passing good policies, can help us deal—help small businesses deal with health care—is a key issue.

And so those are some of the things I'm looking forward to working with Congress about to deal with these times. As I say, we've been through this before. People said, "Are you optimistic?" I said, absolutely, absolutely optimistic. Do I recognize the reality of the situation? You bet I do. During my 7 years as President have I seen the great American economy bounce back? I have. People say, "Why do you think?" I say, because our people are optimistic, hard-working, decent people. That's why. I mean, this economy rests in the hands of the American people, not in the halls of our Government.

Winston Churchill, when he came here, by the way—I dug out a quote that I'd like to read to you. He said, "Some . . . regard private enterprise as a predatory tiger to be shot, while others look at it as a cow that they can milk. Only a handful see it for what it really is: the strong and willing horse that pulls the whole cart along." I don't know if he said it right here in this very hall, but that's what he said. Government policy ought to recognize who's pulling this economy, and that would be the entrepreneurs and workers of America.

So I want to thank you for giving me a chance to share some thoughts with you. Thank you for taking risk. Thank you for helping Chicago and the area around Chicago. You're one of the really great locations in the United States of America. Mr. Mayor, I'm honored to be with you again. Appreciate your time. God bless you. May God bless America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:18 p.m. at the Union League Club of Chicago. In his remarks, he referred to Mayor Richard M. Daley of Chicago, IL.

Statement on the Situation in Kenya

January 7, 2008

I welcome the visit of African Union Chairman John Kufuor to Nairobi to help facilitate a dialog to resolve Kenya's political crisis. I condemn the use of violence as a political tool and appeal to both sides to engage in peaceful dialog aimed at finding a lasting political solution. The Government of Kenya has acknowledged that voting irregularities have occurred, and the Orange Democratic Movement has pledged to refrain from further protests that could detract from reconciliation efforts. I now urge both sides to enter this dialog in good faith to earn back the trust of the Kenyan people, who deserve a political process that reflects their dedication to democracy. I remain heartened by the voices of peace that have emerged through Kenya's robust media and civil society. The United States supports their efforts to continue to hold their political leaders to account.

Remarks Following a Meeting With President Abdullah Gul of Turkey

January 8, 2008

President Bush. It's been my honor to welcome the President of Turkey here. Mr. President, I'm glad you're here. This is not his first trip to Washington. I can remember many a time you sitting in the Oval Office as the Foreign Minister, and now you come representing the—representing a great strategic partner as its President.

Turkey is a strategic partner of the United States. Relations between the United States and Turkey are important for our country. And we have worked hard to make them strong, and I believe they are strong. We deal with common problems.

One such problem is our continuing fight against a common enemy, and that's terrorists and such a common enemy as the PKK. It's an enemy to Turkey; it's an enemy to Iraq; and it's an enemy to people who want to live in peace. The United States is—along with Turkey, are confronting these folks. And we will continue to confront them for the sake of peace.

I strongly believe that Europe will benefit with Turkey as a member of the European Union. I have held this position ever since I've been the President. I feel it as strongly today as when I first articulated it. I think Turkey sets a fantastic example for nations around the world to see where it's possible to have a democracy coexist with a great religion like Islam. And that's important. I view Turkey as a bridge between Europe and the Islamic world, a constructive bridge. And so I believe it's in the interests of peace that Turkey be admitted into the EU.

We talked about energy and the need for all of us to help secure more energy supplies. We talked about—I'm about to brief the President on my trip to the Middle East. I know he's deeply concerned about whether or not it's possible to achieve a two-state solution in the Middle East. I believe it is, and I'm looking forward to sharing the strategy.

All in all, we've had a very constructive conversation, and that's what you'd expect when you're—when two friends are in the room together.

So, Mr. President, thank you for coming, and welcome.

President Gul. Thank you, Mr. President. I would like to thank the President for his invitation here. Turkey and the United States are longstanding allies, and the relationship between our two countries continue to be strengthened. We have a—we share a common vision, and we work together. And the relations between the two countries are such that they have an impact not only on the two countries but also on a regional and global scale.

Our relations are important, and we will continue to work together to ensure that peace, stability, and prosperity continue to grow around the world. And we are also working against our common enemy, the PKK, and we have once again underlined the importance of our cooperation in fighting against the PKK. And I would like to thank the President for his determination, as well, on this regard.

As the President has said, we have discussed some other important issues such as energy and the issues with respect to the Middle East. The President is engaged very

much in efforts to ensure peace in the Middle East, and we believe that these are important efforts which can yield results.

We've also discussed Iraq, and we will continue to discuss issues such as Iraq, the Balkans, and other issues. And I would like to thank the President for this meeting very much.

President Bush. Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:54 a.m. on the South Lawn at the White House. President Gul spoke in Turkish, and his remarks were translated by an interpreter.

Remarks Following a Video Teleconference With Iraq Provincial Reconstruction Team Leaders and Brigade Combat Commanders and an Exchange With Reporters

January 8, 2008

The President. Thank you very much. I had a series of good meetings today to discuss the situation in Iraq, including a video teleconference this morning with General Petraeus, Ambassador Crocker, and members of the national security team. I also spoke by video with Prime Minister Maliki to discuss the return of the Iraqi Parliament that—it was clear from my discussions that there's great hope in Iraq, that the Iraqis are beginning to see political progress that is matching the dramatic security gains for the past year. There's still work to be done, but it was a very hopeful conversation.

Today I just had a good discussion with some of our bravest citizens, members of our Nation's Provincial Reconstruction Teams and their brigade commanders in Iraq, three of whom are with me today, along with the Secretary and Deputy Secretary. I thank you all for coming. And the others were by SVTS, by video from Baghdad. I first of all thanked them for the progress they've helped make possible during the past year and the important work that they're doing in the communities all across Iraq.

Provincial Reconstruction Teams are called PRTs, are a central part of the new strategy in Iraq that I announced a year ago. The strategy was built around three key elements: first was a surge of additional troops into Iraq, with a new mission to protect the Iraqi people from terrorists, insurgents, and illegal militias; second was a surge of operations that began in June once the troops were in place, with new offenses across the country to drive the terrorists and militias out of their strongholds; and third was a surge of Provincial Reconstruction Teams, was a civilian surge, which deployed across Iraq to ensure the military progress was quickly followed up with real improvements in the daily lives of the Iraqi citizens.

Over the past year, we've doubled the number of PRTs in Iraq. There are now 24 of these teams serving in all 18 Iraqi Provinces. Many are embedded with military units and work closely with our troops to support their operations. Their mission is to help strengthen moderate leaders at the local, municipal, and Provincial level by providing assistance to help create jobs, deliver basic services, and build up local economies. The teams are helping Provincial governments spend their money more effectively. Across the country, these teams are helping to bring Iraqis together so that reconciliation can happen from the ground up.

The leaders I met today updated me on important work they're doing and the progress they have made. For example, our PRT leaders in Baghdad report they have now mentored district councils and public work departments in several neighborhoods, provided funding for generators to help build up local markets, and support a microgrant program to help small businesses reopen across their district in the city.

Our PRT leaders in Kirkuk report that they helped broker a settlement that brought Sunnis back into the Provincial Council after a year-long boycott. They also helped the Provincial government successfully execute the budget, assisted local enterprises with small business loans, and helped establish a major crimes court in a Province—in the Province that is providing citizens with equal justice under the law.

Our PRT leaders in Najaf, which happens to be one of Shi'a Islam's holiest cities, report that they're working with Iraqis to build a modern airport that will allow Shi'a Muslims from around the world to travel to the city on pilgrimage. These PRT leaders briefed us

on the changes they're seeing on the ground in Iraq. Because they live and work among the Iraqi people, they see the progress that is taking firsthand.

And here's what they tell me: Violence across the country continues to decrease. Tens of thousands of Iraqis have stepped forward to join Concerned Local Citizens groups that are fighting Al Qaida and other extremists. And as the security improves, life is returning to normal in communities across Iraq, with children back in school and shops reopening and markets bustling with commerce.

Improvements on the ground in Iraq are allowing some U.S. forces to return home. That's what we're—the strategy is called return on success. It has now begun. I don't think most Americans know this, but one Army brigade and one Marine expeditionary unit have come home and will not be replaced. And in the coming months, four additional brigades and two Marine battalions will follow suit.

As we withdraw these forces, we will continue to pursue Al Qaida and other extremists in Iraq. Our enemies in Iraq have suffered blows in recent months, but they're still dangerous. They're not yet defeated. As we saw yesterday, when terrorists killed the leader of a Concerned Local Citizens group, the enemy remains capable of horrific violence. We're not going to allow these terrorists to find respite anywhere in Iraq, and we're not going to allow them to regain the strongholds that they've lost.

The PRT leaders have gotten to know the Iraqi people. They understand the vast majority of Iraqis want to live in freedom and peace; that's what they know. You know why? Because the citizens tell them just that. They're helping give ordinary Iraqis confidence by rejecting the extremists and reconciling with one another so they can claim their place in a free Iraq and build a better life for their families.

The men and women of our PRTs are serving on the frontlines in the war on terror. These are courageous souls. They could be doing a lot of other things, but they chose to go to the frontline where they can make a difference in world peace. And I can't thank you enough for the vital work you've done and for helping 2007, particularly the end of 2007, become incredibly successful beyond anybody's expectations. And we believe 2008, you're going to see continued progress.

These people are helping improve the lives of citizens they've never met before, and in so doing, they're making this country more secure, and they're helping lay down a foundation for peace. And I want to thank them from the bottom of my heart, and I thank your families, as well, for the sacrifices they have made. We are so honored to have such courageous citizens such as yourself. And now I'll answer a couple of questions.

Knoller [Mark Knoller, CBS Radio].

Iran

Q. Mr. President, what do you make of the incident in the Strait of Hormuz with Iran on Sunday? Do you think they were trying to provoke a fight with the U.S.?

The President. Well, Mark, we viewed it as a provocative act. It is a dangerous situation, and they should not have done it, pure and simple.

Q. What do you think they were up to?

The President. I don't know what I think—what their thinking was, but I'm telling you what I think it was. I think it was a provocative act.

Q. What will your message be to the 5th Fleet then when you're there in Bahrain?

The President. My message is, thanks for serving the United States of America; we're proud of you. And my message today to the Iranians is, they shouldn't have done what they did.

Roger [Roger Runningen, Bloomberg News].

National Economy/Housing Market

Q. Yes, Mr. President. The index of people buying used homes fell more than expected in a report that came out today. And Secretary Paulson says that the housing really has not yet reached bottom. Does that nudge you further towards some sort of economic stimulus package?

The President. Well, you know, I'm optimistic about the economy. I'm optimistic because I've seen this economy go through periods of uncertainty. I mean, in the 7 years

that I've been the President, we've had a recession, corporate scandals, the 9/11 attack, major national disasters, two wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. All that created was uncertainty, each one of those incidences, and we've been able to come through it because we've been resilient.

And as I said yesterday and a couple of days earlier than that, I am—I like the fundamentals; they look strong, but there are new signals that should cause concern. And one of the signals is the fact that the housing market is soft, and it's going to take awhile to work through the downturn. The number you just reflected is an indication of softness.

And so what can you do about it? Well, one thing we can do about it is to help people who are creditworthy stay in their homes. And that's why Secretary Paulson and Secretary Jackson have put together what's called a HOPE NOW project, all aiming to get lenders and borrowers and investors and counselors together to help people find out how to renegotiate a loan and then get it done.

As I told the people yesterday in Chicago, in the old days, you'd walk in and borrow your—borrow the money to buy a home, and then if you got in a bind, you'd go back to the loan officer. Well, what happens in these days is, you'll borrow the money, and all of a sudden, that loan is sold somewhere else, and you're not sure who to negotiate with. And so it's a much more complex world for many homeowners, and we're helping them, as best as we possibly can, find out how to renegotiate the home so they can stay in.

Secondly, the Congress needs to pass the Federal Housing Administration reform act so that we can get more people better refinancing to stay in their home. There's some practical things that can be done. And so I'm—we're watching very carefully, and we're listening to different ideas about what may or may not need to happen. And it's—we'll work through this. We'll work through this period of time. And the entrepreneurial spirit is strong. And, any rate—yes.

Taxes

Q. Thoughts about a tax cut?

The President. Pardon me?

Q. Thoughts about a tax cut?

The President. Well, I can tell you something about taxes. Congress doesn't need to raise taxes, for starters. I know a bunch of them up there would like to. They'd like to get a little more money out of the people's pocket. But in times of uncertainty, you don't need to be raising taxes.

Secondly, in times of uncertainty, it seems like Congress ought to be sending a message that we're not going to raise your taxes in the next 3 years by making the tax cuts permanent. And beyond that, we'll look at all different options.

Listen, thank you. I'm looking forward to going on the trip. I hope people are coming. Does any of you get to come with me? That's too bad. [*Laughter*]

Well, here's what we're going to do. We're going to go over and stress three themes. First theme is, is that it's important to lay out a vision in order for there to be a Palestinian state once roadmap obligations are met. What has to happen in order for there to be a peaceful settlement of a longstanding dispute is there to be a outlines of a state clearly defined so that at some point in time, the Palestinians who agree that Israel ought to be—exist and agree that a state ought to live side by side with Israel in peace have something to be for. They need to have a vision that's clearly defined that competes with the terrorists and the killers who murder the innocent people to stop the advance of democracy.

Secondly, I intend to work with our Arab friends and allies on this very issue, and remind them about, one, the strategy; and two, the obligations they have to help this vision become a reality; and thirdly, remind our friends and allies that the United States is committed to security in the region.

One of the problems we have is that the intelligence report on Iran sent a mixed signal. And I'm going to remind them what I said in that press conference when I sat there and answered some of your questions: Iran was a threat; Iran is a threat; and Iran will continue to be a threat if they are allowed to learn how to enrich uranium.

And so I'm looking forward to making it clear that the United States of America sees clearly the threats of this world, and we intend to work with our friends and allies to

make the—that part of the world more secure.

Thank you all very much. See you when I get back.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:12 p.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Gen. David H. Petraeus, USA, commanding general, Multi-National Force—Iraq; Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki of Iraq; Kristin Hagerstrom, team leader, Ramadi Embedded Provincial Reconstruction Team; John Jones, team leader, Diyala Provincial Reconstruction Team; John Smith, team leader, Embedded Provincial Reconstruction Team, Baghdad 7; and Riyadh Samarrai, leader of the Adhamiya Awakening group, who was killed by a suicide bomber in Baghdad on January 8.

Statement on Efforts To Achieve Lasting Peace in Sudan

January 8, 2008

Tomorrow marks the third anniversary of the signing of the comprehensive peace agreement in Sudan, which ended 21 years of civil war in that country. I am proud of the role the United States played in achieving that historic result. I remain committed to assisting both sides with the rigorous and complete implementation of all aspects of the agreement. While much progress has been made in forming a Government of National Unity, sharing wealth, and respecting a cessation of hostilities, many challenges remain to the agreement's full implementation. Every effort should be made to ensure that a nationwide census is immediately conducted to allow national elections to be held on time next year. The work of Sudan's border commission also must be reinvigorated, along with efforts to redeploy troops away from disputed border areas to reduce the chances of a return to violence. The comprehensive peace agreement laid the groundwork for lasting peace and unity for all of Sudan, and its vigorous application will continue to underpin U.S. involvement across Sudan.

I have asked my new Special Envoy for Sudan, Ambassador Richard Williamson, to continue the United States strong involvement on north-south issues to help find solutions to these challenges. Ambassador Williamson is also charged with advancing efforts to end the violence in Darfur. I am deeply troubled that innocent civilians continue to fall victim to the scourge of Government and rebel-led attacks in Darfur. I remain firmly committed to the rapid deployment of an effective peacekeeping force, coupled with serious political dialog between the parties, to help end the crisis and the suffering of the innocent people of Darfur.

Remarks at a Welcoming Ceremony in Tel Aviv, Israel

January 9, 2008

President Peres and Prime Minister Olmert, I thank you for your warm welcome. You know, it's been nearly a decade since I've been in Israel, and I've really been looking forward to coming back. Truth of the matter is, when I was here last time, I really didn't think I'd be coming back as President of the United States. But I knew I'd come back because Israel is a special place. And it's a great honor to make my first visit as the President of the United States. Thank you all for coming out to welcome me.

My one regret is that my wife isn't traveling today. Laura is back home in Washington, but she sends her very best regards to both of you all and to the people of Israel.

The United States and Israel are strong allies. The source of that strength is a shared belief in the power of human freedom. Our people have built two great democracies under difficult circumstances. We built free economies to unleash the potential of our people. And the alliance between our two nations helps guarantee Israel's security as a Jewish state.

Each of our nations must guard against terror. We must firmly resist those who murder the innocent to achieve their political objectives. We must recognize that the great ideology based upon liberty is hopeful. In working the lines here, one of the religious leaders said, "Remember, Mr. President, justice and love." Justice and love is based upon a society that welcomes human rights and human dignity, a society which recognizes the universality of freedom. And that's what we stand for today. We will do more than

defend ourselves. We seek lasting peace. We see a new opportunity for peace here in the Holy Land and for freedom across the region.

I look forward to my meetings with President Peres and Prime Minister Olmert. We will discuss our deep desire for security, for freedom, and for peace throughout the Middle East. I want to thank the people of Israel for their friendship and hospitality, and I appreciate the opportunity to visit your beautiful country once again. God bless.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:23 p.m. at the Ben Gurion International Airport.

Remarks Following a Meeting With President Shimon Peres of Israel in Jerusalem, Israel

January 9, 2008

President Peres. Mr. President, distinguished guests: As the President of the state, I am delighted to speak on behalf of our people. I want to tell you in simple language, you came to a land and a people that loves deeply the United States of America, and without any reservation.

And also, may I say that I have the highest respect for you and the highest regard, because, speaking as a politician, you have introduced character in politics. It's a great contribution to politics—character, courage, vision. And I'm thinking about the last few years, you did really three things of importance: your address in 2002, which for the first time established the basis for a solution and the basis for a consensus in the Arab countries and the rest of—the two-state solution.

Then you and the Secretary worked very hard in Annapolis, in spite of all the skeptics around. Finally, Annapolis gave us one thing, at least: a year to work and make progress. And time is so precious. Dare I say that, firstly, I believe it won't be the last year, but it may be the best year for peace. God knows what can happen later on; we'll have to take it extremely seriously.

And I also believe that the process may be slow, but the progress can be sweet. The process will be slow because negotiations by character calls for time between the opening positions and the fallback positions. You argue. You argue; you have to wait for them. But in the meantime, you can build a support for the negotiation that can make it realistic, tangible. I'm referring to economy; it can raise the standard of the life of the people. That will help immensely the Arabs, the Palestinians, Abu Mazen, nothing more than an economic—[*inaudible*]—advance, and also the security arrangements, which are also possible.

About the economy, may I say, it can be done very quickly because things are ready, and that will have the most profound impact upon all people around. And I would like to add also that while the political side is controversial in our country, economic is a win-win situation. It is accepted by the whole Parliament; it is accepted by the Arabs; it is accepted by you and the Europeans. And you can really build a constructive coalition with the Europeans on that issue under your leadership.

We take your visit not as a ceremonial occasion—very powerful—but a third opening after the two states, after the year of Annapolis, and now the year to implement the highest and the greatest hopes we have. It is in this spirit that I welcome you so much.

President Bush. Thank you. Mr. President, thank you for your kind words about me. I'm just following your example. [*Laughter*]

President Peres. Be careful. [*Laughter*]

Q. Ten years to follow.

President Bush. I wouldn't say that. [*Laughter*]

You're well-known in my country, and you're well-respected. And so I bring the respect of America not only to you but to the people of Israel. Secondly, I come as an optimistic person and a realistic person—realistic in my understanding that it's vital for the world to fight terrorists, to confront those who would murder the innocent to achieve political objectives. We've been called to this task in the past. World War II was such a time, when the world was called to fight people who murdered the innocent to achieve a dark political vision.

Here in the 21st century, America knows firsthand, just like Israel knows firsthand, what it's like to confront those who would

murder innocent men, women, and children in order to achieve a political objective. And this war, Mr. President, goes on not only in this part of the world, but it goes on in Iraq, in Afghanistan, in Lebanon; it goes on in capitals in Europe. And we must be steadfast in confronting it.

Secondly, the best way to defeat an ideology of hate is with an ideology of hope. And so I come to Israel as a man who believes strongly in liberty and the power of democracy and freedom to be transformative. And your country has shown that to the world. Israel is a thriving democracy, and its politics can be rough sometimes, just like the politics of America can be rough.

President Peres. [*Inaudible*]—the Israeli. [*Laughter*]

President Bush. Yes. Well, we share a common vision, though, of peace. I come with high hopes. And the role of the United States will be to foster a vision of peace. The role of the Israeli leadership and the Palestinian leadership is going to do the hard work necessary to define a vision. And so I thank you for your hospitality. I've really been looking forward to this trip, and it's such an honor to be in your presence, sir.

President Peres. Thank you very much. We met, actually, the first time in 1990——

President Bush. That's right.

President Peres. ——the young American President on his ship.

President Bush. That's exactly right.

President Peres. And since then, we are sailing.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:12 p.m. at the President's Residence. President Peres referred to Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice; and President Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) of the Palestinian Authority. A portion of these remarks could not be verified because the tape was incomplete.

The President's News Conference With Prime Minister Ehud Olmert of Israel in Jerusalem

January 9, 2008

Prime Minister Olmert. Good evening. I am proud and delighted to welcome President Bush to the Prime Minister's home in Jerusalem. We spent more than 2½ hours talking privately and with the delegations, and this was a very interesting and, I think, very important meeting, Mr. President.

I think your visit is timely and is very important to encourage the process that you and Secretary Rice helped start in Annapolis a few weeks ago, and that we, both sides, I believe, are very seriously trying to move forward with now in order to realize the vision of a two-state solution, a Palestinian state for the Palestinian people and the State of Israel, the homeland of the Jewish people and the Jewish state.

I want to thank you—this opportunity—for the friendship and the support for the security of the State of Israel that you have manifested for a long period of time, throughout your tenure as President of the United States of America. This last year, you decided to increase the annual support for the State of Israel for an overall package of $30 billion, which is remarkable and important and is very helpful for the future of the State of Israel.

We discussed regional issues and the bilateral relations between Israel and America and, naturally, of course, the progress that we envisage for the negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians. And I hope, Mr. President, that you felt through these talks that the Israeli team is absolutely committed to carry on these negotiations in a very serious manner, to deal with all the core issues that we need to deal in order to bring about an agreement that will have to be implemented, subject, of course, to the implementation of the roadmap, as we agreed with the Palestinians and as you have announced in Annapolis in the international meeting. That was a very important and encouraging meeting, with the participation of so many countries coming from the region and from all parts of the world.

We are dealing with serious security problems. Only today the terrorists were shooting many Qassam rockets on the southern part of Israel, and mortar shells and few of the rockets landed inside the city of Sderot. This is a serious problem. Israel does not tolerate and will not tolerate the continuation of these vicious attacks on uninvolved and innocent civilians living in our cities. And we made it clear to everyone that we'll take all the

necessary measures in order to reach out for those who are responsible for these attacks, and we will not hesitate to take all the necessary measures in order to stop them.

There will be no peace unless terror is stopped, and terror will have to be stopped everywhere. We made it clear to the Palestinians; they know it, and they understand that Gaza must be a part of the package and that as long as there will be terror from Gaza, it will be very, very hard to reach any peaceful understanding between us and the Palestinians.

Mr. President, I want to thank you for your visit, for your efforts, for your friendship, for the power that you used for good causes for this region and for the world. Welcome.

President Bush. Mr. Prime Minister, thank you. I view this as an historic moment. It's a historic opportunity, Mr. Prime Minister, first of all, to work together to deal with the security of Israel and the Palestinian people—a matter of fact, the security of people who just simply want to live in peace.

We're in conflict with radicals and extremists who are willing to murder innocent people to achieve a dark vision. And this is an historic opportunity for the world to fight that—to fight those terrorists. It's an historic opportunity to spread freedom as a great alternative to their ideology, as a society based upon human rights and human dignity, a society in which every man, woman, and child is free. And it's a historic opportunity to work for peace. And I want to thank you for being a partner in peace.

I believe that two democratic states, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace is in the best interests of America and the world. I believe it's in the long-term security interests of Israel and, I know, to provide a more hopeful society for the Palestinians. And that's why I articulated this vision early in my Presidency. And that's why I'm so pleased to have—to watch two leaders, you and President Abbas, work hard to achieve that vision.

It's in the interests of all of us that that vision come to be. I'm under no illusions; it's going to be hard work. I fully understand that there's going to be some painful political compromises. I fully understand that there's going to be some tough negotiations. And the role of the United States is to help in those negotiations.

It's essential that people understand America cannot dictate the terms of what a state will look like. The only way to have lasting peace, the only way for an agreement to mean anything, is for the two parties to come together and make the difficult choices. But we'll help, and we want to help. If it looks like there needs to be a little pressure, Mr. Prime Minister, you know me well enough to know I'll be more than willing to provide it. I will say the same thing to President Abbas tomorrow as well.

I come—you know, people in America say, well, do you really think these guys are serious? We've heard a lot of rhetoric in the past, a lot of grand proclamations. I wouldn't be standing here if I did not believe that you, Mr. Prime Minister, and President Abbas and your negotiators were serious. It is my considered judgment that people now understand the stakes and the opportunity. And our job, Mr. Prime Minister, is to help you seize that opportunity.

In the rest of my trip, I will be talking about the opportunity for Middle Eastern peace and remind people in the neighborhood that if they truly want to see two states living side by side in peace, they have an obligation, Arab leaders have an obligation to recognize Israel's important contribution to peace and stability in the Middle East and to encourage and support the Palestinians as they make tough choices. I'm an optimistic people—people say, do you think it's possible during your Presidency? And the answer is, I'm very hopeful and will work hard to that end.

We also talked about Iran. Iran is a threat to world peace. There was a recent intelligence report that came out that I think sent the signal to some that said, perhaps the United States does not view an Iran with a nuclear weapon as serious—as a serious problem. And I want to remind people, Mr. Prime Minister, what I said at the press conference when I discussed that National Intelligence Estimate. I said then that Iran was a threat; Iran is a threat; and Iran will be a threat if the international community does not come together and prevent that nation

from the development of the know-how to build a nuclear weapon.

A country which once had a secret program can easily restart a secret program. A country which can enrich for civilian purposes can easily transfer that knowledge to a military program. A country which has made statements that it's made about the security of our friend Israel is a country that needs to be taken seriously. And the international community must understand with clarity the threat that Iran provides to world peace.

And we will continue to work with European countries, Russia, and China as well as nations in this neighborhood to make it abundantly clear that—the threat that Iran poses for world peace.

So we've had a very constructive dialog, and I'm not surprised. This isn't the first time we've had a chance to visit. Every time we've had, I've come away impressed by your steadfast desire to not only protect your people but to implement a vision that will lead to peace in the long term. Thanks for having me.

Prime Minister Olmert. Thank you.

Iran

Q. [*Inaudible*]—Israel's finding about Iran are completely different than the NIE report. Given the duration and the unpopularity of the war in Iraq, there is a fear, a concern in Israel that your administration will not take the necessary action against Iran.

[*At this point, the reporter asked a question in Hebrew, and her remarks were translated by an interpreter as follows.*]

And the question to Prime Minister Olmert: Did you perhaps present to Mr. Bush positions that run counter to those of the Americans, and perhaps you are concerned that what he said now actually indicates that his hands are tied when it comes to Iran?

President Bush. [*Inaudible*]—what the NIE actually said. It said that, as far as the intelligence community could tell, at one time, the Iranians had a military—covert military program that was suspended in 2003 because of international pressure. My attitude is that a nontransparent country, a country which has yet to disclose what it was up to, could easily restart a program. The fact that they suspended the program is heartening in that the international community's response had worked. The fact that they had one is discouraging because they could restart it.

Secondly, there are three aspects to a weapons program. One is the capacity to have—enrich so that you can have the materials necessary to make a bomb. They're claiming they're enriching for civilian purposes. I believe that knowledge gained for civilian purposes could be transferred for military purposes. Therefore, our efforts are to stop them from enriching.

Secondly, the knowledge of how to convert any materials into a bomb—we don't know whether they have that knowledge or not. However, for the sake of peace, we ought to assume they do, and therefore, rally the world to convince others that they're a threat. Third, they've got missiles in which they can use to deliver the bomb. So no matter how you might have interpreted the NIE, I interpreted it to mean you better take the Iranians' threat seriously.

Secondly, I have always told the American people that I believe it's incumbent upon the American Presidents to solve problems diplomatically. And that's exactly what we're in the process of doing. I believe that pressure—economic pressure, financial sanctions—will cause the people inside of Iran to have to make a considered judgment about whether or not it makes sense for them to continue to enrich or face world isolation. The country is paying an economic price for its intransigence and its unwillingness to tell the truth.

The Iranian people—we have no qualm with the Iranian people. I'm sure Israel doesn't either. It's people with a proud history and a great tradition. But they are being misled by their Government. The actions of their Government are causing there to be isolation and economic stagnation. People went into office saying, we promise you this, and we promise you this economic benefit, but they're simply not being delivered. And so we'll continue to keep the pressure on the

Iranians, and I believe we can solve this problem diplomatically.

[*At this point, Prime Minister Olmert spoke in Hebrew, and his remarks were translated by an interpreter as follows.*]

Prime Minister Olmert. We had a very thorough discussion, which, of course, also covered the Iranian subject, as President Bush said. And we discussed all aspects of this issue, and of course, it goes without saying that we shared with one another what we know and what we—what the Americans know when it comes to this topic. And without my sharing with you right now all of the details, of course, despite the natural curiosity, which I appreciate, I believe that what has just been said now by the President of the United States is particularly important. The President of the largest power in the world, the most important power in the world, is standing right here, and he has said in no uncertain terms that Iran was a threat and remains a threat.

And the fact that it has certain technological capacities is a fact. And through this, it is capable of realizing that potential and creating nuclear weapons. And considering the nature of the Government there and the type of threats that they are voicing, one cannot possibly disregard that power, and we must do everything possible to thwart them.

Of course, the United States will decide for itself just what steps to take. I can only say one thing, namely, my impression based on this conversation as well as previous talks that we had—and we talk quite frequently, apart from the face-to-face meetings—my impression is that we have here a leader who is exceptionally determined, exceptionally loyal to the principles in which he believes. He has proven this throughout his term in office in his preparedness to take exceptional measures in order to defend the principles in which he believes and in his deep commitment to the security of the State of Israel.

Inasmuch as I could sum up all of these impressions this evening, I would say that I certainly am encouraged and reinforced having heard the position of the United States under the leadership of George Bush, particularly on this subject.

Press Secretary Dana Perino. Anne Gearan of the Associated Press, please.

Middle East Peace Process

Q. Mr. President, are you disappointed that the Israelis and the Palestinians haven't made more specific progress since Annapolis? And is it maybe time for you to apply some of that direct pressure you referred to earlier?

And for the Prime Minister, did you offer any new assurances to the President—or do you plan to—that Israel will stop disputed settlement and construction activity?

President Bush. Step one of any complicated process that is going to require a lot of hard work and serious dialog is whether the mindset is right. It's one thing for somebody to say to the President, sure, we're for a two state, just to make the President feel okay. That's not the case here. The fundamental questions that I was seeking at Annapolis and on my return trip is the understanding about the power of what a vision will do for peace.

You know, one of the concerns I had was that—whether it be the unprovoked rocket attacks or the issues of settlement, that the leaders would be so bogged down in the moment that they would lose sight of the potential for a historic agreement. And I've come away with the belief that while those issues are important and certainly create consternation amongst the respective constituencies, that both leaders are determined to make the hard choices necessary.

Now, implicit in your question is whether or not the President should butt in and actually dictate the end result of the agreement. In my judgment, that would cause there to be a nonlasting agreement. In my judgment, the only way for there to be a vision that means something is for the parties to seriously negotiate that vision. If you're asking me, am I nudging them forward—well, my trip was a pretty significant nudge, because yesterday they had a meeting.

And by the way, the atmosphere in America was, nothing is going to happen, see. That these issues are too big on the ground; therefore, you two can't get together and come up with any agreements. You just heard the man talk about their desire to deal with core

issues, which I guess for the uneducated on the issue, that means dealing with the issues like territory and right of return and Jerusalem. Those are tough issues—the issue of Israeli security. And they're going to sit down at the table and discuss those issues in seriousness.

And I've been briefed today from the Israeli perspective of those discussions. Tomorrow I'll be briefed by the Palestinians about their interpretation.

Now, there's three tracks going on, by the way, during this process. One is the vision track. Let me just make sure everybody understands—in our delegation—the goal. The goal is for there to be a clear vision of what a state would look like so that, for example, reasonable Palestinian leadership can say, here's your choice: You can have the vision of Hamas, which is dangerous and will lead to war and violence, or you can have the vision of a state, which should be hopeful.

The second track is to help both parties deal with roadmap issues. Settlements is a roadmap issue; security is a roadmap issue, in a certain limited sense. Third issue is to help the Palestinians, one, organize their security forces so that they can better assure their own people and, equally importantly, better assure Israel that they can deal with the extremists in their midst. That's what General Dayton is doing here, for example. Or an economic track—listen, the best way to make sure that the Palestinians realize there's a hopeful future in which it's in their interests to live at peace with Israel is for them to realize that they've got an economy in which they can make a living. And Tony Blair is helpful on that, and so is America.

And so you're watching three tracks parallel each other. And the one, of course, you're asking about is whether or not the leadership has got the willingness and the desire and the drive to design a state, compatible to both sides. And my answer is, yes, I think they will.

Prime Minister Olmert. I hope that I don't disappoint anyone, certainly not the President, because we talked at length, if I will say that the President didn't ask for me to make any commitments other than the ones that Israel made already with regard to the peace process and as I have spelled it out on many different occasions, including in Annapolis, which was a very, as I said, a very important event. The commitment of Israel is absolutely to carry on in this process in order to realize the vision of two states living side by side, as I said before.

Now, there are many issues. Settlement is one of the issues. We made clear our position. And I know that sometimes not everyone is happy with this position, but we are very sincere. And we were never trying to conceal any of these facts from anyone, starting with President Bush and Secretary Rice and, of course, our Palestinian partners.

They know that there is a moratorium on new settlements and the new expropriation of land in the Territories. But they also know, and we have made it clear, that Jerusalem, as far as we are concerned, is not in the same status. And they know that the population centers are not in the same status. And there might be things that will happen in the population centers or in Jerusalem which they may not be in love with, but we will discuss them, and we will not hide them. We are not going to build any new settlements or expropriate land in the Territories. We made it clear, and we will stand by our commitments. And we will fulfill all our commitments as part of the roadmap because this is an essential part for any progress that will have to take place in the future.

But there are some aspects only just realized which one can't ignore, and everyone knows that certain things in Jerusalem are not in the same tactical level as they are in other parts of the Territories which are outside the city of Jerusalem. And so it's true about some population centers. So there was nothing that happened that was not known in advance to all our partners in this process. We made clear our positions. We made clear exactly what we can do; what we can't do; what we want to do; and what we will not be able to do. And I think that they all know it, and they, at least even when sometimes they disagree with us, they at least respect our sincerity and openness about these issues.

Obligations of Middle East Peace Process Participants

Q. Mr. President, regarding the issues of rockets and settlements that you mentioned before, what should—what could Israel do regarding the ever-growing threat from Gaza? And regarding the settlements, did you get any new assurances from the Prime Minister regarding the removal of illegal outposts? Do you believe that this time it will be implemented? Do you care about it?

President Bush. Yes.

[*At this point, the reporter asked a question in Hebrew, and his remarks were translated by an interpreter as follows.*]

Q. Mr. Prime Minister, are you concerned that the core issues are going to be affected? Because as soon as Mr.—member of Knesset, Mr. Liberman, is going to withdraw from the coalition.

President Bush. As to the rockets, my first question is going to be to President Abbas: What do you intend to do about them? Because ultimately, in order for there to be the existence of a state, there has to be a firm commitment by a Palestinian Government to deal with extremists and terrorists who might be willing to use Palestinian Territory as a launching pad into Israel. So I'll be asking that question tomorrow. And what can we do to help you?

I believe that he knows it's not in his interests to have people launching rockets from a part of the Territory into Israel. A matter of fact, maybe the Prime Minister can comment on this in a while, in a second, but at least he's told me that he fully recognizes, in order for there to be a state, he cannot be a safe haven for terrorists that want to destroy Israel. You can't expect the Israelis, and I certainly don't, to accept a state on their border which would become a launching pad for terrorist activities. And that's why the vision of a democracy is an important vision.

How Israel deals with the rocket attacks, I would hope is done in a way that not only protects herself but worries about innocent life. And I'm convinced the Prime Minister does. He understands he has an obligation to protect Israel. He also understands that he's got to be circumspect and reasonable about how he does it so that innocent people don't suffer. He just gave you the answer on the settlements.

In terms of outposts, yes, they ought to go. Look, I mean, we've been talking about it for 4 years. The agreement was, get rid of outposts, illegal outposts, and they ought to go. And——

[*Prime Minister Olmert spoke in Hebrew, and his remarks were translated by an interpreter as follows.*]

Prime Minister Olmert. [*Inaudible*]—earlier, and I say once again—I think it's important to repeat this—Israel has commitments, and the Palestinians have commitments. We must abide by our commitments, and we shall do so. I do not want to use this as an excuse, as a pretext, and therefore, I say, we demand of the Palestinians that they uphold all of their commitments.

And some have not been upheld, not a single one, particularly the most important things that have to do with terrorism, that have to do with the security of the State of Israel—not only in Gaza. The fact that we, over the past year, have had fewer casualties from terrorism than in any year of the recent years previously is not because the Palestinians have made fewer attempts, but because we have been more successful, in a very sophisticated and courageous way, of our general security service and our IDF in preventing these terrorist acts.

I'm not using this as a pretext. I'm saying, we must uphold our commitment. I believe that the President has said this fairly and appropriately. We have made commitments; we should uphold them; and we shall. But let us present a balanced picture. By the same token, we will not refrain from demanding and insisting that the Palestinians abide by all of their commitments. And their commitments when it comes to terrorism are the central key, the pivot to bringing this negotiation process to a successful conclusion. And I hope it will happen this year, as all of us hope.

I very much sincerely hope that all of those in the coalition will remain in the coalition as full partners, and I would certainly not like to have a political crisis. I don't think

that anyone who is responsible—has a responsibility such as I have would like to see any kind of an undermining of the stability of this Government. It is a stable Government, a Government that has been operating in many different directions, with very impressive achievements, which the party of Avigdor Liberman, Yisrael Beitenu, is part of this effort, part of these achievements; whether it's in the economic field or the political one or when it comes to security or the deterrence ability of the State of Israel.

And everyone knows that this Government has had some very impressive achievements on its record over the past year. And Liberman's party was certainly a partner in this process, and I'd like them to stay part of the process. I think that the gap between us is smaller than it appears, and I will do everything within my power to ensure that the coalition remains stable. The State of Israel must be part of a serious peace process. We cannot forego this; we cannot obscure it; we must not delay it. It would be wrong to delay it.

Let me say something in Hebrew—since I know that the President does not speak Hebrew, I'll say it in Hebrew because, after all, you know, you're not supposed to praise people in their presence, so I'll say it in Hebrew. Well, then, what I'd like to say is, thank God I can conduct political negotiations with George Bush at my side as one of my partners. Thank God we can conduct political negotiations when the largest and most important power in the world, and the most important for us, is headed by such an important friend of Israel.

We have no interest in delaying matters. We don't want to procrastinate with the negotiations, lest changes for the worse take place on the Palestinian front. And we certainly don't want to delay the negotiation process when we have such political assistance, assistance with respect to our security too, when it comes to the most important power in the world, being led by a person who is so deeply committed to the security of the State of Israel and to realizing the vision of two states; a person who is fair, who does not hide his viewpoints, who speaks openly about his will to establish a Palestinian state alongside Israel, a state that will be secure not at the expense of the interests of the State of Israel.

I believe that any responsible political leader in the State of Israel will understand that this is a moment that must not be missed. This is an opportunity that must not be passed up. We must do everything we can—okay, we can have occasional internal arguments. The President has said that some very difficult decisions must be made. He is right, but I am not afraid of difficult decisions. I am willing to contend with difficult decisions. I am willing to make decisions that will entail painful compromises, so long as they enable us to reach the goal that we have dreamt of for so long, to secure ourselves—to ensure ourselves of security and to give the Palestinians the state of their own that will be vibrant, democratic, open, and living in peace alongside Israel.

At the head of our negotiating team is the Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister. She bears a very heavy responsibility. We work in full cooperation, and I am convinced that she will wisely succeed, together with Abu Ala, head of the Palestinian team, in navigating through these negotiations in such a manner that the vital interests of the State of Israel are served well on the basis of a deep understanding.

President Bush. The interpreter got it right. [*Laughter*] Thank you.

Prime Minister Olmert. Thank you, Mr. President.

President Bush. Yes, Toby [Tabassum Zakaria, Reuters].

Strait of Hormuz Naval Incident

Q. Mr. President, what is the United States prepared—what action is the United States prepared to take if there is another confrontation with Iranian ships in the Strait of Hormuz? Your National Security Adviser this morning spoke about consequences if there was a repeat.

And Mr. Prime Minister, why is there no three-way meeting scheduled on this trip?

President Bush. The National Security Adviser was making it abundantly clear that all options are on the table to protect our assets.

She's referring to, Mr. Prime Minister, the fact that our ships were moving along very

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

the Holy Land. We've had very good meetings, and now is the time to make difficult choices.

I underscored to both Prime Minister Olmert and President Abbas that progress needs to be made on four parallel tracks. First, both sides need to fulfill their commitments under the roadmap. Second, the Palestinians need to build their economy and their political and security institutions. And to do that, they need the help of Israel, the region, and the international community. Third, I reiterate my appreciation for the Arab League peace initiative, and I call upon the Arab countries to reach out to Israel, a step that is long overdue.

In addition to these three tracks, both sides are getting down to the business of negotiating. I called upon both leaders to make sure their teams negotiate seriously, starting right now. I strongly supported the decision of the two leaders to continue their regular summit meetings, because they are the ones who can and must and, I am convinced, will lead.

I share with these two leaders the vision of two democratic states, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security. Both of these leaders believe that the outcome is in the interest of their peoples and are determined to arrive at a negotiated solution to achieve it.

The point of departure for permanent status negotiations to realize this vision seems clear. There should be an end to the occupation that began in 1967. The agreement must establish Palestine as a homeland for the Palestinian people, just as Israel is a homeland for the Jewish people. These negotiations must ensure that Israel has secure, recognized, and defensible borders. And they must ensure that the state of Palestine is viable, contiguous, sovereign, and independent.

It is vital that each side understands that satisfying the other's fundamental objectives is key to a successful agreement. Security for Israel and viability for the Palestinian state are in the mutual interests of both parties.

Achieving an agreement will require painful political concessions by both sides. While territory is an issue for both parties to decide, I believe that any peace agreement between them will require mutually agreed adjustments to the armistice lines of 1949 to reflect current realities and to ensure that the Palestinian state is viable and contiguous. I believe we need to look to the establishment of a Palestinian state and new international mechanisms, including compensation, to resolve the refugee issue.

I reaffirm to each leader that implementation of any agreement is subject to implementation of the roadmap. Neither party should undertake any activity that contravenes roadmap obligations or prejudices the final status negotiations. On the Israeli side, that includes ending settlement expansion and removing unauthorized outposts. On the Palestinian side, that includes confronting terrorists and dismantling terrorist infrastructure.

I know Jerusalem is a tough issue. Both sides have deeply felt political and religious concerns. I fully understand that finding a solution to this issue will be one of the most difficult challenges on the road to peace, but that is the road we have chosen to walk.

Security is fundamental. No agreement and no Palestinian state will be born of terror. I reaffirm America's steadfast commitment to Israel's security.

The establishment of the state of Palestine is long overdue. The Palestinian people deserve it, and it will enhance the stability of the region, and it will contribute to the security of the people of Israel. The peace agreement should happen and can happen by the end of this year. I know each leader shares that important goal, and I am committed to doing all I can to achieve it.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:27 p.m. at the King David Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Prime Minister Ehud Olmert of Israel; and President Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) of the Palestinian Authority.

Remarks During a Visit to Yad Vashem in Jerusalem

January 11, 2008

Mr. President and Mr. Prime Minister, thank you for your wonderful hospitality. I would hope as many people in the world

would come to this place, it would be a sobering reminder that evil exists and a call that when we find evil, we must resist it. It also is a—I guess I came away with this impression, that I was most impressed that people, in the face of horror and evil, would not forsake their God, and in the face of unspeakable crimes against humanity, brave souls, young and old, stood strong for what they believe.

It's an honor to be here. It is a moving experience, and it is a living memory that is important. Thank you, sir.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:43 a.m. In his remarks, he referred to President Shimon Peres and Prime Minister Ehud Olmert of Israel; and Avner Shalev, chairman, Yad Vashem Directorate.

Digest of Other White House Announcements

The following list includes the President's public schedule and other items of general interest announced by the Office of the Press Secretary and not included elsewhere in this issue.

January 5

In the morning, the President had an intelligence briefing.

January 7

In the morning, the President had an intelligence briefing. Later, he traveled to Chicago, IL, where he visited Horace Greeley Elementary School. Then, at the Union League Club of Chicago, he had lunch with business and community leaders.

In the afternoon, the President returned to Washington, DC.

January 8

In the morning, the President had an intelligence briefing.

In the afternoon, in the Old Family Dining Room, the President had lunch with President Abdullah Gul of Turkey.

In the evening, the President traveled to Tel Aviv, Israel, arriving the following morning.

The President declared a major disaster in Nevada and ordered Federal aid to supplement State and local recovery efforts in the area struck by severe winter storms and flooding beginning on January 5 and continuing.

January 9

In the morning, aboard Air Force One, the President had an intelligence briefing.

In the afternoon, the President traveled to the King David Hotel in Jerusalem, Israel. Later, he traveled to the President's Residence, where he and President Shimon Peres of Israel attended cultural performances. He then traveled to the Prime Minister's Residence, where he met with Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Tzipora "Tzipi" Livni, and Minister of Defense Ehud Barak of Israel.

In the evening, the President returned to the King David Hotel.

January 10

In the morning, the President had an intelligence briefing. Later, he met with Opposition Leader Benjamin "Bebe" Netanyahu of Israel. He then met with the family of former Prime Minister Ariel Sharon of Israel.

Later in the morning, the President traveled to Ramallah, Palestinian Territories, where, at the Muqata, he participated in a greeting with President Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) of the Palestinian Authority. Later, in the President's Small Conference Room of the Muqata, the President met with Prime Minister Salam Fayyad of the Palestinian Authority.

In the afternoon, in the President's Dining Room of the Muqata, the President had a working lunch with President Abbas. Later, he met with Quartet Representative in the Middle East Tony Blair. He then traveled to Bethlehem, Palestinian Territories, where he visited the Church of St. Catherine of Alexandria at the Basilica of the Nativity.

Later in the afternoon, the President returned to the King David Hotel in Jerusalem, Israel, where he met with U.S. Embassy personnel and their families.

In the evening, the President traveled to the Prime Minister's Residence, where, in

the Dining Room, he had a working dinner with Prime Minister Ehud Olmert of Israel. Later, he returned to the King David Hotel.

The President announced the designation of the following individuals as members of a Presidential delegation to attend the inauguration of Alvaro Colom Caballeros as President of Guatemala in Guatemala City on January 14: Michael O. Leavitt (head of delegation); James M. Derham; Rob Mosbacher; Sara Martinez Tucker; and Christopher A. Padilla.

The President announced his intention to nominate William J. Brennan to be Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere.

The President announced his intention to nominate J. Gregory Copeland to be General Counsel of the Department of Energy.

The President announced his intention to nominate Dorla M. Salling to be a member of the U.S. Parole Commission.

The President announced his intention to nominate Kurt D. Volker to be U.S. Permanent Representative on the Council of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, with the rank and status of Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary.

January 11

In the morning, the President had an intelligence briefing. Later, he met with Quartet Representative in the Middle East Tony Blair. He then visited the Yad Vashem, the Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Authority, where he rekindled the Eternal Flame and participated in a wreath-laying ceremony.

Later in the morning, the President traveled to Galilee, Israel, where he toured the Capernaum archaeological ruins. He then visited the Mount of the Beatitudes chapel.

In the afternoon, the President traveled to Tel Aviv, Israel. He then traveled to Kuwait City, Kuwait, where, upon arrival at the Kuwait International Airport, he participated in an arrival ceremony with Amir Sabah al-Ahmad al-Jabir al-Sabah of Kuwait. Later, he traveled to the Bayan Palace Guest House.

In the evening, the President traveled to Dar Salwa Palace, where he participated in a greeting with Amir Sabah. Then, in the Dining Room, he had dinner with Amir Sabah. Later, he returned to the Bayan Palace Guest House.

The President declared a major disaster in Nebraska and ordered Federal aid to supplement State and local recovery efforts in the area struck by a severe winter storm from December 10–12.

Nominations Submitted to the Senate

NOTE: No nominations were submitted to the Senate during the period covered by this issue.

Checklist of White House Press Releases

The following list contains releases of the Office of the Press Secretary that are neither printed as items nor covered by entries in the Digest of Other White House Announcements.

Released January 7

Transcript of a press gaggle by Deputy Press Secretary Tony Fratto and Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings

Fact sheet: Six Years of Student Achievement Under No Child Left Behind

Released January 8

Transcript of a press gaggle by Press Secretary Dana Perino

Transcript of a background briefing by a senior administration official on the President's meeting with President Gul of Turkey

Statement by the Press Secretary announcing that on January 7 the President signed H.R. 660, H.R. 3690, and S. 863, and on January 8 he signed H.R. 2640

Statement by the Press Secretary on disaster assistance to Nevada

Fact sheet: Helping Iraq Achieve Economic and Political Stabilization

Released January 9

Transcript of a press briefing by National Security Adviser Stephen J. Hadley and Press Secretary Dana Perino

Transcript of a press briefing by National Security Adviser Stephen J. Hadley

Released January 10

Transcript of a press briefing by National Security Adviser Stephen J. Hadley on the Middle East peace process

Released January 11

Transcript of a press gaggle by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice

Statement by the Press Secretary on the selection of C. Boyden Gray as Special Envoy for European Union Affairs

Statement by the Press Secretary on disaster assistance to Nebraska

Acts Approved by the President

Approved January 7

H.R. 660 / Public Law 110–177
Court Security Improvement Act of 2007

H.R. 3690 / Public Law 110–178
U.S. Capitol Police and Library of Congress Police Merger Implementation Act of 2007

S. 863 / Public Law 110–179
Emergency and Disaster Assistance Fraud Penalty Enhancement Act of 2007

Approved January 8

H.R. 2640 / Public Law 110–180
NICS Improvement Amendments Act of 2007