

moving hard to help. I'll be in touch with the Governors to offer all the Federal assistance we can.

This Mother's Day weekend was awfully special for Laura and me. Our little girl Jenna married a really good guy, Henry Hager. The wedding was spectacular. It's just—it's all we could have hoped for. The weather was—cooperated nicely, and just as the vows were exchanged, the sun set over our lake. And it was just a special day and a wonderful day, and we're mighty blessed.

Anyway, thank you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:52 a.m. at Texas State Technical College. In his remarks, he referred to Gov. Brad Henry of Oklahoma; Gov. Matt Blunt of Missouri; and Gov. Sonny Perdue of Georgia.

### Interview With Nadia Bilbassy Charters of Al Arabiya Television

May 12, 2008

**Ms. Bilbassy Charters.** Mr. President, thank you very much for your time, sir.

**The President.** I am honored to be with you again. Thank you.

#### *Situation in Lebanon*

**Ms. Bilbassy Charters.** Thank you. And of course, we're going to focus on Lebanon. You have been a strong supporter of Prime Minister Siniora. Yet when he came under attack, he seems to be abandoned—not the U.S. and not the U.N., not Arab countries came to his aid. How do you explain that?

**The President.** Well, I don't think it's an accurate description that the United States hasn't stayed in contact with him, has listened to him, has listened to his requests. I mean, we're in contact with him a lot. And the reason why is because I personally admire Prime Minister Siniora, and the Lebanese democracy is essential to a peaceful Middle East in many ways. And so we're—we will help him. We will help him particularly and primarily through strengthening his armed forces, the Lebanese Armed Forces. It's probably the most practical way that we can get some help to him quickly.

**Ms. Bilbassy Charters.** Just to follow up on that, during the fight with Fatah al-Islam,

you have helped the Lebanese Army, but in this particular case, it doesn't seem to be coming. So what—can you just give us some details—

**The President.** Yes, we probably got some more work to do, Nadia. I mean, we've got—it's interesting, the situation has evolved from one where Hizballah supposedly was protecting the Lebanese people from Israel; now we're going to need—inherent in your question is a desire for the Lebanese Armed Forces to protect the Lebanese people from Hizballah. And the roles are seemingly reversed. And so Condi, in particular, has been in touch—Condi Rice has been in touch with the Prime Minister a lot to assess needs and to help and see how we can help.

#### *Safety of Lebanese Leaders*

**Ms. Bilbassy Charters.** Three of your closest allies, which is Saad al-Hariri, Walid Jumblatt, and Prime Minister Siniora, are under siege. They're under house arrest. Is this any guarantee that you—their life or—is safe or that they're not going to be attacked? And if they are attacked, what the United States can do?

**The President.** Well, we're constantly looking at options, of course. And we're monitoring the situation very closely by staying in touch with these leaders, particularly Prime Minister Siniora. And the best solution is for the Lebanese Armed Forces to be—is to be capable of protecting the leaders. And that's what we expect. And our Ambassador evidently was in with the Prime Minister when he gave instructions to the military to protect these leaders.

And the Lebanese Armed Force is pretty good. They're not great yet, but they're pretty good. And we want to make them better so that they can respond.

**Ms. Bilbassy Charters.** But you're confident that their safety is not going to be touched?

**The President.** I hope so. I'm not confident the—I was hopeful that Hizballah would become patriotic—patriots to Lebanon and not respond every time to Syrian or Iranian demands. And so we'll see what happens. As you know, there's been a lot of confusing stories coming out. But one thing

that we're concerned about is, obviously, the safety of our friends and leaders.

### **U.S. Troop Movements/Situation in Lebanon**

**Ms. Bilbassy Charters.** One other thing we have seen was the USS *Cole* has moved from the Suez Canal opposite the Lebanese shores. Is this just a show of force, or are they able to do something?

**The President.** Well, this is a part of a routine training mission that had been scheduled a long time before. Again, I repeat to you, the best way for us to help stabilize the situation and eventually allow this Lebanese democracy to go forward is, one, keep the pressure on Syria, and two, bolster the capabilities of the Lebanese Armed Forces so that they respond to the Government—and the Government says, okay, you need to go protect these people, or go take care of business here, they'll be able to do so.

### **Lebanese Armed Forces**

**Ms. Bilbassy Charters.** So you're satisfied with their role so far, the army?

**The President.** Satisfied with?

**Ms. Bilbassy Charters.** With the army.

**The President.** No, I'm not satisfied with the army, but I'm satisfied that, given their equipment, they've done a good job. And the question then is, can we help them get better equipment and better training in the short run? In other words, we want it to be better than today. I was satisfied with the earlier incursion that you talked about. I thought they handled themselves very well.

### **Meeting With Prime Minister Fuad Siniora of Lebanon/Situation in Lebanon**

**Ms. Bilbassy Charters.** You wanted to meet with Prime Minister Siniora in Sharm el-Sheikh, but he's under siege. How he's going to get out of Lebanon?

**The President.** Yes. I don't know; we'll see. I'd like to meet him. And we'll just have to deal with that when I get over there.

**Ms. Bilbassy Charters.** Is there any plans?

**The President.** No, I haven't—there may be; I just haven't talked to anybody about it today, Nadia. In terms of—you know, I'd love to see him. I think it would be a good

message if I could see him and stand with him, side by side, and say my—say the truth, which is, I admire his courage. And I think the Arab world needs to support him stronger, and I think the Arab world needs to make it clear to the Iranians and Syrians that—allow this good man to govern his country without interference.

### **Situation in the Middle East/Iran**

**Ms. Bilbassy Charters.** Sir, a former Israeli Army—[inaudible]—said that it's better if Hizballah is in control of Lebanon. It will make it easier for Israel to attack. Would you agree with this man?

**The President.** I'm a peace man. I think—I don't know who this guy is, and I haven't read about it, but I will tell you that I would much rather have the Siniora Government succeed and survive and that there be peaceful—a peaceful process. I think we ought to all work to prevent the necessity for armed conflict in order to solve problems. Obviously—look, I believe that using the military as a last option is important to keep on the table. But I would hope that we—through better policy that we would create the conditions—that we would not create the conditions that would enable another war inside Lebanon. These people have suffered too long.

**Ms. Bilbassy Charters.** I hope so.

**The President.** So have the Palestinians, by the way, and that's why I'm for a Palestinian state.

**Ms. Bilbassy Charters.** Well, we're going to follow up on the Palestinian issue in a minute, but do you see what's happening in Lebanon as a proxy war between Iran and the U.S., fought this time on Lebanese territory?

**The President.** I think that it's a part of a larger ideological struggle where people are willing to use agents of violence in order to achieve their political objectives. And so whether it be Lebanon, Iraq, or the Palestinian Territories, you're seeing this type of strategy play out, and a lot of it is fueled by Iran.

### **Syria/Iran**

**Ms. Bilbassy Charters.** What measures would you take to pressurize Syria or Iran

regarding the action of Hizballah in Lebanon?

**The President.** Well, we're taking pressures, as you know, through sanctions, which sometimes are effective, sometimes aren't. And what's very important during this period, Nadia, is to remind people of the truth and the realities on the ground, to encourage them to be more tough on implementing these U.N. Security Council resolutions.

And obviously, we're trying to solve problems diplomatically. I mean, it's important that we work with friends and allies to see if we can't convince the Iranians to stop funneling monies to these violent groups or to stop their enrichment—suspend their enrichment activities; or in Syria's case, to put financial pressure on them to adhere to the U.N. Security Council resolutions regarding Lebanon.

And we've been successful sometimes, as I mentioned, and sometimes we haven't, because sometimes commercial interests don't take the threats nearly as seriously as you do or I do. And so it's just a lot of work to keep the pressure. But to me, that's the best way to try to solve these problems, is through diplomacy.

**Ms. Bilbassy Charters.** So there is no selective military strike that could be considered?

**The President.** Well, there's always—as you know, there's always that option. I made it very clear during my Presidency that option is on the table. And of course—and I've also always said diplomacy is our first choice.

#### **Iran/Middle East Peace Process**

**Ms. Bilbassy Charters.** Some will say that Iran is establishing a foothold in the Mediterranean, whether it's happening in Lebanon now, and this issue of Gaza, to a certain extent, by Hamas. How would you, sir, kind of react to Iranian influence in the region?

**The President.** Well, it's clearly there. And the first thing is to tell the truth. That's why I'm glad you're asking me about this question, because I want people who are listening to understand that it's the Iranian influence that is creating problems for the Palestinians trying to have a state. I mean, isn't it interesting that there's a two-state solution

on the table that needs to be negotiated. I readily understand that, that you can negotiate the boundaries, negotiate the refugee issue, negotiate the other issues. But as those negotiations go forward, there are Iranian-backed groups trying to kill people to stop it, trying to create enough violence and confusion so that the peace talks don't go forward.

And it's just a clear example of why the Iranian influence needs to be dealt with. And the United States is very much involved with doing that through, for example, success in Iraq. And we're trying to stand with our friend—not trying—we are standing with our friend Siniora. We're analyzing ways that we can continue to do so. And I'm going to the Middle East to talk very clearly about the Palestinian state and how I'd like to get it defined before I leave office. And I think we can. I think we can.

#### **United States-Israel-Palestinian Authority Meeting**

**Ms. Bilbassy Charters.** But the fact that you don't have a trilateral meeting between yourself, Abbas, and Olmert—

**The President.** I don't think—

**Ms. Bilbassy Charters.** —as some would say, it's like—

**The President.** Yes, I know, but don't read into that. I mean, it's—look, I think I can be plenty effective meeting with these leaders. And remember, Condi is over there meeting—the main negotiators, by the way, happen to be Tzipi and Abu Ala. And they're talking all the time, and we're trying to get their data, get to where they are, and bring it to the leadership level at times. And the leaders are meeting as well. So it's a very complicated process. And I don't think necessarily not having a trilateral meeting should be read as anything other than that it just didn't work out. It's not a sign that the talks aren't going forward.

**Ms. Bilbassy Charters.** My time is over. They give me the two x's. But can I—do I—can I—

**The President.** Yes, fire away. Of course you can.

### **Middle East Peace Process**

**Ms. Bilbassy Charters.** Okay. Thank you, sir. You know, I mean, some will say that you were the first President to call for a Palestinian state, yet people do not see a tangible results on the ground. You're going now in a very tough time. Prime Minister Olmert is facing corruption charges. You're celebrating 60 years of Israel independence; for the Palestinians, 60 years of misery. What can we offer tangibly, on the ground, to the Palestinians that will say, George Bush did this for us?

**The President.** No, I appreciate that very much. One is a security force that can respond to the—Prime Minister Fayyad's work and President Abbas's desires. I mean, it's—in other words, people want to see whether or not the state is capable of protecting them. And therefore, as this Palestinian force gets more capable, we expect the Israelis to move back, and move back to the point where the state can actually begin to function a little bit in the West Bank.

Secondly, economic development—I mean, people are wondering, okay, it's great; Bush shows up; he talks about a Palestinian state, but where are the tangible benefits? And so the idea of working these entrepreneurial programs or some of these programs that my friend Tony Blair is doing—who I will meet with, by the way, just to get a sense for how we can advance them.

But I fully understand your question. And your question is, all we hear is talk; when are we going to see action? Well, part of the plan is for people to see a better life. And the other part of the plan is for there to be a clearly defined state, so it's no longer just a two-state solution. It's, "here's what the borders will look like; here's how we're going to deal with the refugees; here's how we're going to deal with the different, complicated issues," so people could actually see and analyze, do I want this, or do I want what's happening in Gaza, for example. And given that choice, I'm confident, having met a lot of Palestinians and know the Palestinians fairly well, about how people just want peace. They want their children to grow up in peace, and they want to be able to make a living.

Look, the Palestinians are very entrepreneurial and—people. They know how to

make a good living, and that's all they want. And moms want their kids to go to schools—and without fear of violence and fear of poverty and fear of disease. And there—believe me, I understand that there needs to be a lot of work, but from my perspective, the definition—a clear definition of a state would be a major step forward of providing hope and a different vision, a different way forward.

**Ms. Bilbassy Charters.** So an agreement still can be reached by the time you leave office?

**The President.** Yes, I think so. That's what I'm aiming for, absolutely. We're pushing hard.

### **President's Upcoming Visit to the Middle East/Saudi Arabia**

**Ms. Bilbassy Charters.** Just on the Saudis—also, you're visiting Saudi Arabia to celebrate 75 years of—[inaudible]—nations.

**The President.** I am going to go to Saudi. See, I'm going to go to Israel, but I'm also going to two other important stops, which is Saudi Arabia as well as Egypt.

**Ms. Bilbassy Charters.** And what do you hope to achieve in your visit with the Saudis?

**The President.** Well, first of all, His Majesty—it's always a pleasure to be in his company. He's a dear friend of mine, and he's kindly invited me back to his farm, which is a great—it's an honor. And we'll talk about a lot of bilateral relations, visas, and different relations. And of course, he'll be very interested in a lot of other subjects too. He'll be interested in knowing about progress in the Palestinian issue. He'll be—

**Ms. Bilbassy Charters.** Iraq?

**The President.** Yes, Iraq. He'll be interested in Iran. He'll be interested in a lot of issues. And I'm looking forward to briefing him in person.

### **Price of Oil and Supply**

**Ms. Bilbassy Charters.** Right. And the price of oil, would you raise it with him?

**The President.** Yes. I mean, I raise it with him every time I see him. And it's gotten higher. And, yes, of course, I will. It's—the interesting thing for people to understand, though, is that there's not just—there's not a lot of excess capacity in the world now.

Demand has risen so fast relative to supply that it's very tight. And there is no easy solution. It took us awhile to get to where we are, and it's going to take us awhile to get out of where we are.

### ***The Presidency and the Middle East***

**Ms. Bilbassy Charters.** Finally, what would be your advice to the next President regarding the Middle East? How would you—

**The President.** Take the Middle East seriously because that's the center of—that's the place where people are—get so despondent and despair that they're willing to come and take lives of U.S. citizens.

On the other hand, be hopeful, because the Middle East is full of really decent, honorable people that want to live in peace. And use our influence to promote peace, whether it would be in Iraq, Lebanon, the Palestinian Territories, or elsewhere.

**Ms. Bilbassy Charters.** Thank you very much.

**The President.** Yes, ma'am.

**Ms. Bilbassy Charters.** Thank you for your time. Thank you.

NOTE: The interview was taped at 12:09 p.m. in the Map Room at the White House for later broadcast. In his remarks, the President referred to Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Tzipora "Tzipi" Livni of Israel; former Prime Minister Ahmed Qureia (Abu Ala), Prime Minister Salam Fayyad, and President Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) of the Palestinian Authority; Quartet Representative in the Middle East Tony Blair; and King Abdallah bin Abd al-Aziz Al Saud of Saudi Arabia. Ms. Bilbassy Charters referred to Parliament Members Saad Hariri and Walid Jumblatt of Lebanon; and Prime Minister Ehud Olmert of Israel.

### **Statement on the Earthquake in China**

*May 12, 2008*

I extend my condolences to those injured and to the families of the victims of today's earthquake in China's Sichuan Province. I am particularly saddened by the number of students and children affected by this tragedy. The thoughts and prayers of the American people are with the Chinese people, es-

pecially those directly affected. The United States stands ready to help in any way possible.

### **Statement on the Situation in Lebanon**

*May 12, 2008*

I strongly condemn Hizballah's recent efforts, and those of their foreign sponsors in Tehran and Damascus, to use violence and intimidation to bend the Government and people of Lebanon to their will. The United States will continue to firmly support the Government of Lebanon, led by Prime Minister Siniora, against this effort to undermine the hard-fought gains in sovereignty and independence the Lebanese people have made in recent years. The international community will not allow the Iranian and Syrian regimes, via their proxies, to return Lebanon to foreign domination and control. To ensure the safety and security of the people of Lebanon, the United States will continue its assistance to the Lebanese Armed Forces to ensure they are able to defend the Lebanese Government and safeguard its institutions.

It is critical that the international community come together to assist the Lebanese people in their hour of need. I plan to consult with regional leaders on my upcoming trip to the Middle East to coordinate efforts to support the Lebanese Government and implement U.N. Security Council Resolutions 1559 and 1701, among others, which seek to bolster Lebanon's sovereignty against external efforts at destabilization and interference. The Lebanese people have sacrificed much for the sake of their freedom, and the United States will continue to stand with them against this latest assault on their independence and security.

### **Interview With Jacob Eilon and Gil Tamari of Israel's Channel 10 TV**

*May 12, 2008*

**Q.** Mr. President, thank you for speaking with Channel 10.

**The President.** Yes, sir.