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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, especially 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.

Jenna Bush's Wedding

Q. First of all, congratulations on your daughter's wedding this weekend. [*Laughter*]

The President. Thank you. It was—as my Jewish friends tell me, there was *mazel tov*. And it was a beautiful experience. It was very emotional, and it was—to see your little girl marry a good guy. And Laura and I were thrilled.

Q. Made you proud?

The President. Yes, I was very proud of her. It was a wonderful time. And we did it on our ranch, which was—we didn't do it here in the White House because Jenna wanted a more low-key, kind of homey environment. And she loves the ranch, and so do we, so it was perfect. It was wonderful. Thanks for asking.

Q. Great. Now to business.

The President. Yes. [*Laughter*]

Middle East Peace Process

Q. Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert just said a couple days ago that he would resign if he was indicted with some new corruption charges. Does that change in any way your strategy on the peace process in the Middle East?

The President. No. The vision of the peace process still is the same. I have come to the conclusion that it is essential for Israel to have a Palestinian partner that is a democracy committed to peace. I fully understand not all Palestinians agree with that vision. But I also believe, over time, that when confronted with life in Gaza, what that's like, or life in a place where you can raise your child in peace, most of the Palestinians will choose peace, and that the best way to marginalize these radicals who murder the innocent to achieve their political objectives is through Palestinian democracy.

Q. And you can do that with Olmert and Abbas?

The President. Well, the Prime Minister's—as I understand it, the legal issue goes on, and I fully understand that and respect Israeli rule of law. I will just tell you, in my—I have great relations with the Prime Minister. I find him to be a frank man, an honest man, an open man, a guy easy to talk to, and somebody who has—understands the vision necessary for Israeli security.

And so we will continue working hard. And I do believe we can get a state defined by the end of my Presidency. A state won't exist until certain obligations are met by everybody, but to have it defined is very important.

Middle East Peace Process/Hamas

Q. So that's the goal? By the end of the year, a defined—what borders of a Palestinian state?

The President. Well, that and refugee issue as well as the other key security issues that are necessary for a state to come into being. But the roadmap has obligations for all parties. And so my goal is to get the state defined.

Look, I firmly believe that—first of all, I supported the Sharon move on Gaza and still think it was the right move; and that I supported the elections, because there needs to be clarity. Everybody's got to see the truth. And the truth is that Hamas can't deliver promised—promises for the Palestinian people. And the truth is, is that there's an opportunity now to offer a different vision from theirs. Their vision is, destroy Israel. How about a vision that says, we want to coexist with Israel so we can raise our children in peace?

Now, they—I'm sure people say, oh, Bush, man, he sounds hopelessly idealistic. But the truth of the matter is, in order for peace to secure, it's that kind of idealism that has got to prevail.

Iran

Q. Mr. President, you have said that the bombing of the Syrian/North Korean facility by Israel sent a message to Iran. What was the message? You are next?

The President. No, it's just that people are going to take care of their security needs. And the message to Iran is that your desire to have a nuclear weapon, coupled with your statements about the destruction of our close ally, has made it abundantly clear to everybody that we have got to work together to stop you from having a nuclear weapon.

I mean, to me, it's the single biggest threat to peace in the Middle East, is the Iranian regime, not only because of their desire to have the technologies to build a weapon—the technologies necessary to build a weapon,

but it's also to—their funding of Hizballah. Look what's happening in Lebanon now—a young democracy trying to survive. By the way, it's in Israel's interests that the Lebanese democracy survive.

Q. So what's going to stop them?

The President. Well, pressure, sanctions, diplomacy. All options are on the table. They're trying to destabilize the young Iraqi democracy. And what stops them there is when we catch them moving their weapons in, they're brought to justice. That's what stops them.

Israel/Iran

Q. Many Israelis think that the only thing that would stop them would be a military attack. Have you considered that?

The President. I've always told people that all options are on the table. I've also learned that in my 7½ years as President, it's probably best not to be talking about the specifics of any option.

Q. If Israel does that, would you understand?

The President. You're becoming very hypothetical in your questions. I fully understand Israel's concerns about Iran. That's going to be my message when I come to Israel, and that is that you need to be concerned about Iran, and you are concerned about Iran, and so are we. And part of our job is to—you know, look, we want to solve anything—I mean, stopping them enriching is—the first choice is to do it diplomatically, of course. And that's why we're working on the sanction regime, and that's why we're trying to affect their money flows.

But it's hard, because not everybody shares the same anxiety as Israel and the United States does. And—but it's a tough issue, and I fully understand it. And I will continue to pressure as best I can.

Jonathan Pollard Case

Q. Mr. President, did you get any official request to pardon Jonathan Pollard, and if yes, would you consider it? And do you know, many people in Israel think that the arrest of Ben-Ami Kadish in another spy case tended to influence you.

The President. We are constantly analyzing cases. There's been no change in the Government's attitude at this point.

Q. So——

The President. No change.

Q. But your—did you get such a request from Israel?

The President. Oh, yes, constantly.

Q. Constantly?

The President. Sure.

Q. So for our 60th birthday, any new——

The President. We'll analyze every request, but there's been no change of attitude.

Situation in the Middle East/Middle East Peace Process

Q. Mr. President, it took, like, 7 years before you got involved in the Middle East.

The President. No, that's not an accurate statement, please.

Q. Well, in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, maybe to be more accurate.

The President. No, that is an inaccurate statement too. But, anyway, go ahead. I will let you finish your question.

Q. Would you recommend the next President to start earlier?

The President. Look, I inherited—when I came in office, there was an intifada. It's hard in the middle of the intifada to be talking peace. I mean, you had people scrambling for their security. But I gave a speech in June 2002—remember, I was sworn in in 2001—which really helped define the two-state solution. It talked about who we would or not deal with. I've been—no, we've been very much engaged in terms of setting the conditions. Remember, the roadmap was done during my time. Anyway, no, we've been very much involved in the Middle East. It's a——

Q. And should the next President start early?

The President. Like me?

Q. You're not the next President.

The President. No, no, you mean, start it early like I did? Sure, yes——

Q. No. Okay——

The President. ——you can't help it. Look, this is the—one of the accomplishments—or one of the interesting things that's happened in this administration is we have

placed American foreign policy—a top priority of our foreign policy is squarely in the Middle East. We got Iraq; we got Lebanon; we got Iran; and of course, we got the Middle Eastern—the peace process between the Palestinians and Israelis, which frankly is moving down the road pretty good. And I hope during my time, before it's over, we get the vision defined. But it's—I think any American President is going to be committed to Israel's existence and understand the realities and threats in the Middle East.

President's Upcoming Visit to Israel

Q. Finally, Mr. President, you are coming to Israel for your second visit as President of the United States. What do you expect from this visit?

The President. I expect a chance to speak in the Knesset, which I'm excited about, and I'm thankful. And I'm looking forward to telling people that I fully understand the nature of the world, and that there are ideologues who murder innocent people to achieve their political objectives. And we must do—we must stand strong against those ideologues, and we must, on the one hand, be strong in our security measures, and on the other hand, offer a competing vision. And that's what I'm going to talk about.

It's a hopeful speech. It's an optimistic speech. And it's one that I hope assures Israel—Israelis that during the Bush administration and the subsequent administrations, they'll have a strong friend and ally in the United States of America.

Q. Mr. President, we wish you a pleasant trip to Israel. Thank you very much.

The President. I'm looking forward to it. Thank you, sir.

Q. Thank you very much for this interview.

The President. Yes, thanks. Good to see you guys.

NOTE: The interview was taped at 11:30 a.m. in the Map Room at the White House for later broadcast. In his remarks, the President referred to Henry Hager, husband of Jenna Bush; and former Prime Minister Ariel Sharon of Israel. The interviewers referred to President Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) of the Palestinian Authority; former civilian U.S. Navy intelligence analyst Jonathan Pollard, who was convicted of treason and espionage in 1987; and former civilian U.S. Army mechanical engineer Ben-Ami Kadish, who was arrested on April 22, 2008. The transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on May 13.

Interview With Mona Shazli of Egypt's Dream TV

May 12, 2008

Ms. Shazli. Mr. President, it's not an easy thing to interview the President of the most powerful state on—in the world. However, what is more difficult is to size down your questions to fit in the minutes.

The President. In the timeframe. [*Laughter*]

Egypt-U.S. Relations

Ms. Shazli. Yes. My first question is, people in Egypt, sometimes they get confused. On one hand, they hear the U.S. statements, speeches that stress on the long-lasting relationships with Egypt, the strategic importance of Egypt to the U.S. and to the Middle East, Egypt as the major player in the peace process. On the other hand, they could see indications that contradicts with this: U.S. depending on other parties in the region, your snatching visit to Sharm el-Sheikh last January, the partial cutting of the U.S. aid. How would you comment on that?

The President. Yes. I would comment this: That from my perspective, the Egyptian-U.S. relationship is a very important part of our Middle Eastern foreign policy, for these reasons: One, Egypt has got a proud history and a great tradition, and a lot of people look to Egypt for help.

Now, the United States can't solve a lot of problems on our own. Has to have allies be a part of it. And so on the Palestinian issue, for example, Egypt can be very constructive and has been constructive and helpful. Egypt has got a society that honors diversity and gives people a chance to realize their talents, like you. I mean, you're a very smart, capable professional woman who has showed the rest of the Middle East what's possible in the Middle East. And Egypt has been on the forefront of modernization. Egypt is a—strategically located.

And so our relationship is strong and good. We've had our differences—on elections, for