
President Bush Meets with His Majesty King Abdullah of Jordan

Oval Office

11:47 A.M. EST

PRESIDENT BUSH: His Majesty and I will take a couple of questions after opening statements.

Your Majesty, I value your friendship and I value your leadership. And I appreciate you coming back. America has got no stronger friend in the Middle East than Jordan. And we appreciate the -- we appreciate your firmness when it comes to dealing with terror and extremism. We appreciate the heart when it comes to people -- your heart when it comes to people who suffer.

We spent a lot of time talking about the Middle Eastern peace process. A couple of points I want to reiterate. One is that the United States is engaged and will remain engaged in helping convince the Prime Minister of Israel and President Abbas that now is the time to formulate a vision of what a state will look like.

And secondly, I assured His Majesty this is a major focus of my administration and that I would like to see that vision, the process that we have started in Annapolis, finished prior to my departure from the presidency. In other words, there is a -- people say, well, you always set -- you're hesitant to set timetables. But there happens to be a timetable as far as I'm concerned, and that is, I'm leaving office. And Secretary Rice is in the region today and she's -- she is making our views known, that we expect these leaders to step up and make hard decisions. And I told His Majesty I'm optimistic -- still as optimistic as I was after Annapolis.

And so we welcome you, sir, and thank you for your passion.

KING ABDULLAH: Thank you very much, Mr. President. It is obviously a great honor to be back here and to be with you. We tremendously appreciate the warm relationship and the great friendship between our two countries.

But as His Excellency the President just stated, we are very, very pleased with the continued commitment that the President has to solve the longest, most outstanding issue in the Middle East -- the Israeli-Palestinian process. And the words and discussions that we've had this morning will have, I think, a very great response back in our part of the world when I will go back and report to many of my colleagues the President's commitment to bringing a bright future to Israelis and Palestinians and to the whole area.

And we look forward to continuing to work with you, Mr. President, and many of us in the area, to finally achieve a peace that will set the Middle East in the right direction.

PRESIDENT BUSH: Thank you. A couple of questions apiece. Ben.

Q: Mr. President --

Q: Mr. President --

Q: -- as you have promised -- sorry.

Q: Thank you, Mr. President. Are you -- what are your thoughts about the fact that President Abbas has not resumed peace talks? Are you disappointed? And very quickly, sir, you said you're still as optimistic as you were after Annapolis -- what gives you that optimism?

PRESIDENT BUSH: I'm optimistic because I am absolutely convinced that Prime Minister Olmert and President Abbas understand that this is now a key moment in achieving peace. Both leaders are committed to a democracy -- two democracies living side by side in peace. Both leaders understand that there has to be a vision of what that state will look like. Both leaders fully understand that there has to -- you know, have to work out agreements on borders and right of return, and other issues.

Both leaders understand that a vision that respects people and promotes freedom stands in stark contrast to the extremists, who are willing to murder people to stop the advance of democracy and to, you know, dash the ambitions of the Palestinians.

I'm optimistic that they understand that. I understand the difficulties, but I also believe both leaders have -- when it -- ultimately will have the courage necessary to reach an agreement.

And my job as the President, and my administration's responsibilities, are to help them understand what is possible, and to keep them moving on a process. And so I'm optimistic; I am.

Q: Are you disappointed about the lack of resumption in peace talks?

THE PRESIDENT: This is a process that, you know, always has two steps forward and one step back. We just got to make sure that it's only one step back. Condi is out there in the region -- and sometimes, you know, there's matters going behind the scenes that aren't apparent in the public arena. And so yes, I'm optimistic. And we'll continue to work hard to help achieve the vision.

Step one is to convince the leaders it's necessary, and to help them define a vision so that a state can come into being after conditions are met. But a lot of Palestinians are probably -- are saying, we've heard this kind of rhetoric before -- show us what a state looks like. And I said a state has got to be continuous -- a contiguous territory; it can't look like Swiss cheese. You know, the Palestinians have got to understand that this is an option available for them, and it will stand in stark contrast to the vision of Hamas, which has been nothing more than violence and deprivation.

You want to call on somebody?

Q: Mr. President, as you mentioned, you know, as you approach the end of your term in office, you mentioned that you still feel that establishing the Palestinian state is still achievable.

What is the exact vision that you have, you know, with this short time left?

THE PRESIDENT: Sure, I appreciate it. First of all, 10 months is a long time. May seem short to you, but it's -- there's plenty of time to get a deal done.

Secondly, I have visited with the leaders, you know, on a one-on-one basis quite frequently, and I understand that it's -- this is a difficult subject. But I also feel very comfortable with the commitment they have made to try to work out subjects that have been difficult for other leaders to work out in the past.

The role of the United States -- we can't impose peace. We can help leaders come to agreement and come to the table and make hard decisions. We can help facilitate the bridging of gaps, if there are gaps. And that's exactly what our diplomacy is in the process of doing.

And by the way, there is -- and one of the reasons why His Majesty is so important in this process, as the other leaders in the Middle East, including my close friend, King Abdallah of Saudi Arabia and President Mubarak of Egypt, is that both these leaders are going to need the support of the Arab world in order to make tough decisions. But first it's up to them. And so I'm optimistic that they can conclude tough negotiations. And we'll try to facilitate that.

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END 12:00 P.M. EST