

For Immediate Release
Office of the Press Secretary
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President Holds Press Conference
Room 450
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Q I'm wondering, sir, what lesson you draw, though, from their efforts, how you think the war in Iraq may, at this point, have improved prospects for a Mideast peace? And whether you think you might sit in that diplomatic dental chair yourself this year?

THE PRESIDENT: I've been in the diplomatic dental chair for four years. This is an issue we talk about a lot, but it became apparent to me that peace would never happen so long as the – the interlocutor in the peace process was not really dedicated to peace, or dedicated to state.

I was at – look, I gave the speech June 24, 2002, in the Rose Garden that laid out the vision about how to achieve – at least from my point of view, how to achieve a peaceful solution, and something that I hope happens. But I'm realistic about how to achieve peace. And it starts with, my understanding, that there will never be peace until a true democratic state emerges in the Palestinian territory. And I'm hopeful right now because the Palestinians will begin to have elections, have – will have elections, which is the beginning of the process toward the development of a state. It is not the sign that democracy has arrived. It is the beginning of a process.

And we look forward to working with Israel to uphold her obligations to enable a Palestinian state to emerge. But we've got a good chance to get it done. And I just want the people – and I know the world is wondering whether or not this is just empty rhetoric or does – do I really believe that now is the time to move the process forward. And the answer is: Now is the time to move the process forward. But we cannot shortcut the process by saying – you know, well, the Palestinians can't self-govern; they're not suitable for a democracy. I subscribe to this theory that the only way to achieve peace is for there to be democracies living side-by-side. Democracies don't fight each other. And the last system didn't work, which was the hope that a Palestinian authority, run by a singular head, who on some days would say we're for peace and some days would say now is the time to attack; hope that everything would be fine. It just didn't work.

So I look forward to working with the world, the new Secretary of State, to work with the Palestinians to develop the structures necessary for a democracy to emerge. And I appreciate the fact that Prime Minister Tony Blair is willing to help that process by holding a conference with Palestinians that will help develop the state. And if the free world focuses on helping the Palestinians develop a state, and there is leadership willing to accept the help, it's possible to achieve peace. And there are responsibilities for all parties; the Palestinians have responsibilities, the Israelis have responsibilities, the Americans have responsibilities, the EU has responsibilities. But we all have got to keep the big vision in mind in order to achieve the objective.