

achieve peace is to fight terror. And I'm the first American President ever to have articulated the creation of a Palestinian state. And the reason I did so is because I believe a Palestinian state, when properly done, will be—provide enough hope for people, provide a peaceful avenue for those who aspire for a better future. And I also believe it's in Israel's interest that there be a Palestinian state which develops in a peaceful way.

Every statement I've said, I said all parties must assume responsibilities. The Palestinians have got to assume the responsibility of fighting off terror. If they want a state which provides a hopeful future for their people, they must fight terror. They must be resolute in the fighting of terror.

Israel has responsibilities. Today the Prime Minister stepped up to those responsibilities. He started a process that I believe can be a hopeful process. The Arab world has got responsibilities to help not only fight terror but to provide hope for a peaceful Palestinian people. Those are responsibilities. America is assuming responsibilities. My position on Middle East peace is quite clear.

Final question, from the Israeli press.

Palestinian Right of Return/Israeli Security

[A journalist asked a question in Hebrew and then continued in English.]

Q. And Mr. President, if I may, is what you said about the Palestinian refugee mean that you deny unconditionally the—what's it called—the right of return of Palestinian refugee to the state of Israel?

President Bush. My statement—refer back to my statement that I said, and also look at the letter that I sent the Prime Minister. It will clarify my position on the issue.

[Prime Minister Sharon answered in Hebrew and then continued in English.]

Prime Minister Sharon. I mentioned first that I got from you, Mr. President, a letter. And I sent you a letter. And in these letters, all those issues, all those details are very clearly described in those letters. And I suggested also on your behalf that they will read the letters.

President Bush. Thank you.

Prime Minister Sharon. That's the first thing. I was asked by the Israeli media if I would say the things they held here or we discussed here or have been concluded here will provide me a weapon against my colleagues in the Government or the members of my party in Israel.

So my answer was that I was never looking for weapons to use against my colleagues in the Government or against the members of my party. I agree that I've been using weapons for many years, being a soldier for many years, against the enemies of the state of Israel. And I never hesitated, and I will not hesitate also in the future, to use weapons if it will be needed in order to defend the citizens of Israel, their life, their normal life, their development, and so on.

And therefore, I say that I don't need for that. I believe that our discussion today providing the needed security and hope for the future of the state of Israel and the future, I would say, of the region.

President Bush. Thank you, sir.

Prime Minister Sharon. Thank you.

President Bush. Thank you all very much.

Prime Minister Sharon. Thank you so much.

President Bush. Welcome.

Prime Minister Sharon. Thank you.

NOTE: The President's news conference began at 1:05 p.m. in the Cross Hall at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt; and King Abdullah II of Jordan.

Statement on the Israeli Disengagement Plan and the Middle East Peace Process

April 14, 2004

I remain hopeful and determined to find a way forward toward a resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian dispute.

The Israeli Plan:

I welcome the disengagement plan prepared by the Government of Israel, under which Israel would withdraw certain military installations and all settlements from Gaza, and withdraw certain military installations and settlements in the West Bank. These

steps will mark real progress toward realizing the vision I set forth in June 2002 of two states living side by side in peace and security, and make a real contribution toward peace.

I am hopeful that steps pursuant to this plan, consistent with this vision, will remind all states and parties of their own obligations under the roadmap.

The Path to Peace:

I believe certain principles, which are very widely accepted in the international community, show us the path forward:

- The right of self defense and the need to fight terrorism are equally matters of international agreement.
- The two-state vision and the roadmap for peace designed to implement it, command nearly universal support as the best means of achieving a permanent peace and an end to the Israeli occupation that began in 1967.
- United Nations Security Council resolutions have repeatedly spoken of the desirability of establishing two independent states, Israel and Palestine, living side by side within secure and recognized borders.

Having these principles in mind, the United States is able to make the following comments.

Peace Plans:

The United States remains committed to the vision of two states living side by side in peace and security, and its implementation as described in the roadmap. The United States will do its utmost to prevent any attempt by anyone to impose any other plan.

Security:

There will be no security for Israelis or Palestinians until they and all states, in the region and beyond, join together to fight terrorism and dismantle terrorist organizations. The United States reiterates its steadfast commitment to Israel's security, including secure, defensible borders, and to preserve and strengthen Israel's capability to deter and defend itself, by itself, against any threat or possible combination of threats. The United States will join with others in the

international community to strengthen the capacity and will of Palestinian security forces to fight terrorism and dismantle terrorist capabilities and infrastructure.

Terrorism:

Israel will retain its right to defend itself against terrorism, including to take actions against terrorist organizations. The United States will lead efforts, working together with Jordan, Egypt, and others in the international community, to build the capacity and will of Palestinian institutions to fight terrorism, dismantle terrorist organizations, and prevent the areas from which Israel has withdrawn from posing a threat that would have to be addressed by any other means. The United States understands that after Israel withdraws from Gaza and/or parts of the West Bank, and pending agreements on other arrangements, existing arrangements regarding control of airspace, territorial waters, and land passages of the West Bank and Gaza will continue.

The Two-State Solution:

The United States remains committed to the two-state solution for peace in the Middle East as set forth in June 2002, and to the roadmap as the best path to realize that vision.

The goal of two independent states has repeatedly been recognized in international resolutions and agreements, and it remains a key to resolving this conflict. The United States is strongly committed to Israel's security and well-being as a Jewish state. It seems clear that an agreed, just, fair and realistic framework for a solution to the Palestinian refugee issue as part of any final status agreement will need to be found through the establishment of a Palestinian state, and the settling of Palestinian refugees there, rather than in Israel.

As part of a final peace settlement, Israel must have secure and recognized borders, which should emerge from negotiations between the parties in accordance with UNSC Resolutions 242 and 338. In light of new realities on the ground, including already existing major Israeli populations centers, it is unrealistic to expect that the outcome of final status negotiations will be a full and complete

return to the armistice lines of 1949, and all previous efforts to negotiate a two-state solution have reached the same conclusion. It is realistic to expect that any final status agreement will only be achieved on the basis of mutually agreed changes that reflect these realities.

Palestinian Statehood:

The United States supports the establishment of a Palestinian state that is viable, contiguous, sovereign, and independent, so that the Palestinian people can build their own future in accordance with the vision I set forth in June 2002 and with the path set forth in the roadmap. The United States will join with others in the international community to foster the development of democratic political institutions and new leadership committed to those institutions, the reconstruction of civic institutions, the growth of a free and prosperous economy, and the building of capable security institutions dedicated to maintaining law and order and dismantling terrorist organizations.

Palestinian Obligations:

Under the roadmap, Palestinians must undertake an immediate cessation of armed activity and all acts of violence against Israelis anywhere, and all official Palestinian institutions must end incitement against Israel. The Palestinian leadership must act decisively against terror, including sustained, targeted, and effective operations to stop terrorism and dismantle terrorist capabilities and infrastructure. Palestinians must undertake a comprehensive and fundamental political reform that includes a strong parliamentary democracy and an empowered prime minister.

Israeli Obligations:

The Government of Israel is committed to take additional steps on the West Bank, including progress toward a freeze on settlement activity, removing unauthorized outposts, and improving the humanitarian situation by easing restrictions on the movement of Palestinians not engaged in terrorist activities.

As the Government of Israel has stated, the barrier being erected by Israel should be a security rather than political barrier, should

be temporary rather than permanent, and therefore not prejudice any final status issues including final borders, and its route should take into account, consistent with security needs, its impact on Palestinians not engaged in terrorist activities.

Regional Cooperation:

A peace settlement negotiated between Israelis and Palestinians would be a great boon not only to those peoples but to the peoples of the entire region. Accordingly, all states in the region have special responsibilities: to support the building of the institutions of a Palestinian state; to fight terrorism, and cut off all forms of assistance to individuals and groups engaged in terrorism; and to begin now to move toward more normal relations with the State of Israel. These actions would be true contributions to building peace in the region.

Letter to Prime Minister Ariel Sharon of Israel on the Israeli Disengagement Plan

April 14, 2004

Dear Mr. Prime Minister:

Thank you for your letter setting out your disengagement plan.

The United States remains hopeful and determined to find a way forward toward a resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian dispute. I remain committed to my June 24, 2002 vision of two states living side by side in peace and security as the key to peace, and to the roadmap as the route to get there.

We welcome the disengagement plan you have prepared, under which Israel would withdraw certain military installations and all settlements from Gaza, and withdraw certain military installations and settlements in the West Bank. These steps described in the plan will mark real progress toward realizing my June 24, 2002 vision, and make a real contribution towards peace. We also understand that, in this context, Israel believes it is important to bring new opportunities to the Negev and the Galilee. We are hopeful that steps pursuant to this plan, consistent with my vision, will remind all states and parties of their own obligations under the roadmap.