



## THE WHITE HOUSE

PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH

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### President Bush and Secretary of State Rice Discuss the Middle East Crisis

Prairie Chapel Ranch  
Crawford, Texas

#### [In Focus: Peace in the Middle East](#)

8:59 A.M. CDT

**THE PRESIDENT:** Good morning. Since the crisis in Lebanon began more than three weeks ago, the United States and other key nations have been working for a comprehensive solution that would return control of Lebanon to its government, and to provide a sustainable peace that protects the lives of both the Lebanese and the Israeli people.

Secretary Rice and diplomats from other countries are developing United Nations resolutions to bring about a cessation of hostilities and establish a foundation for lasting peace.

The first resolution, which the Security Council is now considering, calls for a stop of all hostilities. Under its terms, Hezbollah will be required to immediately stop all attacks. Israel will be required to immediately stop all offensive military operations. In addition, the resolution calls for an embargo on the shipment of any arms into Lebanon, except as authorized by the Lebanese government.



A second resolution, which the Security Council will begin working on as soon as possible, will help establish a sustainable and enduring cease-fire and provide a mandate for a robust international force that will help the legitimate government of Lebanon extend its authority over all of Lebanon's territory.

Under this second resolution, the Lebanese armed forces, supported by the international force, will deploy to southern Lebanon. This international force will help Lebanon patrol its border with Syria and prevent illegal arm shipments to Hezbollah. As these Lebanese and international forces deploy, the Israeli defense forces will withdraw. And both Israel and Lebanon will respect the blue line that divides them.

These two resolutions are designed to bring an immediate end to the fighting, to help restore sovereignty over Lebanese soil to Lebanese democratic government -- to Lebanon's democratic government, excuse me -- to strike a blow against the terrorists and their supporters, and to help bring lasting peace to the region. By taking these steps, it will prevent armed militias like Hezbollah and its Iranian and Syrian sponsors from sparking another crisis. And it will protect innocent Lebanese and Israelis. And it will

help the international community deliver humanitarian relief and support Lebanon's revival and reconstruction.

The loss of life on both sides of the Lebanese-Israeli border has been a great tragedy. Millions of Lebanese civilians have been caught in the crossfire of military operations because of the unprovoked attack and kidnappings by Hezbollah. The humanitarian crisis in Lebanon is of deep concern to all Americans, and alleviating it will remain a priority of my government.

I also believe that innocent civilians in Israel should not have to live in bunkers in fear of missile attacks. To establish a lasting peace that protects innocent civilians on both sides of the border, we must address the underlying conditions that are the root cause of this crisis.

I believe that the two resolutions I have discussed and that Secretary Rice is working on will put us on that path.

And now I'll be glad to answer some questions. Nedra.

Q Thank you, Mr. President. Lebanon has rejected the draft proposal, and Israel is not speaking out in support of it. How do you get a resolution that both sides will support?



THE PRESIDENT: Everyone wants the violence to stop. People understand that there needs to be a cessation of hostilities in order for us to address the root causes of the problem. That was the spirit that came out of the G8 conference. It came out of the Rome conference that Secretary Rice attended. We all recognize that the violence must stop. And so that's what Secretary Rice is working toward with our friends and allies.

Look, everybody is -- I understand both parties aren't going to agree with all aspects of the resolution. But the intent of the resolutions is to strengthen the Lebanese government so Israel has got a partner in peace. The intent of the resolution is to make sure that we address the root cause -- the resolution is to address the root cause, which was a state operating within the state. Hezbollah was -- or is an armed movement that provoked the crisis.

And so whatever comes out of the resolutions must address that root cause. And so the task today for the Secretary and her counterparts is to develop a resolution that can get passed. It is essential that we create the conditions for the Lebanese government to move their own forces, with international help, into the south of Lebanon to prevent Hezbollah and its sponsors from creating this -- creating another crisis. And so that's where we're headed.

Steve.

Q The Lebanese Prime Minister is demanding a quick and decisive cease-fire. An Israeli air raid today killed 40 people. When will we see this resolution? And if it's approved, when will we see a cessation of violence?

THE PRESIDENT: I'll let Condi talk about the details of what she's going to do today, if you care to hear from her. But we will work with our partners to get the resolution laid down as quickly as possible. And the resolution will call for a cessation of violence. And the concern, by the way, from the parties in the region is whether or not the resolution will create a vacuum into which Hezbollah and its sponsors will be able to promote more instability.

We all agree that we ought to strengthen this government, the Lebanese government -- that's the purpose of the resolutions, as well as to stop the violence.

I don't know if you want to comment upon --

SECRETARY RICE: First of all, we are working from what we believe to be a strong basis for a cessation of hostilities, that is the U.S.-French draft, a strong basis for the cessation of hostilities, and then as the President said, to have a process then that can address the root causes. And we also believe that it's going to be very important that this first resolution lay a very quick foundation for passage of a second resolution. So these have to be worked, in a sense, together.



I spoke last night and yesterday with Prime Minister Olmert, with Prime Minister Siniora, with Secretary General Kofi Annan, with a number of others, and I think we believe that there is a way forward.

Now, we understand that this has been a very emotional and, indeed, devastating and tragic set of circumstances for Lebanon and for Israel. And obviously, the parties have views on how to stop this. Their views are not going to necessarily be consonant about how to stop it. The international community has a view. But, of course, we're going to take a little time and listen to the concerns of the parties and see how they can be addressed.

But I want to just note, we believe that the extant draft resolution is a firm foundation, is the right basis, but, of course, we're going to listen to the concerns of the parties and see how they might be addressed. And that's really what's going to be going on today, particularly after the Arab League meets and Prime Minister Siniora emerges from that.

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, Peter.

Q Thanks. Mr. President, officials have been quoted saying that the international force would not include U.S. troops. And I wonder if you can explain why that is? Is it because the military is already over-tasked? Is it because you're afraid that the U.S. doesn't have credibility in the region?

THE PRESIDENT: No, I think -- first of all, there has been a history in Lebanon with U.S. troops. Secondly, I have said that if the international force would like some help with logistics and command and control, we'd be willing to offer logistics and command and control. There are some places where -- it's like Darfur, people say to me, why don't you commit U.S. troops to Darfur as part of an international peacekeeping. And the answer there is that those troops would be -- would create a sensation around the world that may not enable us to achieve our objective. And so when we commit troops, we commit troops for a specific reason, with the intent of achieving an objective. And I think command and control and logistical support is probably the best -- is the best use of U.S. forces.

Mike Fletcher.

Q Many strategists say that we'll never get to the bottom of this crisis unless the U.S. engages directly with Syria and Iran. Why not talk to them directly about this, and have a back-and-forth conversation?

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, that's an interesting question. I've been reading about that, that people have

been posing that question. We have been in touch with Syria. Colin Powell sent a message to Syria in person. Dick Armitage traveled to Syria. Bill Burns traveled to Syria. We've got a consulate office in Syria. Syria knows what we think. The problem isn't us telling Syria what's on our mind, which is to stop harboring terror and to help the Iraqi democracy evolve. They know exactly what our position is. The problem is, is that their response hasn't been very positive. As a matter of fact, it hasn't been positive at all.

And in terms of Iran, we made it clear to the Iranians that if they would honor previous obligations and verifiably stop enrichment of nuclear materials, we would sit at a table. And so there's a way forward for both countries. The choice is theirs. Now, I appreciate people focusing on Syria and Iran, and we should, because Syria and Iran sponsor and promote Hezbollah activities -- all aimed at creating chaos, all aimed at using terror to stop the advance of democracies.

Our objective, our policy is to give voice to people through democratic reform. And that's why we strongly support the Siniora government. That's why I've articulated a two state solution between Israel and the Palestinians, two democracies living side-by-side in peace. That's why Condi went to see President Abbas, the President of the Palestinian Territories, to assure him that we're committed to a democracy. That's why we're making sacrifices in Iraq -- to build democracy.

In other words, we believe democracy yields peace. And the actions of Hezbollah through its sponsors of Iran and Syria are trying to stop that advance of democracy. Hezbollah launched this attack. Hezbollah is trying to create the chaos necessary to stop the advance of peace. And the world community must come together to address this problem.

Let's see here. Jim.

Q Mr. President, in the last couple of weeks, every time the question was asked why not get an immediate cessation and then build a sustainable -- terms for a sustainable cease-fire after you get the hostilities stopped, it was categorically rejected. Yet, a few weeks later, here we are. Can you explain why this wasn't done a couple weeks ago?

THE PRESIDENT: Sure. Because, first of all, the international community hadn't come together on a concept of how to address the root cause of the problem, Jim.

Part of the problem in the past in the Middle East is people would paper over the root cause of the problem, and therefore the situation would seemingly be quiet, and then lo and behold, there'd be another crisis. And innocent people would suffer. And so our strategy all along has been, of course we want to have a cessation of hostilities, but what we want to do in the same time is to make sure that there is a way forward for the Lebanese government to secure its own country so that there's peace in the region.

And that deals with an international peacekeeping force to complement a Lebanese army moving into the south to make sure that Resolution 1559, passed two years ago by the U.N., was fully upheld. Had the parties involved fully implemented 1559, which called for the disarmament of Hezbollah, we would not be in the situation we're in today.

Let's see here. Yes, Richard.

Q Mr. President, what are the specific stumbling blocks that are preventing this first resolution from being passed quickly? What are the people -- what are the parties objecting to in the language that needs

to be altered?

SECRETARY RICE: I think that first of all, I don't -- I'm not going to get into specifics about the views of the parties. I think that we have to do that privately and talk with the parties privately. But obviously, this particular resolution is important because it sets an agenda for the basis for a sustainable peace. And so it will not surprise you that the Lebanese have views of what should be on that agenda. The Israelis have views of what should be on that agenda. They aren't always the same views, and so working together to get to what that agenda should be is part of what's going on here.

But I will say something that's very interesting. There is more agreement than you might think about how to prevent, again, a situation in which you have a state within a state able to launch an attack across the blue line.

For instance, there is agreement that the Lebanese government needs to extend its authority throughout the country, that it needs to have the Lebanese armed forces move to take care of this vacuum that has been existing in the south, that there should not be any armed groups able just to operate in the south in the way that Hezbollah has been able to operate in the south, that there ought to be respect for the blue line. These are all agreements between the two parties.

And so there is going to be some pressure from both sides to get things onto the agenda because they want to get them onto the agenda. But I think we have a reasonable basis here that both sides can accept. I think there are some issues of timing and sequence that need to be worked out. There are some concerns about when an international force would actually be available. And so we're going to continue to work to address those concerns of the two parties.

But as the President said, this last three weeks has been extremely important. Had we done this three weeks ago, we were talking about what people -- an unconditional cease-fire that I can guarantee you would not have addressed any of these items that both sides know are going to have to be addressed if we're going to have a sustainable cease-fire in the future. So this has been time that's been well spent over the last couple of weeks, that everybody agrees it's time to have a cessation. We're going to work a little bit more with the parties, and I think this resolution will be the right basis -- both to cease the hostilities and to move forward.

THE PRESIDENT: Cheryl.

Q Mr. President, you've spoken with Prime Minister Blair and Chancellor Merkel about this. Have you spoken directly with Prime Ministers Olmert and Siniora? And if not, why not?

THE PRESIDENT: Because Condi is handling those conversations, and she's doing a fine job of doing so.

Yes.

Q Mr. President, you've been quite specific in Hezbollah's role as the creator of this conflict. But what is the magnet, what is the pressure point, what is the hook to get this group to accept a cease-fire, to stop shooting and to stop kidnapping soldiers from across the border of another country?

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, I would hope it would be international pressure on not only Hezbollah, the group of Hezbollah within Lebanon, but also its sponsors. And that's the whole purpose of the United States working with allies and friends, is to send a clear message that sponsoring terror is unacceptable.

It's the great challenge of the 21st century, really.

Q Do you --

THE PRESIDENT: Let me finish for a minute.

Q I'm sorry..

THE PRESIDENT: It is the great challenge of this century and it's this: As young democracies flourish, terrorists try to stop their progress. And it's the great challenge of the United States and others who are blessed with living in free countries. Not only do terrorists try to stop the advance of democracy through killing innocent people within those countries, they also try to shape the will of the western world by killing innocent westerners. They try to spread their jihadist message -- a message I call, it's totalitarian in nature -- Islamic radicalism, Islamic fascism, they try to spread it as well by taking the attack to those of us who love freedom.

And as far as this administration is concerned, we clearly see the problem and we're going to continue to work to advance stable, free countries. We don't expect every country to look like the United States, but we do want countries to accept some basic conditions for a vibrant society -- human rights, human decency, the power of the people to determine the fate of their governments. And, admittedly, this is hard work because it flies in the face of previous policy, which basically says stability is more important than form of government. And as a result of that policy, anger and resentment bubbled forth with an attack, with a series of attacks, the most dramatic of which was on September the 11th.

You know, your question is can we get people to -- a terrorist group to change their attitude. What we can do is we can get state sponsors of terror to understand this behavior is unacceptable, and that we can convince some people in terrorist groups that there is a better way forward for them and their families.

Remember, Hezbollah is a political party within Lebanon. They actually ran people for office. The problem is, is that they're a political party with a militia that is armed by foreign nations and, obviously, this political party with militia was willing to try to influence the Middle East through unprovoked attacks.

And what Condi is working on and I work on is to remind people about the stakes in the Middle East. And those stakes include not only helping the Lebanese government firm up its democracy -- remember, we worked with the French two years ago to boot out Syria. Syria was inside Lebanon and we felt that in order for a democracy to flourish, Syria needed to remove not only her troops, but her agents, her intelligence agents, for example.

And, obviously, there are some in the region that don't want the Lebanese government to succeed. I also happen to believe that as Prime Minister Olmert was making progress in reaching out to President Abbas and others in the region to develop a Palestinian state, that that caused a terrorist reaction. Remember, this all started with the kidnapping of an Israeli soldier by militant Hamas, followed shortly thereafter by the kidnapping of two Israeli soldiers by Hezbollah.

And, finally, the third most notable battleground in the advance of liberty is Iraq. It's interesting, if you go back to the work of Mr. Zarqawi, he talked about fomenting sectarian violence in order to stop the advance of democracy. The challenge of the 21st century is for free nations to help those who aspire to liberty. And, you know, the first question is, do people aspire to liberty? And the answer is, absolutely -- look at the 12 million people who voted in Iraq. Or look at the people who went to the polls in Lebanon.

It's just clear to me that there will be terrorist activities that will try to stop people from living a decent, hopeful life.

And what you're watching now is the diplomatic efforts to address the problem. I know there's -- I sense a certain impatience in your voice about diplomacy coming to a conclusion. What Secretary Rice is doing, as well as me, is we are dealing with a lot of different interests. Remember, each nation at the Security Council has got its own domestic issues to deal with, as well, and so it is -- I wish things happened quicker in the diplomatic realm -- sometimes it takes a while to get things done. But what the American people need to know is we've got a strategy -- a strategy for freedom in the Middle East which protects the American people in the long run. And we've got a strategy to deal with the situations that arise in the Middle East -- first Lebanon; of course, the Iranian nuclear weapon issue.

And as you remember, right before the G8, the question on your mind was would we ever get a resolution out of the U.N. on the Iranians' desire to have a nuclear weapon, as well as whether or not we'd ever get a resolution out of the U.N. to deal with North Korea. As a matter of fact, there was great skepticism, I felt, in some circles, as to whether or not we'd be able to put a diplomacy in place that would deal with these two very difficult problems.

And, in fact, during the G8, two resolutions were passed -- by the way, those resolutions overshadowed by the situation in Lebanon. And I'm confident that working with our friends, if we stay on principle and remind people of the stakes, that we'll be able to accomplish the diplomatic objectives that we have set out -- which is dealing with this problem and addressing the long-term issues.

A couple more questions, and we'll get out -- Suzanne.

Q If I could follow Nedra's question. She had asked, Lebanon --

THE PRESIDENT: I can't remember that far back. (Laughter.)

Q Lebanon's parliament speaker, Nabih Berri, who has been negotiating for Hezbollah, has rejected the first resolution, saying it's unacceptable, they want the Israeli troops to pull out immediately. Is that a negotiable point? And, also, Secretary Rice, will you be reaching out to Berri, as you had spoken with him before?

THE PRESIDENT: Whatever happens in the U.N., we must not create a vacuum into which Hezbollah and its sponsors are able to move more weapons. Sometimes the world likes to take the easy route in order to solve a problem. Our view is, it's time to address root causes of problems. And to create a vacuum, Suzanne, is unacceptable. It would mean that we haven't addressed the root cause.

The idea is to have the Lebanese government move into the south so that the government of Lebanon can protect its own territory, and that there be an international force to provide the help necessary for the Lebanese government to secure its country. Remember, in Germany, the first thing I said was -- or one of the first things I said, I think I said this -- help me out here, if I didn't --

SECRETARY RICE: I think you did.

THE PRESIDENT: -- was we want the Siniora government to survive and to be strengthened. The linchpin of the policy is to support democracies. And so the strategy at the U.N., the diplomatic strategy is to support that notion, because a democracy in Lebanon will not only help that nation address its long-term issues -- such as rebuilding, providing a hopeful life -- but a democracy on Israeli's northern border

will stabilize -- help stabilize the region. We are committed to a democracy in the Palestinian territory.

President Abbas, in his conversations with Condi, talked about moving forward with democracy. There are people who can't stand the thought of a society based upon universal liberty from emerging. And that, in itself, ought to be a warning signal to those of us who care deeply for peace, that people would be willing to kill innocent citizens in order to stop the advance of liberty.

Now, I've talked a lot about the universal appeal of liberty, and I readily concede some people aren't willing to -- some say, well, you know, liberty may not be universal in this sense -- America imposes its will. We don't impose liberty; liberty is universal.

It's one of the interesting debates of the 21st century, I think, that some would be willing to say it's okay for people not to live in a free society. It's not okay for us. If you love peace, in order to achieve peace you much help people realize that which is universal -- and that is freedom.

She asked you a question.

SECRETARY RICE: Our point of contact for the Lebanese government is obviously Prime Minister Siniora. As you know, I've also spoken to Speaker Berri on a couple of occasions.

I understand how emotional this is for the Lebanese. They've been through a very difficult war. It's emotional for Israel, as well. They're in the midst of a difficult war.

Let me just say that in terms of what the end state will look like here, I don't think there is any disagreement that the right solution is the one that the President referred to. It's the Lebanese, and the Lebanese armed forces able to secure their territory. And the international help is so that Lebanon can secure its territory. And I don't believe anybody anticipates that there should be foreign forces on Lebanese soil as a result of what has happened here.

And so I think there is room on this issue to work on this issue, because everybody has the same vision - - that it's the Lebanese army, with support from an international force, that can actually prevent that vacuum from obtaining again in the south, so that we're not right back here three or four or five months from now, in the same situation.

Q Mr. President, I don't think we've heard from you since Fidel Castro has fallen ill. Can you give us what you know of his current condition, what your administration's contingency plans are for his death, and how they address the desire of Cuban exiles in this country to eventually go home and reclaim their property?

THE PRESIDENT: First of all, Cuba is not a very transparent society, so the only thing I know is what has been speculated. And that is that, on the one hand, he's very ill, and on the other hand, he's going to be coming out of a hospital. I don't know. I really don't know.

And, secondly, that our desire is for the Cuban people to be able to choose their own form of government, and we would hope that -- and we'll make this very clear -- that as Cuba has the possibility of transforming itself from a tyrannical situation to a different type of society, the Cuban people ought to decide. The people on the island of Cuba ought to decide. And once the people of Cuba decide their form of government, then Cuban Americans can take an interest in that country and redress the issues of property confiscation. But first things first, and that is the Cuban people need to decide the future of their country.

Q Mr. President, if I could turn to Iraq for a moment.

THE PRESIDENT: Sure.

Q When you and Prime Minister Blair met at the White House a few months ago, you were asked about mistakes and missteps. And he said the one mistake he made was miscalculating in thinking that a young democracy, as you put it, would be born very quickly after the fall of Saddam. Are you prepared today to agree with him and acknowledge that you've had the same expectations, which were wrong?

THE PRESIDENT: Actually, I think -- I can't remember his answer; I'm sure you've characterized it perfectly. My attitude is that a young democracy has been born quite quickly. And I think the Iraqi government has shown remarkable progress on the political front, and that is, is that they developed a modern constitution that was ratified by the people, and then 12 million people voted for a government - - which gives me confidence about the future in Iraq, by the way.

You know, I hear people say, well, civil war this, civil war that. The Iraqi people decided against civil war when they went to the ballot box. And a unity government is working to respond to the will of the people. And frankly, it's quite a remarkable achievement on the political front, and the security front is where there have been troubles. And it's going to be up to the Maliki government, with U.S. help, to use the trained forces, and eventually a trained police force, to take care of those who are trying to foment sectarian violence.

We've made some progress against some of those folks, particularly when Mr. Zarqawi met his demise. Remember, al Qaeda is in the country, all attempting to stop the advance of democracy. And the blowing up of the mosque created an opportunity for those who were trying to foment sectarian violence to achieve their objective. But the Iraqi people rejected that kind of sectarian violence, the army stood strong.

No question it's still difficult. On the other hand, the political process is part of helping to achieve our objective, which is a free country, an ally in the war on terror that can sustain itself and govern itself and defend itself.

Okay, who else? I don't want to hurt any feelings. Yes, sir.

Q Thank you very much.

THE PRESIDENT: Identify yourself.

Q Kevin Corke, NBC News, sir.

THE PRESIDENT: Right. I knew that.

Q Yes, sir.

THE PRESIDENT: Just wanted to make sure you did.

Q Yes, indeed. In reading the 1559 resolution and the draft, as it's currently constructed, there are a lot of similarities, quite frankly. And I'm wondering if you could speak to maybe the frustration some Americans might be feeling that you've said we want sustainable peace, we don't want to come back here in a few months or a few years -- and, yet, it seems like there will be another resolution, maybe

another resolution, maybe another this, that and the other. People get frustrated. Can you understand that and respond to that, sir?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, the people who should get really frustrated are the Israelis and the Lebanese. They ought to be the ones who are frustrated, because 1559 clearly laid a way forward for there to be a strong democracy in Lebanon, which will more likely yield the peace. And there is a level of frustration around the world with organizations that will take innocent life to achieve political objectives. And our job is to remind people that this isn't a moment, this is a movement, and that we must deal with this movement. We must deal with this movement with strong security measures, we must bring justice to those who would attack us, and at the same time, defeat their ideology by the spread of liberty.

And it takes a lot of work. This is the beginning of a long struggle against an ideology that is real and profound. It's Islamo-fascism. It comes in different forms. They share the same tactics, which is to destroy people and things in order to create chaos in the hopes that their vision of the world become predominant in the Middle East.

And Condi and I will work hard -- by the way, the United States can't win this war alone. We can do damage to the enemy. We can take the philosophical high ground and remind people of the importance of how freedom can change societies. But we will work with allies and friends to achieve this objective. And part of the challenge in the 21st century is to remind people about the stakes, and remind people that in moments of quiet, there's still an Islamic fascist group plotting, planning and trying to spread their ideology. And one of the things that -- one of the things that came out of this unfortunate incident in the Middle East is it is a stark reminder that there are those who want to stop the advance of liberty and destabilize young democracies. And they're willing to kill people to do so.

I repeat, this whole incident started because Hezbollah kidnapped two soldiers and launched rocket attacks. And it's been unfortunate that people on both sides of the border have lost life. And we're committed to helping the Lebanese government rebuild.

On the other hand, what we won't do is allow for a false hope. We believe that it's important to challenge the root cause now. We thought we had done so with 1559, but 1559 wasn't implemented. In other words, there was a way forward to deal with the problem. And now there's another chance to deal with the problem, and that's the role of the United States, working with others, to not only remind people about the problem, but to come up with solutions in dealing with the problem. And the solutions that we are working with our friends are, in our judgment, is the best hope for achieving stability and peace.

But it takes a lot of work. And it takes commitment and focus. And that's what this administration will continue to do. We'll stay focused on the problem and stay focused on coming up with solutions that, when implemented, will leave behind a better world.

Thank you all very much for your interest.

END 9:36 A.M. CDT