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Remarks During a Meeting With President Shimon Peres of Israel in Jerusalem, Israel
May 14, 2008

President Peres. Mr. President, Secretary of State, distinguished delegation: I got permission from the Americans to be a—and Miss Tzipi Livni, our Foreign Minister—I got permission to be, all my life, an optimist. And you bring with you optimism, so I feel a sort of competition. [*Laughter*] But let me say that I know you have elections sometimes, by the end of this year, and maybe there will be a change of administration, a change of guards. I think before you will leave office, you will see a change of guards here in the Middle East.

President Bush. Yes.

President Peres. What looks today so gloomy may be the last effort by some very extremist group to remain alive. Because it's concentrated, it becomes sharp and clear, particularly in two places. In Lebanon, Hizballah is simply destroying Lebanon. It's a matter that concerns not only the United States or Israel; it concerns the Arab world. For them, the destruction of Lebanon is the destruction of statehood in many other places. And it's a protest without a message. And the second goes to Gaza, where Hamas is responding to the establishment of a Palestinian state. I think you, and may I say the Secretary of State, invested so much effort to enable the Palestinians to correct the historic mistakes in—from 1947, because would they then accept an Arab state, we wouldn't have all these troubles. But never the mind, we cannot change the past.

But today, the real obstacle, when I consider everything else for—before creation of—the—[*inaudible*]—recreation of a Palestinian state, is Hamas. And talking with the Palestinians, I know that's their view. We are not their enemies, as we are not enemies of Lebanon. On the contrary, I think we would like to see a united, integrated Lebanon living in peace, who don't have any ambitions neither to their water, nor to their land, nor to their politics. We would like to see the Palestinians living together. They suffered a great deal of their life. The separation is a tragedy for them and for the rest of us.

Now the Arab world will have to take a stand, not about the conflict between us and them, but about their own destiny, where are they moving. And that will affect us.

Your 8 years were very moving years for all of us.

President Bush. Thank you.

President Peres. [*Inaudible*]—that you can really watch a friendship without any bad mood. And I know that we are not the—[*inaudible*]—half the time. But you never interrupted your understanding, your support——

President Bush. Thank you.

President Peres. ——and really trying to do whatever you, your administration, and the lady who is on the State Department really did then to help us negotiate a difficult time.

So for us, it's a celebration not only because we're a little bit older—60 years, it's not too much—but also because we feel that our efforts are not in vain. And it is in this optimistic view that I welcome you here.

President Bush. Thank you, sir.

President Peres. Thank you.

President Bush. Mr. President, it's great to be with you. You're known as a wise soul, and your comments reflect your wisdom. I am delighted to be here for the 60th birthday party. As a person who is 61 years old, it doesn't seem that old. [*Laughter*]

But I suspect if you looked back 60 years ago and tried to guess where Israel would

be at that time, it would be hard to be able to project such a prosperous, hopeful land. No question, people would have said, "Well, we'd be surrounded by hostile forces." But I doubt people would have been able to see the modern Israel, which is one reason I bring so much optimism to the Middle East, because what happened here is possible everywhere.

And the objective of the United States must be to, one, support our strongest ally and friend in the Middle East that won't—only true democracy against the forces of terror that you just described—and at the same time, talk about a hopeful future.

So I'm really looking forward to my time here. I want to thank you for giving me a chance to speak to the Knesset. I hear it's quite an experience. It'll be a huge honor to represent my country for your 60th birthday.

In the meantime, we will continue to work toward a vision of—where the—where people who are just reasonable and want a chance to live at peace with Israel have that opportunity, and at the same time, speak clearly about those forces of terror who murder innocent people to achieve their political objectives and how the world must stand against them.

And so I want to thank you for giving me a chance to come by and see you again. And you're looking good. [*Laughter*] I hope you're feeling well.

Thank you, sir.

President Peres. Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:29 p.m. at the President's residence.

Remarks Following a Meeting With Prime Minister Ehud Olmert of Israel in Jerusalem
May 14, 2008

Prime Minister Olmert. I am delighted to honor President George W. Bush on his second visit. This time, President came to celebrate with Israel the 60th anniversary of the State of Israel.

We are particularly excited by the fact that the President chose to come this week, which is a very meaningful and very exciting week in his private life. And I congratulate you again, President——

President Bush. Thank you.

Prime Minister Olmert. ——for the marriage of your daughter Jenna this last weekend. We are very happy to host you here.

We had a long discussion about a variety of issues. The first of the issues was the attempts made by Iran to acquire nuclear capabilities. This is a danger of the highest order to the safety of the region—of course, Israel is part of it—and many other countries in the world. And there is an international effort, led by the United States of America, to try and stop Iran from acquiring nuclear power. And the discussions between our two countries will continue on this issue. And of course, Israel will try to join the main forces, led by the United States of America and the President, to try and stop the Iranians from continuing their efforts, which are going on and which are clearly dangerous and threatening for the stability of the world.

We also discussed the situation in Lebanon. We observed the events in Lebanon, and we are very much concerned that there will be an attempt to upset the democratic process, which has to take place properly in Lebanon. And we will continue to observe the situation, and hopefully, the situation will stabilize in Lebanon and the Government of Prime Minister Siniora will prevail against the provocations and the efforts