



For Immediate Release
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President Bush Participates in Joint Press Availability with President Sarkozy of France

Elysée Palace
Paris, France

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11:45 A.M. (Local)

PRESIDENT SARKOZY: (As translated.) Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for coming to work with us on this Saturday morning. I wanted to thank President Bush for his visit to Paris on his European tour. I see how much importance it has to Franco-American relations and the transatlantic relation. And I think everyone should firmly bear in mind the importance of this transatlantic relation between the United States and Europe, especially as we celebrate the 60th anniversary of the Marshall Plan. This is an opportunity for me to extend the same sort of hospitality, warm hospitality that was extended to me last November when I went to Washington and to Mount Vernon.

It's also an opportunity to continue to pursue this confident, trusting regular dialogue between France and the United States on all issues that we have in common -- and there are so many of them. We had an extended discussion on the international situation on the Middle East, but also on economic and trade matters. We checked that -- once again saw that there were many areas of convergence, although perhaps slight differences, and that's only right and normal. Friendship should not prevent France or the United States from expressing independent views. But if there are differences, we can discuss them calmly, in a level headed manner. And this is once again an opportunity for me to say to the American people the deep gratitude of the French people and our friendship.



PRESIDENT BUSH: Yesterday I reminded the world, really, Nicolas, that America's first friend was France. And frankly, we wouldn't be where we are today with the French support early in our revolution. You are not only our first friend, you've been a consistent friend, and the meetings here have reconfirmed and strengthened our friendship between our countries and our personal friendship.

I really enjoy being with President Sarkozy. He's an interesting guy. (Laughter.) He is full of energy. He's full of wisdom. He tells me what's on his mind. And we've had -- every time I've met with him we've had very meaningful discussions. We discussed Afghanistan -- and thank you very much for supporting the Paris support conference; it made a big difference for that young democracy. And I do thank the people of France for supporting the women and children and the young democrats in Afghanistan. And thank you, too, Nicolas.

We talked about Lebanon, of course. Talked to him about the Holy Land, about our deep desire for there to be two states living side by side in peace; two democracies, a Palestinian democracy and Israel; having a -- resolving this conflict which creates so much difficulty for not only the Palestinians and the Israelis, but for much of the Middle East.

We talked about Darfur, and I want to thank you very much for having your troops there in Chad. We talked about Iran -- spent a lot of time talking about Iran. And I will tell you that we both have a mutual desire to prevent the Iranians from gaining the knowledge so that they could build a weapon. And we do that for the sake of peace and security of the world.

We talked about Doha, the importance of the Doha Round. And frankly -- and then we spent some time on climate change. We had a meaningful, good discussion. And I thank you very much for the dinner last night. And it was a great pleasure to have been able to meet your wife. She's a really smart, capable woman, and I can see why you married her. (Laughter.) And I can see why she married you, too. (Laughter.)



Anyway, thanks. It's been a good visit. We'll be glad to take some questions.

PRESIDENT SARKOZY: Thank you, George. Perhaps a first question from the French press.

Q (As translated.) To both of you, what specific, concrete requests do you wish to make or send to the Syrian President, Bashar Assad, so that he normalize his relations with the West, and of course to achieve stability in Lebanon and in the rest of --

PRESIDENT BUSH: Well, my message would be, stop fooling around with the Iranians and stop harboring terrorists; serve as a constructive force in the Middle East to help the advance of a Palestinian state; make it clear to Hamas that terror should stop for the sake of peace; and make it clear to their Iranian allies that the West is serious when we talk about stopping them from learning how to enrich, which would be the first -- a major step for developing a bomb; and to make it clear to their Iranian allies that Hezbollah is a destabilizing force for not only Lebanon but elsewhere.

That would be my message. I'd make it clear to him that there is a better way forward for Syria. And Nicolas and I talked about this subject today.

PRESIDENT SARKOZY: Well, George and I totally agree on the need to guarantee Lebanon's independence. Lebanon is entitled, like any other country anywhere in the world, to its independence and to remain independent. And this is one of the preconditions that I have laid down -- the election of a new President for Lebanon. That is exactly what happened. It was done with the election of General Suleiman.

Second point, we will go through with the process, the procedure of the international tribunal to track down those who assassinated Mr. Rafik Hariri. But once I have said to Bashar Assad, let the presidential process run its course, we would get back into contact with them, and that is exactly what we've done. We have to let Lebanon stand free.

I also share the view of the United States of America on the fact that the Iranian question, and the fact that they might get their hands on a nuclear weapon is of the essence; it is a major issue. Syria has to peel off, as much as possible, from Iran in its desire to lay its hands on a nuclear weapon. Once that has happened, then the process will continue.

Lastly, I told the President of the United States that we have taken the initiative of convening a summit for the Mediterranean, and to my knowledge, Syria is part of the Mediterranean region, is a Mediterranean country. Now if we should go around the Mediterranean region and start picking and choosing, and simply inviting those who correspond to exactly our criteria, then we'll probably have a meeting with very few people attending it.



PRESIDENT BUSH: I want to call on Bill Plante from CBS, but before I do, I want to say something about one of

your colleagues.

America lost a really fine citizen yesterday when Tim Russert passed away. I've had the privilege of being interviewed by Tim Russert. I found him to be a hardworking, thorough, decent man. And Tim Russert loved his country, he loved his family, and he loved his job a lot. And we're going to miss him all, and we send our deepest sympathies to Maureen, his wife, and Luke, his son. I know they're hurting right now, and hopefully the prayers of a lot of Tim's friends and a lot of Americans will help them during this time of difficulty.

Plante.

Q Mr. President, Iran's government spokesman, shortly after the package had been presented by the Europeans, dismissed it out of hand, saying that if it does not -- if it includes suspension of enrichment, it absolutely will not fly. Can you convince the rest of your allies and partners to enforce the sanctions which are envisioned in that package? It seems that many of them are reluctant.

PRESIDENT BUSH: That's probably a question you ought to ask the President of France. Let me just give you my impressions of the situation. We have worked hard -- "we" being our allies -- have worked hard to say to the Iranian people: There is a better way forward for you; you've got a government that has isolated you; you've got a government that is creating the conditions so that you can't live a full and hopeful life, and the reason why that's happening is because your government has defied the demands, the just demands of the free world. In other words, they refuse to abandon their desires to develop the know-how which could lead to a nuclear weapon.

Now, they say, well, we want civilian nuclear power. And as I explained to Nicolas today, I agree, they should have the right to have civilian nuclear power. As a matter of fact, Vladimir Putin delivered that very message to the Iranian regime. He also delivered this message: that because you have been untrustworthy, because you haven't fully disclosed your programs to the IAEA in the past, that we can't trust you to enrich. And therefore Russia will provide the fuel necessary for the civilian nuclear reactor. And therefore you don't need to [en]rich.



So our demands are just and fair. And Bill, we have been implementing the sanctions through the United Nations. And we're working with our friends and allies. As a matter of fact, much of my discussions on this trip have been dominated by this subject because our allies understand that a nuclear-armed Iran is incredibly destabilizing, and they understand that it would be a major blow to world peace.

So I'm disappointed that the leaders rejected this generous offer out of hand. It's an indication to the Iranian people that their leadership is willing to isolate them further. And our view is we want the Iranian people to flourish and to benefit. We want their economy to be strong so people can grow up in peace and hope; and they've got a - - this Ahmadinejad is obviously -- takes a different position from that. So his policies are what's creating the deprivation inside Iran.

PRESIDENT SARKOZY: Well, I think France's position is well known. If Iran gets a nuclear bomb, that is totally unacceptable. That's very clear. It is an unacceptable threat to world stability, especially when you think of the repeated statements made by the President of Iran right now. Anyone is entitled -- including Iran -- to access to civilian nuclear energy. We will help them to do so if they act in good faith. If the Iranian authorities are in good faith then they should let inspections run their course. If they nothing to hide, then they have nothing to hide -- let's show it.

And meanwhile the only solution in order to persuade the Iranians of this is a faultless, seamless sanction system, you see. The door is wide open to access to civilian nuclear technology -- straightaway, now. But as far as military nuclear access is concerned, this is "no" on the part of the international community. And as the President just said, Vladimir Putin has with us sung from the same hymn sheet and our position will not change. The Iranian people -- who are great people and a major civilization -- they need economic progress, they need growth, they deserve better than the impasse, the dead-end into which some of their leaders are leading them.

Q President, to you, Mr. Sarkozy. It would appear that the building and shaping of Europe has been seriously shaken yesterday by the Irish "no." In fact, some have called for the ratification procedure to be suspended. Can this not be the case? And secondly, do you want your presidency, the French presidency to be one which, as you called for, continues to push Europe forward? And do you not think that the Irish "no" is going to hinder this?

PRESIDENT SARKOZY: Well, it's going to make things more difficult, but when you're a head of state and when the bubble -- you take over the presidency of the union, if you like easy jobs then you should step down straightaway.

Now, the Irish "no" is a political reality. It's a fact. It's happened. But the issue is not whether we like or not; it's a fact, we have to live with it. The Irish people said what they had to say, and we have to accept that. Now, having said that, we, with Angela Merkel, believe that we have to continue with the ratification process, because at this stage 18 European states have ratified the treaty. We have to continue doing so and that is Gordon Brown's intention, as he explained to me yesterday over the telephone, so that this Irish hiccup not become a major crisis.

So despite that, let's continue to ratify. But at the same time, we have to put our heads together, all of us. It is no coincidence, it is no surprise to a certain extent -- in fact I spoke yesterday with the Irish Taoiseach, the Irish Prime Minister. A lot of Europeans do not understand how we are shaping Europe right now and building Europe, and we have to take account of that. And we have to do so very fast. We have to change our way of building Europe.

The idea of a European construct -- it was one of the most wonderful ideas that the founding fathers had some half a century ago. We cannot allow -- we shouldn't sabotage it. But perhaps we should do it differently. Europe was set up to protect, and yet it worries so many Europeans. We can't not take account of this. We have to do so, and we have to do so now. So I have every intention of taking initiatives. I'm thinking, for instance, of a European immigration policy. I'm thinking of a European response to this endless increase in oil prices. It seems to me that we have a duty to be more effective and look at what the daily lives of our fellow citizens look like. And I take the Irish "no" as a call for us to do things differently and do things better.

Now, of course it's not going to simplify the work and the task of the French President, Presidents of the European Union, but --

PRESIDENT BUSH: Olivier. Tossing a bone to somebody who has got a French name. (Laughter.) Might want to use the mic, Olivier.

Q Yes, I will. Thank you, Mr. President. Merci, Monsieur Président. First --

PRESIDENT BUSH: Speaks the language, too. (Laughter.)

Q Just wait. (Laughter.) I'd like to ask you each a question --

PRESIDENT BUSH: In the great tradition of David Gregory.

Q Who?

PRESIDENT BUSH: Yes -- just trying to work him in the news here.

Q I'd like to ask you a question first, Mr. President. (As translated.) And then a question to the President of France. (Speaking English.) President Bush, Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki says that talks on a status of forces agreement are at an impasse, or a dead end -- not dead, but in trouble. How do you break this impasse, and are the conditions that the United States have set forward in support so far non-negotiable?

(As translated.) And to you, President, is the Franco-American relationship the privilege, the priority number one relationship in the transatlantic context?

PRESIDENT BUSH: Olivier, if I were a betting man, we'll reach an agreement with the Iraqis. You know, of course we're there at their invitation; this is a sovereign nation. And therefore, we're working hard with the elected

government of Iraq about, you know, U.S. presence and coalition presence, in a way that the elected government is comfortable.

And it's interesting to be working with a democracy where, you know, people are trying to prepare the ground to get something passed in the parliament, for example, or the free press is vibrant. But we're going to work hard to accommodate their desires. It's their country.

And at the same time, we believe that a strategic relationship with Iraq is important. It's important for Iraq. It's important for the United States. It's important for the region. And I repeat to you that whatever we agreed to, it will not commit future Presidents to troop levels, nor will it establish permanent bases.

Anyway, we'll see how it goes. And thanks for the question -- in English. (Laughter.)

PRESIDENT SARKOZY: Well, the Americans and the French have had a privileged relationship for two centuries now. I mean, when the United States of America was born, France made a choice. It was not a European choice, because we chose to side with the Americans of the United States of America, as opposed to Britain at the time. And in two world wars we've been together. We share the same values.

So yes, it is a privileged relationship, but it's not privileged since I came to be elected; it's been privileged for two centuries now. You can't neglect that. Now, through this -- throughout that, we have had ups and downs -- hiccups -- because two peoples -- I'm talking about the French and the American peoples -- that actually resemble one another. We express our feelings. The American people can be heard, and likewise for the French people. We have to be careful about this. We have to be mindful of this when we talk to one another in our relations.

I have always seen American leaders -- and thank you to President Bush -- for accepting European originality and independence; and of course French originality and independence. And I've always noted that we can talk very frankly when we had points of disagreement. But we have to do so as allies and as friends, and be mindful of not hurting one another. We can agree on an issue, on the substance of issue, but we don't have to say so in an unpleasant manner. It so happens that today we have a lot of areas of convergence. But yes, maybe on such and such an issue, we don't totally agree, but it doesn't in any way undermine the basis of what I have to say, which is that the Americans are our friends and our allies. They know they can count on us.

Might I add that it seems to me that the more you trust somebody, the more trust there is on both sides of the Atlantic, the more leeway we have. We don't ask the United States to apologize to us because they have their own vision of their strategic interests, and they don't ask us to apologize for the fact that we are defending our own strategic interests, precisely because the relationship is a strong one, it is a calm one, and when a relationship is that strong, you accept one's divergences or differences. And that is my whole point -- you've got to understand if you're in a strong relationship, then you have more room for freedom, more room for maneuver. That's what this is all about.

Perhaps one last question?

PRESIDENT BUSH: Oh. (Laughter.)

PRESIDENT SARKOZY: (Speaking English.) One more, last.

Q You have set the target before leaving the White House that by the end of this year you will hopefully achieve an historical peace between the Israelis and the Palestinians. However, in light of what's happening to the fragile position of Ehud Olmert, Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, and the continuous process of building illegal settlements in eastern Jerusalem and certain parts of the occupied territories, do you think that peace is far away right now in light of those obstacles?

PRESIDENT BUSH: Thank you. First of all, I view the concept of a Palestinian state and the idea of a Palestinian state for Israeli security, as well as Palestinian security and hope, as bigger than the political process. And I fully recognize there's a lot of uncertainty in the Israeli political scene now.

On the other hand, what is not uncertain is that most people or many people in Israel understand that for their

own security there has to be a Palestinian state, with clearly defined borders, a state that doesn't look like Swiss cheese, a resolution of the refugee issue and the security issue, and of course issues surrounding Jerusalem.

Most Palestinians want to coexist in peace with Israel. And that peace must be in a state that is clearly visible, well defined, and in actuality is a state. And so in other words, the concept -- and by the way, this is newly arrived; I'm actually the first President ever to have articulated a two-state solution, two democracies living side by side with peace -- in peace. And during my time as President I've seen a notable shift amongst folks in the Middle East that recognize the importance of having that state.

So my point to you is, is that, you know, it's been a -- there's always difficulties in democracies, but the notion of getting this work done is important. And therefore our diplomacy is to remind all the parties involved that they have now an opportunity to get a state negotiated. And I think it can be done by the end of the year. Condi is very much involved with it on a, you know, a nearly weekly, it seems like, basis. And of course I'm in touch with the leaders. The Palestinians are discouraged by the settlement activity -- all the more reason to get the borders clearly defined as quickly as possible.

I want to thank Nicolas and the EU, for example, for helping build civil society in the Palestinian Territory, as well as helping Prime Minister Fayyad with security measures.

I'll also remind you that it's essential that we get a state defined as quickly as possible so that leaders such as President Abbas and Prime Minister Fayyad can say to their people, here's an alternative vision to what's taking place in Gaza. You support us and you're going to get a state. You support Hamas, and you're going to get Gaza. Take your pick.

And therefore, it is imperative that we, you know, convince the parties to get this done. Now, I know some say, all America has got to do is say, do it. No -- the way it works is the parties have got to come to this agreement. Our job, along with the EU through the Quartet, is to keep the process moving.

And so I'm optimistic. I understand how difficult it is, but difficultly should not cause people to do the right thing. If you believe in your soul something is right, then you have an obligation to work. And in this case, I firmly believe that the establishment of a Palestinian state will bring hope and peace to the Israelis and the Palestinians.

Thank you.

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