

## Bush Denounces Islamic Extremists, Iran During Israel Visit

Contributed by AP  
Thursday, 15 May 2008

JERUSALEM &mdash; President Bush on Thursday criticized the deadly tactics of extremist groups like Al Qaeda, Hezbollah and Hamas and said he looks toward the day when Muslims "recognize the emptiness of the terrorists' vision and the injustice of their cause."

In a speech prepared for delivery to the Knesset, or parliament, Bush pledged that the United States has an unbreakable bond with Israel.

"Some people suggest that if the United States would just break ties with Israel, all our problems in the Middle East would go away" Bush said in his prepared address. "This is a tired argument that buys into the propaganda of our enemies, and America rejects it utterly. Israel's population may be just over 7 million. But when you confront terror and evil, you are 307 million strong, because America stands with you."

Bush took special aim at Iran and said the United States stands with Israel in opposing moves by Tehran to obtain nuclear weapons.

"Permitting the world's leading sponsor of terror to possess the world's deadliest weapon would be an unforgivable betrayal of future generations," the president said. "For the sake of peace, the world must not allow Iran to have a nuclear weapon."

With just eight months remaining to reach an agreement, Bush's speech was striking in what it did not say. It offered no suggestions on how to resolve the thorniest disputes over the borders of an eventual Palestinian state, the status of Jerusalem and its contested holy sites and the rights of Palestinians to return to land inside present-day Israel.

There was only one reference to Palestinians in all of Bush's prepared remarks and no timetable for achieving a Palestinian state. Bush previously has set a goal of reaching an agreement before the end of his term outlining the shape of a Palestinian state.

The only reference to Palestinians came in a passage envisioning the future of Israel 60 years from now.

"Israel will be celebrating its 120th anniversary as one of the world's great democracies, a secure and flourishing homeland for the Jewish people," Bush said. "The Palestinian people will have the homeland they have long dreamed of and deserved a democratic state that is governed by law, respects human rights, and rejects terror."

"From Cairo and Riyadh to Baghdad and Beirut, people will live in free and independent societies, where a desire for peace is reinforced by ties of diplomacy, tourism, and trade. Iran and Syria will be peaceful nations, where today's oppression is a distant memory and people are free to speak their minds and develop their talents. And Al Qaeda, Hezbollah, and Hamas will be defeated, as Muslims across the region recognize the emptiness of the terrorists' vision and the injustice of their cause."

Here to celebrate the 60th anniversary of Israel's birth, Bush said that "the joy of independence was tempered by the outbreak of a battle, a struggle that has continued for six decades. Yet in spite of the violence, in defiance of the threats, Israel has built a thriving democracy in the heart of the Holy Land."

With less than a year left in his term, Bush is waging a long-shot campaign for a major Mideast peace agreement that would lead to the establishment of an independent Palestinian state living side by side in peace with Israel. The goal is complicated by politics on both sides of the negotiations and rocket attacks into Israel by the Hamas radical group that controls Gaza.

"This struggle is waged with the technology of the 21st century, but at its core it is the ancient battle between good and evil," Bush said. "The killers claim the mantle of Islam, but they are not religious men. No one who prays to the God of Abraham could strap a suicide vest to an innocent child, or blow up guiltless guests at a Passover Seder, or fly planes into office buildings filled with unsuspecting workers."

Bush said that those who carry out such violent acts are serving only their own desire for power.

"They accept no God before themselves. And they reserve a special hatred for the most ardent defenders of liberty, including Americans and Israelis," Bush said. "That is why the founding charter of Hamas calls for the `elimination' of Israel. That is why the followers of Hezbollah chant `Death to Israel, Death to America!' That is why Usama bin Laden teaches that `the killing of Jews and Americans is one of the biggest duties.' And that is why the president of Iran dreams of returning the Middle East to the Middle Ages and calls for Israel to be wiped off the map."