

## Bush promises Obama won't allow Iran nukes

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The US will not allow Iran to develop nuclear weapons, even after President-elect Barack Obama's inauguration on January 20, President George W. Bush said on Friday.

Bush went on to call Teheran's nuclear program "a major threat to peace," speaking at the Saban Forum in Washington.

"While Iran has not accepted these offers, we have made our bottom line clear: For the safety of our people and the peace of the world, America will not allow Iran to develop a nuclear weapon," he said.

Bush also spoke of his administration's efforts to bring about an agreement between Israel and the Palestinians, and said Israel was America's "closest ally in the Middle East."

The president noted he had been "the first American president to call for a Palestinian state, and building support for the two-state solution has been one of the highest priorities of my presidency.

"To earn the trust of Israeli leaders, we made it clear that no Palestinian state would be born of terror, we backed prime minister [Ariel] Sharon's courageous withdrawal from Gaza, and we supported his decision to build a [West Bank] security fence, not as a political border but to protect his people from terror," Bush said.

Calling Yasser Arafat a "terrorist who stole from his people and walked away from peace," Bush complimented the Palestinian Authority's current leadership, saying the US was "strongly supporting its efforts to build the institutions of a vibrant democratic state."

"In all our efforts to promote a two-state solution, we have included Arab leaders from across the region, because their support will be essential for a lasting peace," the US president said. "I believe that the day will come when the map of the Middle East shows a peaceful, secure Israel beside a peaceful and democratic Palestine."

Noting that an agreement between Israel and the Palestinians has not been reached, as was agreed at the Annapolis conference in November 2007, Bush said that both sides had "made important progress. And as they have stated to the Quartet, they have laid a new foundation of trust for the future."

Bush went on to speak about problems in the Middle East generally, saying, "Iran and Syria continue to sponsor terror, Iran's uranium enrichment remains a major threat to peace, and many in the region still live under oppression."

Still, Bush proclaimed that the Middle East was a freer, more hopeful place today than it was when he took office in 2001.

He cited examples: The Lebanese are free from Syria's military occupation; Libya's nuclear weapons equipment is locked away in the Oak Ridge National Laboratory in Tennessee; the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain are emerging as centers of commerce; Iran is facing greater international pressure than ever before; and the threat from terrorist organizations like al-Qaida has been curtailed.

On Iraq, Bush defended the US-led invasion on grounds the world could not have risked leaving president Saddam Hussein's power unchecked. While it was true Saddam was not connected to the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, the decision to oust him could not be viewed in isolation, Bush said.

"In a world where terrorists armed with box cutters had just killed nearly 3,000 people, America had to decide whether we could tolerate a sworn enemy that acted belligerently, that supported terror and that intelligence agencies around the world believed had weapons of mass destruction," the US president said.

"It was clear to me, it was clear to members of both political parties, and to many leaders around the world that after September 11, that was a risk we could not afford to take," he said.

AP contributed to this report

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