

Bush, Sarkozy for President Who Enjoys Support from Majority of People

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U.S. President George Bush and French President Nicolas Sarkozy said they are for a President who enjoys support from the majority of the Lebanese people and pledged to work together to see that a new head of state is elected before Nov. 24.

Bush said he was "comfortable" with French outreach to Syria over the political crisis in Lebanon but insisted Lebanon must control its own destiny.

"I have a partner in peace," Bush said of visiting French President Nicolas Sarkozy during a joint press conference in Washington.

Sarkozy is "somebody who has clear vision, basic values, who is willing to take tough positions to achieve peace. So you ask am I comfortable with the Sarkozy government sending messages? You bet I am comfortable," said Bush.

Presidential elections in Lebanon have been twice deferred due to a lack of consensus over who should replace the pro-Syrian President Emile Lahoud, whose term runs out on November 24.

"Our common objective here is for the Lebanese democracy to survive, thrive, and serve as an example for others. We will work with France and with others to see that this process be completed by November 24," Bush said.

French President Nicolas Sarkozy pledged the help of the Lebanese people to retain their sovereignty and independence and elect a president who represents them according to the constitution and within the scheduled limit. "France stands engaged alongside all the Lebanese. It will not accept attempts to subjugate the Lebanese people." Sarkozy vowed in a historical speech he delivered before the U.S. congress.

Sarkozy stressed that "what Lebanon needs today is a broad-based president elected according to the established schedule and in strict respect of the constitution."

"Together we must help the Lebanese people affirm their independence, their sovereignty, their freedom, their democracy," he said.

The French president hailed the friendship between France and the United States and paid tribute to U.S. sacrifices in World War II as he drew a veil on years of tense ties.

"Since the United States first appeared on the world scene, our two peoples, the French and the American people, have always been friends," Sarkozy told the U.S. Congress in a rare address by a foreign dignitary.

As he arrived for a joint session of the Senate and the House of Representatives, U.S. lawmakers gave the French leader a three-minute standing ovation and his address was met with bursts of warm applause.

"We may have differences, we may disagree on things, we may even have arguments, as in many families," he said, "but in times of difficulty, in times of hardship, one stands true to one's friends, one stands shoulder to shoulder with them, one supports them, and one helps them."

Sarkozy held out an extended olive branch to Washington and President George Bush, backing the tough U.S. line on Iran's nuclear program. But he also urged the Americans to do more to shore up the dollar and called upon them to take the lead in the fight against global warming.

He pledged before U.S. lawmakers that France would stay the course in Afghanistan.

"Let me tell you solemnly today, France will remain engaged in Afghanistan for as long as it takes, because what is at stake in that country is the very future of our values, and that of the Atlantic alliance."

Sarkozy also urged the Palestinians and Israelis to reach a long-awaited peace agreement.

He said "Together we must help the people of the Middle East find the path of peace and security. To the Israeli and

Palestinian leaders I say this: Don't hesitate! Risk peace! And do it now!"

"The status quo hides even greater dangers: that of delivering Palestinian society as a whole to the extremists that contest Israel's existence; that of playing into the hands of radical regimes that are exploiting the deadlock in the conflict to destabilize the region", Sarkozy added.

"France wants security for Israel and a State for the Palestinians," he reiterated.

Sarkozy was speaking on the second day of his first official visit to Washington since his election in May.

French-U.S. ties soured under Sarkozy's predecessor Jacques Chirac who firmly opposed the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003.

After his speech on Wednesday Sarkozy was to join Bush for talks at Mount Vernon, George Washington's historic residence located just outside the U.S. capital.

The French leader reiterated on Wednesday his strong support of the U.S. drive to deprive Iran of atomic weapons, saying to applause that "the prospect of a nuclear-armed is unacceptable to France."

"The Iranian people are a great people," he said. "They deserve better than the sanctions and growing isolation their leaders are condemning them to."

"Iran must be persuaded to choose the option of cooperation, dialogue and openness ... we will be firm and we will keep up the dialogue," he said.

Sarkozy also renewed French concerns over currency imbalances, bemoaning the weakness of the U.S. dollar and the undervaluation of the Chinese yuan, saying the currency "disarray" could lead to "economic war."(Naharnet-AFP)

Beirut, 08 Nov 07, 08:28

<http://www.naharnet.com/domino/tn/NewsDesk.nsf/getstory?openform&1CDD131ADB8AAFEDC225738D002354DA>

Lebanon's political crisis to rank high on agenda between Bush, Sarkozy
Both presidents express support for democracy in country

Compiled by Daily Star staff
Thursday, November 08, 2007

The Lebanese political crisis was expected to rank high on the agenda of talks of US President George W. Bush and his French counterpart President Nicolas Sarkozy in Washington on Wednesday, ahead of Lebanon's presidential vote scheduled for next Monday. During a speech to Congress on Wednesday, Sarkozy said that he will work with the US to ensure Lebanon has a democratically elected president and to protect its sovereignty, democracy and freedom.

"What Lebanon needs is a president elected by the Lebanese people," the french president said in his speech. "France will not accept anyone trying to subjugate the Lebanese people. No one is entitled to prevent the Lebanese to live in a free country."

On Tuesday evening, Bush and Sarkozy voiced strong support for Lebanon's ruling majority during a dinner hosted in honor of the French guest.

"Our two nations support the democratic government of Lebanon," Bush said.

France and the United States have taken a strong line against Syrian involvement in Lebanon in recent weeks.

A bitter power struggle between the country's ruling coalition supported by the West and the Hizbullah-led opposition backed by Syria and Iran is now focused on the name of the country's next president.

President Emile Lahoud is scheduled to step down on November 24. Parliament is scheduled to meet on Monday to elect a successor. But the vote, already postponed twice, is likely to be delayed again unless there is a deal between the two rival camps, political sources quoted by Reuters said.

While the French stance on the issue of the presidential vote is to elect a head of state who "enjoys support from the majority of the people," the US believes that in the absence of a consensus president, a new head of state should be

elected by a simple majority.

Diplomatic sources quoted by AFP on Wednesday said France could move to adopt Washington's stance, particularly after Paris failed to convince Damascus to soften its stand. Two French envoys met with President Bashar Assad on Sunday.

The sources said that France was "deceived" when they learned that Monday's Parliament session was likely to be postponed after it appeared that "contacts have not yet ripened."

"What is going on now is not an agreement on a consensus president, but rather on a prime minister and on the distribution of the portfolios among the key groups so that the new president would not face obstacles that could impede his performance," said one diplomatic source.

French presidential envoys are expected in Beirut on Thursday to follow up on the talks held with Assad and the talks between Sarkozy and Bush.

While Paris and Washington were offering support for the ruling coalition, Russia appealed on Wednesday for political accord ahead of the "fateful" presidential poll and warned against any "foreign meddling."

"Based on our firm support of Lebanon's sovereignty, political independence and territorial integrity, we call on all of the country's political leaders to realize the historic responsibility that lies upon them and do all they can to reach an accord," Foreign Ministry spokesman Mikhail Kamynin said.

"This is a fateful moment for Lebanon, without exaggeration. The most important thing is that the presidential elections be in full accord with Lebanon's law without any foreign meddling from whatever side," he added.

In Beirut, Assistant Arab League Secretary General Hisham Youssef met with politicians from both camps on Monday in an effort to facilitate a smooth election.

"We hope that consensus would be eventually reached," Youssef told reporters after meeting with Prime Minister Fouad Siniora. "We hope that dialogue will continue until the election day."

Youssef also met with MP Ali Hassan Khalil, who is a member of Speaker Nabih Berri Amal's Movement and held talks with former Prime Minister Omar Karami and Social Affairs Minister Nayla Mouawad.

Also discussing the Lebanese crisis is Cypriot Minister of Foreign Affairs Erato Kozakou Markoullis, who arrived in Beirut on Wednesday night.

Lebanese Forces leader Samir Geagea said that there are efforts to arrange a meeting between him and opposition figure and head of the Free Patriotic Movement Michel Aoun in the near future.

"I will do my best to reach an understanding with him," Geagea said during an interview with the Central News Agency.

Aoun met last week in France with Geagea's ally, Future Movement leader Saad Hariri in talks that were widely interpreted as a positive development toward solving the crisis.

Hariri met with US Ambassador to Lebanon Jeffery Feltman in Qoraitem Wednesday.

Geagea also said that his party would oppose any constitutional amendment to allow the election of a public sector employee. Among the presidential candidates are at least two public sector employees, Lebanese Army Commander General Michel Suleiman and central bank Governor Riad Salameh.

Geagea predicted that Syria will try until the last minute to block the election, recalling how "it defied the world to maintain its grip on the Lebanese presidency" when they pushed through Parliament a measure extending Lahoud's term by three years in 2004.

Geagea also said that a president will be elected even if rival politicians don't reach a deal, in a hint that he will be elected by a simple majority quorum instead of the two-thirds.

The Loyal to the Resistance parliamentary bloc said in a statement following their weekly meeting that they will consider presidential election carried out by a simple majority "a coup against the Constitution."

"Consensus over presidential election is a national demand and the only guarantee to ensure the constitutional quorum," the statement said.

Tight security measures will be imposed until the end of presidential election and the area between the Phoenicia Intercontinental Hotel, where many MPs are staying, and Parliament will be a military zone.

In addition, Internal Security Forces and the Lebanese Army will patrol Beirut round the clock, according to security sources. - Agencies

http://www.dailystar.com.lb/article.asp?edition_id=1&categ_id=2&article_id=86613

President Bush Participates in Joint Press Availability with President Sarkozy of France
Mount Vernon Estate
Mount Vernon, Virginia

Video (Windows)
Presidential Remarks
Audio
Photos

3:12 P.M. EST

PRESIDENT BUSH: Mr. President, welcome. Thank you very much for coming here to Mount Vernon, and thank you for coming to the United States. I think it's safe to say that you've impressed a lot of people here on your journey. You bring a lot of energy, enthusiasm for your job, love of your country, and a strong set of universal values in your heart.

We just had an extensive conversation, one that you'd expect good friends to have. We talked about Iran and the desire to work jointly to convince the Iranian regime to give up their nuclear weapons ambitions, for the sake of peace. We talked about the Middle East and the upcoming talks at Annapolis, Maryland. We spent some time on Kosovo, and I appreciate the President's leadership on Kosovo.

I can't thank the President enough for his willingness to stand with young democracies as they struggle against extremists and radicals. And one such democracy is Afghanistan. Mr. President, your leadership on that issue for your country was very impressive. You sent a very clear message. It's clear that you're a man who does what he says he's going to do. It's the kind of fellow I like to deal with.

And so, Mr. President, I also want to thank your administration in your staunch -- strong stance for human rights and human dignity. Whether they be to those who are oppressed in Burma, or Darfur, or on the island of Cuba, France's voice is important and it's clear that the human rights of every individual are important to the world. And I look forward to advancing peace and freedom with you, Mr. President.

Our bilateral relations are important. They are strong and we intend to keep them that way. And so, welcome here to George Washington's old home. Proud to have you in America. Thanks for coming.

PRESIDENT SARKOZY: (As translated.) I want to thank President Bush, his administration, and all Americans who have welcomed us in such exceptional fashion. I get the distinct sense that it is France that has been welcomed so warmly, with so much friendship, so much love. This was my hope, my ambition. And with Bernard Kouchner, Christine Lagarde, Rachida Dati and myself, this is exactly what we wanted.

We've been very moved, deeply moved by your wonderful welcome, together with Mrs. Laura Bush, yesterday at the White House. I especially enjoyed the skit of the dialogue between George Washington and Lafayette that we witnessed.

The tokens of friendship that we have seen since we've been here, your open-mindedness and the fact that we can address any and every subject -- all those that you mentioned, sir -- even though the European defense policy and NATO have also been addressed; environmental issues, which are close to our heart; and Afghanistan. I said that we would stay there because what is at stake is the credibility of the Atlantic Alliance and the fight against terror.

We spent hours discussing very important issues, commercial, economic and others. And I will say that we have done so in a spirit of openness and trust, and that is something I've been particularly struck by. And I can tell you that this visit I think has been very widely covered in France. So when I say that the French people love the American people, that is the truth and nothing but the truth.

Now, I expressed -- I spoke at length this morning and I think the best would be that after President Bush -- whom I wish to thank once again -- we could answer any questions you may have.

PRESIDENT BUSH: Two questions a side. Deb.

Q Mr. President, you came down so hard on Burma and other nations for their crackdowns on pro-democracy demonstrators. Yet you seem to be giving Musharraf a pass. So the question is why are you going so soft on Musharraf? Is there a double standard?

PRESIDENT BUSH: I spoke to President Musharraf right before I came over here to visit with President Sarkozy. And my message was that we believe strongly in elections, and that you ought to have elections soon, and you need to take off your uniform. You can't be the President and the head of the military at the same time. So I had a very frank discussion with him.

Look, our objective is the same in Burma as it is in Pakistan, and that is to promote democracy. There is a difference, however. Pakistan has been on the path to democracy; Burma hadn't been on the path to democracy. And it requires different tactics to achieve the common objective. And as I told you, I just spoke to President Musharraf before I came here, and my message was very -- very plain, very easy to understand, and that is, the United States wants you to have the elections as scheduled and take your uniform off.

You want to call on somebody?

PRESIDENT SARKOZY: You know, in France, I don't choose, I don't pick the journalists.

PRESIDENT BUSH: You don't get to choose? Who chooses? I choose? (Laughter.) Who would you like me to choose? (Laughter.) Oh, he chose. Wait a minute, it didn't last very long, did it?

PRESIDENT SARKOZY: I didn't choose, I indicated a general direction. (Laughter.)

Q Thank you, Mr. President. My question is on Iraq. Mr. President, this morning you talked at length about Afghanistan, Iran, but not Iraq. And I wanted to ask both of you, is France reconciled with the United States, the United States is reconciled with France? So what about Iraq? Can France, for instance, help to get out of the Iraqi quagmire? And President Bush, where do you stand on Iraq and your domestic debate on Iraq? Do you have a timetable for withdrawing troops?

PRESIDENT BUSH: I don't -- you know, "quagmire" is an interesting word. If you lived in Iraq and had lived under a tyranny, you'd be saying, god, I love freedom -- because that's what's happened. And there are killers and radicals and murderers who kill the innocent to stop the advance of freedom. But freedom is happening in Iraq. And we're making progress.

And I can't thank the President enough for sending his Foreign Minister to Baghdad. It's a clear message that freedom matters; that when people are struggling to live in freedom, that those of us who have comfort -- the comfort of a free society ought to help them.

We had a difference of opinion with your great country over whether or not I should have used military force to enforce U.N. demands. I reminded a TV reporter -- I don't know if the person is here or not -- but I said, I just want to remind you that 1441 was supported by France and the United States, which clearly said to the dictator, you will disclose, disarm, or face serious consequences. Now, I'm the kind of person that when somebody says something, I take them for their word.

Having said that, we had a difference of opinion. But I don't sense any difference of opinion now that a struggling democracy wants help from those of us who live in the comfort of free societies. And, Mr. President, the strong gesture of sending your Foreign Minister there wasn't a message to the United States, because we're good friends; it was message to the Iraqi citizens, that said, we hear your cries for freedom, we want you to succeed -- because one of the lessons of history is, free societies yield peace.

And so I appreciate your leadership on that issue and I want to thank your Foreign Minister for -- I don't see your Foreign Minister. Look, the guy was here. (Laughter.) Oh, there he is, yeah, next to -- look, the President was blocking; next to Madam Rice. Anyway, thank you, sir.

PRESIDENT SARKOZY: Allow me to give you two answers in one. On Pakistan, yes, we're worried about the situation. It's worrisome and we need to have elections as quickly as possible. You cannot combat extremism using the same methods as extremists, and it is very important, it is of the essence that Pakistan organize elections. I, like President Bush, I wish this to take place as speedily as possible.

Let me remind you that this is a country of 150 million inhabitants who happens to have nuclear weapons. It is very important for us that one day we shouldn't wake up with a government, an administration in Pakistan which is in the hands of the extremists. And we should, each and every one of us, think about this, of the principles, the values that we

uphold and that we defend, and we must continue to uphold. And then there's the complexity, as it were, in the field. That's why it's important to convene elections, call elections.

Now, on Iraq, Bernard Kouchner's trip to Iraq was very successful. What does France want? A united Iraq. No one, it is in no one's interest to see Iraq dismantled. We want a democratic Iraq. We want a diverse Iraq, where each component, component element of Iraqi society has learned to live with others; an Iraq which can administer and govern itself and that has the means of ensuring the peace and security of every one of its citizens. And that was exactly Bernard Kouchner's message when he went to Iraq. And this is in the interest of one and all that it be thus. And that position is the position I will defend until the end.

PRESIDENT BUSH: Toby.

Q Mr. President --

PRESIDENT BUSH: Which one?

Q Both of you.

PRESIDENT BUSH: Get moving, will you?

Q Okay. Mr. President, with oil approaching \$100 a barrel, are you concerned that your hard words for Iran on its nuclear program are helping drive up oil prices, which can end up hurting the U.S. economy?

PRESIDENT BUSH: No. I believe oil prices are going up because the demand for oil outstrips the supply for oil. Oil is going up because developing countries still use a lot of oil. Oil is going up because we use too much oil, and the capacity to replace reserves is dwindling. That's why the price of oil is going up.

I believe it is important for us to send clear signals to the Iranian government that the free world understands the risks of you trying to end up with a nuclear weapon. And, therefore, we will work together to try to find if there's not rational people inside your government who are tired of isolation and who believe there's a better way forward.

Every time I give a talk about Iran I make sure I speak to the Iranian people -- and I want them to hear once again that we discussed your country today; that we believe -- that I believe that you've got a bright future; that we respect your history and respect your tradition; however, you are governed by people who are making decisions that are isolating you from the rest of the world and you can do better than that.

The idea of Iran having a nuclear weapon is dangerous, and therefore, now is the time for us to work together to diplomatically solve this problem. And we spent a lot of time on the subject. And I thank the French President for his resolve on solving this issue peacefully.

PRESIDENT SARKOZY: I just wanted to say that we exchanged all the intelligence and information we had. It is unacceptable that Iran should have at any point a nuclear weapon. But Iran is entitled to the energy of the future, which is civilian nuclear energy. I believe in the effectiveness of sanctions. I believe even in the need -- (inaudible) -- the sanctions. But in my mind the two go together, in other words, the open -- the outstretched hand of dialogue, of continuing discussions -- because Iran deserves a better fate than that isolation. And I cannot imagine that there are not people, leaders in Iran who will stop to think about the consequences of what is going on.

This is a great people and a great civilization, and we must be firm for as long as there is no gesture on their part. And we have to keep the way of dialogue open, because we must do everything to avoid the worst-case scenario. And this, indeed, was the subject of a very lengthy conversation which showed exactly how convergent our views were.

Q Mr. President, with respect to your statements on Afghanistan and France's commitment on engagement, does this mean that France is going to be sending additional ground troops to fight in the southern regions of Afghanistan, as the U.S. wishes them to do?

How do you feel about the fact that France has been engaging Syria on the upcoming Lebanese presidential election? Do you think that's a good idea? And what are the chances that Lebanon will have a presidential election by November 24th? Thank you.

PRESIDENT BUSH: Thanks, good question.

You want to go first?

PRESIDENT SARKOZY: Well, on Afghanistan, I said what I thought and what I think. We've talked about it with

President Bush. We will not pull out of Afghanistan because what is at stake here is the solidity of our alliance, and ultimately what is at stake here is the fight against terror. We're thinking about the best way to help bring about a democratic Afghanistan. Is it by strength, in stepping up our training efforts so that we lay the groundwork or the basis of a modern Afghan state? Or is it by other means? Maybe perhaps military means? We're still thinking about it.

THE PRESIDENT: First of all, you know, the Syrian influence in Lebanon was something that the previous government and I worked on to -- collaboratively. And because France and the United States worked together, we passed 1551 Resolution out of the United Nations, which got Syria out of Lebanon, by and large. And so we spent time collaborating on how best to make sure that Syria doesn't influence the presidential elections; that, in fact, the presidency is picked by the Lebanese people.

And I'm very aware that Mr. Hariri and Nabih Berri are in consultations as to whether or not they can come up with an acceptable candidate to them, not to Syria; whether or not the Lebanese people can be assured that their President is going to be representing the people of Lebanon, not the people -- not the government of Syria.

And I'm comfortable with President Sarkozy's government sending clear messages that meet common objectives, and our common objective here is for this Lebanese democracy to survive, thrive and serve as an example for others.

We will work with France and with others to see that this process be completed by November 24th. We believe it's in the interests of the Middle East that this Lebanese democracy survive. I want Lebanon to serve as an example for the Palestinians, to show them what's possible. I believe in a two-state solution. I believe there ought to be two states living side by side in peace. So does the President; we discussed that today. There's nothing better for the Palestinians to see what is possible with a stable democracy in Lebanon.

The interesting challenge we face in the world in which we live is there are murderers who will try to stop the advance of democracy, particularly in the Middle East. Isn't it interesting that the places where there's most violence is where there's young democracies trying to take hold, whether it be Iraq or Lebanon or in the Palestinian Territories? And the call for nations such as ourselves is to support those who want to live in freedom. Freedom is the great alternative to the ideology of people who murder the innocent to achieve their political objectives -- by the way, the very same ones that came and killed 3,000 of our citizens.

And so what I'm telling you is -- let me end this press conference by telling you this: I have a partner in peace; somebody who has clear vision, basic values, who is willing to take tough positions to achieve peace. And so when you ask, am I comfortable with the Sarkozy government sending messages -- you bet I'm comfortable.

Mr. President, thanks for coming. I appreciate you being here.

END 3:31 P.M. EST

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2007/11/20071107-5.html>