



## **Remarks on the Middle East and Freedom Agenda by National Security Advisor Stephen Hadley (November 28, 2007)**

As you know, an international conference on the Middle East was held in Annapolis yesterday. At that meeting, Israelis and Palestinians – with the support of their Arab neighbors and the international community – launched negotiations for the establishment of a Palestinian state and for a broader peace between Israelis and Palestinians. Success in these negotiations will contribute to the ultimate goal of a comprehensive peace between Israelis and Arabs.

In light of this development, I thought it would be timely to address four questions this evening:

First, why do we believe that there is an opportunity to achieve a Middle East peace at this particular time?

Second, why is it important to seize this opportunity?

Third, how did we get to this moment of opportunity?

And finally, how is Annapolis linked to President [Bush](#)'s broader agenda of promoting freedom in the Middle East and beyond?

### **I. WHY DO WE BELIEVE THAT THERE IS AN OPPORTUNITY TO ACHIEVE A MIDDLE EAST PEACE AT THIS PARTICULAR TIME?**

There are three reasons why we believe there is an opportunity to achieve a Middle East peace at this time.

First, there has been a dramatic change in the Israeli assessment of their strategic position and long-term interests.

Key segments of the Israeli public have given up the aspiration for a “Greater [Israel](#)” – and no longer wish to retain control over the West Bank and populate it with Israeli settlers. They have recognized that this approach – combined with current demographic trends – would threaten the Jewish character of the State of [Israel](#).

A much larger portion of the Israeli public – who once opposed the establishment of a Palestinian state – have begun to embrace the idea. They have come to understand that the establishment of a free and democratic Palestinian state as a homeland for the Palestinian people can advance international recognition and acceptance of a free and democratic [Israel](#) as a homeland for the Jewish people.

And a growing number of Israelis understand that a Palestinian state supported by its people and with the will and capability to maintain peace within its borders will advance [Israel](#)’s own security against terrorist attacks.

There has also been a change within the Palestinian community.

President [Abbas](#) and Prime Minister [Fayyad](#) are Palestinian leaders whose first priority is bettering the lives of the Palestinian people. They have committed themselves to building the institutions of an independent, democratic, and viable Palestinian state that can provide dignity and hope to their people. They have rejected the terrorist violence that has made victims of so many Palestinians and Israelis.

They are committed to establishing a Palestinian state – and they understand that it cannot be achieved through terror. They want to negotiate with [Israel](#) for the creation of that state and to live side by side in peace and security with [Israel](#). As President [Abbas](#) said yesterday at Annapolis: “He who says that making peace between Palestinians and Israelis is impossible wants only to prolong the duration of the conflict.”

Third, the Arab states have been engaged.

While giving rhetorical support to the Palestinian cause, Arab states until recently have not made the major investment required to build the institutions of a free and independent Palestinian state. Arab states now are increasingly seeing it as in their interest to put the Israeli-Palestinian issue behind them and to focus instead on the pressing security challenges confronting the region.

A reflection of this new attitude is the reaffirmation this year of the Arab Peace Initiative first proposed by then-[Crown Prince Abdullah](#) of [Saudi Arabia](#) over four years ago – and the decision taken by the Arab states at the [Arab League](#) meeting last week to attend the Annapolis meeting en masse.

## **II. WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO SEIZE THIS OPPORTUNITY?**

It is important to seize now the opportunity presented by these developments.

Key leaders of [Israel](#) and the Palestinians have for their own reasons come to the conclusion that it is in their interest to launch negotiations.

Having decided to pursue negotiations, it is important that they not fail. If the effort to establish a Palestinian state through negotiations is abandoned, it will appear to vindicate those who preach violence and practice terror. It will almost ensure that the next generation of leaders of the Palestinian people will come from [Hamas](#) or other [terrorist groups](#). This would represent a clear and present danger to Israelis ... responsible Palestinians ... and their Arab neighbors.

### **III. HOW DID WE GET TO THIS MOMENT OF OPPORTUNITY?**

We have reached this moment of opportunity in the Middle East for many reasons. Among them are the policies that President [Bush](#) has pursued over the last six years.

First, the President identified terrorism as the primary obstacle to peace in the Middle East.

Terror and violent extremism threaten the Palestinian people ... the Israeli people ... and the hopes of many nations for peace in the Middle East. So fighting terror – and discrediting the apologists for terror – has been at the center of the President’s approach to Middle East peace.

The President sought to discredit violence against innocents as a means to pursue political objectives. The President argued strongly that violence against innocents is never justified – by any cause. He made the connection between [Hamas](#), [Hezbollah](#), and al Qaeda as different faces of the same evil: a radical ideology seeking to impose its worldview throughout the Middle East and beyond. And the President has largely won this argument.

The President further demonstrated his commitment to fight and discredit terror in refusing to deal with [Yassir Arafat](#). The world was shocked. But the President saw [Arafat](#) as a failed leader who was complicit in terror and who did not deliver for his people. The President called for a new Palestinian leadership – one that put the interests of the Palestinian people first and understood that violence and terror compromised those interests.

As he said in his Rose Garden speech in the summer of 2002: “Today, Palestinian authorities are encouraging, not opposing, terrorism. This is unacceptable. And the United States will not support the establishment of a Palestinian state until its leaders engage in a sustained fight against the terrorists and dismantle their infrastructure.”

Four years later, the Palestinian people now have leaders in President [Abbas](#) and Prime Minister [Fayyad](#) who understand that terror is the enemy of the Palestinian people and their hopes for a Palestinian state.

The President also made clear that defending itself against terror is the right of every state. He firmly supported Israeli Prime Minister Sharon's efforts to protect the Israeli people from terrorist attacks. By supporting their efforts to fight terror, the President gave Israelis the confidence to take bold steps toward peace.

Much of the world condemned Israeli Prime Minister [Sharon](#)'s plan to disengage from [Gaza](#), but the President understood the real significance of the move. He saw that when the father of the Israeli settlement movement peacefully removed settlements from [Gaza](#), that marked the effective end of the dream of "Greater [Israel](#)." President [Bush](#) believed that such courage deserved America's support – and he gave it.

The President also helped create the context for success at Annapolis by making the aspirations of the Palestinian people his own.

President [Bush](#) was the first U.S. President to call for the creation of a Palestinian state. Not just any state – but a state worthy of the Palestinian people and their aspirations for their children: a free, independent Palestinian democracy.

The President recognized that such a state requires effective democratic institutions. Building such institutions takes time – and requires resources. So the President has focused American aid to the Palestinian people on institution building – and urged the international community to do likewise. Next year alone, the United States will provide more than half a billion dollars to the Palestinians to help them build the institutions and security forces of their future state. General Keith Dayton of the United States Army is on the ground to assist in this effort. Many other nations have also stepped forward with significant commitments. And Quartet Representative Tony Blair will help generate additional aid for the Palestinian people at a donor's conference next month in Paris.

The President believes in Palestinian democracy on principle – yet he also believes that a Palestinian democracy represents the only practical way to move forward toward peace. With effective political institutions, a new Palestinian state has the best chance to develop in a manner that the Palestinian people deserve and expect. And with effective security institutions, a Palestinian state will become the kind of neighbor that Israelis can envision as a partner – and next to whom they can feel secure and at peace.

As part of his commitment to Palestinian democracy, the President supported Palestinian elections.

The President believes that the Palestinian people – like all people – have the right to choose their leaders. He also believes that only a leader elected by the Palestinian people will have the legitimacy and authority to negotiate with [Israel](#) on their behalf.

In 2005, the wisdom of the President's support for Palestinian democracy appeared self-evident. [Mahmoud Abbas](#) was elected President on a platform of peace ... opposition to terror ... improvement in the lives of the Palestinian people ... and the creation of a Palestinian state through negotiations with [Israel](#). President [Abbas](#) won a mandate for this platform, and we believe that mandate still stands.

In the parliamentary elections in 2006, candidates affiliated with the terrorist group  [Hamas](#) won. The election campaign focused primarily on internal governance – as  [Hamas](#) candidates generally ran in opposition to corruption and a legacy of misrule. They promised more effective and accountable government for the Palestinian people.

To the credit of the Palestinian people, the elections were conducted openly and fairly. The international community called on  [Hamas](#) leaders to honor previous agreements of the [Palestinian Authority](#) ... reject terror ... and recognize the existence of the State of [Israel](#). They refused. In June of this year,  [Hamas](#) terrorists staged a coup d'etat in [Gaza](#) – overthrowing legitimate government institutions ... killing those who stood up to their gunmen ... and bringing violence, want, and despair to millions of Palestinians.

The undemocratic actions of  [Hamas](#) have been a major setback for the Palestinian people. Yet these same actions make clear to the Palestinian people the two alternatives before them. On the one hand is the vision offered by  [Hamas](#) of chaos and misery ... perpetual war with [Israel](#) ... and isolation from their neighbors and the international community. On the other hand is the vision offered by President [Abbas](#): a vision of peace, dignity, and opportunity for the Palestinian people.

A peace agreement negotiated with [Israel](#) would help make the vision offered by President [Abbas](#) much more tangible ... give moderates in [Gaza](#) something specific to support ... and isolate and marginalize Palestinian extremists. We can be confident that – when given the choice – the people of [Gaza](#) will choose the vision that allows them to exercise their sovereignty ... reject violence ... and join their fellow Palestinians in the [West Bank](#) who are building a positive future for all Palestinians. When they do so, Palestinian historians will look back on the 2006 parliamentary elections as a Pyrrhic victory for  [Hamas](#) ... and merely a stumble, rather than a fall, for Palestinian democracy.

The President also helped create the context for success at Annapolis by encouraging key regional states to give greater support to peace negotiations.

The President recognized that Middle East peace enjoys broad support within the international community – yet that broad support is not enough. For their negotiations to be successful, the Israelis and Palestinians need engagement and proactive support from their neighbors – including [Jordan](#), [Egypt](#), [Lebanon](#), [Syria](#), and [Saudi Arabia](#).

The President has delivered this message at major summits – including [Aqaba](#) in 2003 – but he does the vast majority of this diplomatic work privately, in bilateral meetings and phone calls with regional leaders. Over the past six years, he has made the case time and time again that the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is in the best interests of the Arab states ... that violent extremism is the biggest threat to regional security ... and that a free and democratic Palestine at peace with [Israel](#) would be a grave blow to the extremists' cause.

Key states in the Middle East can support the Israelis and Palestinians in two ways: financial support for building the institutions of a Palestinian state and for improving the lives of the Palestinian people ... and diplomatic support to help both parties make the hard choices necessary for peace. For President [Abbas](#), diplomatic support from Arab states further isolates [Hammas](#), and will allow him to negotiate with the Arab states behind him. For Prime Minister [Olmert](#), diplomatic support from Arab states will allow him to deliver a broader peace to the Israeli people: a reconciliation not only with the Palestinian people, but with their many Arab neighbors as well.

Fourth, the President helped create the context for success at Annapolis by refusing to impose an American solution.

President [Bush](#) believes that only Israelis and Palestinians meeting together can resolve their differences – only they can negotiate an agreement that both their peoples will accept. The President will not force a resolution of differences nor impose a peace plan with his name on it. What the President will do is use his relationships with the parties to help them build the confidence necessary to make hard choices for peace. He has made clear that he is only a phone call away.

When desired by the parties, the President will facilitate solutions to hard problems. He will continue to offer his full support to Prime Minister [Olmert](#) and President [Abbas](#) – and urge other nations to do the same.

#### **IV. HOW IS ANNAPOLIS LINKED TO PRESIDENT BUSH'S BROADER AGENDA OF PROMOTING FREEDOM IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND BEYOND?**

Success in establishing an independent, democratic and viable Palestinian state – and an Israeli-Palestinian peace – will represent a crucial advance in promoting freedom in the Middle East and beyond.

The President believes in the Freedom Agenda because he believes that freedom is the right of every person. Freedom is not America's gift to the world – it is God's gift to every person in the world. The United States promotes freedom because it is right to do so – and part of our heritage as a nation.

The Freedom Agenda is visionary – but it is not new. Freedom was the basis of our founding as a nation – and promoting freedom has been pursued with more or less emphasis by every U.S. Administration and every generation of Americans.

Promoting freedom means supporting the rights of all people to choose their leaders and enjoy basic civil liberties. This requires free and fair elections – and democracy's parallel institutions such as a free press ... freedom of association ... and an independent judiciary. Elections are not sufficient – in and of themselves – to transition a nation to a free and democratic political system. But elections can clarify choices and point the way forward – and thereby accelerate the establishment of other democratic institutions. History teaches us that tyrannies are rarely the midwives of democratic institutions.

Promoting freedom emphatically does not mean imposing freedom. People must struggle for and win their own freedom. Democratic reform comes at its own pace and in its own time. And when it comes, the free institutions a free people establish will reflect their unique historical and cultural experience.

Yet for much of the last century the Freedom Agenda seemed to inform U.S. policy in every region of the world except the Middle East. The results were tragic. Tyranny and oppression fueled resentment – and violent extremists, including al Qaeda, exploited that resentment. There can no longer be – in the 21st Century – a “Middle East exception” to the progress of democracy in the 20th Century.

We do not know where the negotiations begun at Annapolis will lead. But if they are successful, the result will not only be peace – but an expansion of freedom in a part of the world that has known very little of it. And if freedom can be established in a Palestinian state, it will be a major inspiration and example for other people throughout the Middle East and beyond.

I want to thank all the students here tonight who are studying international affairs. I strongly encourage you to consider a career in public service. And I hope that you will inherit – and continue to build – a world growing in freedom, prosperity, and peace.

And with that, I would be happy to take your questions.

Thank you.

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Source: [White House](#)

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