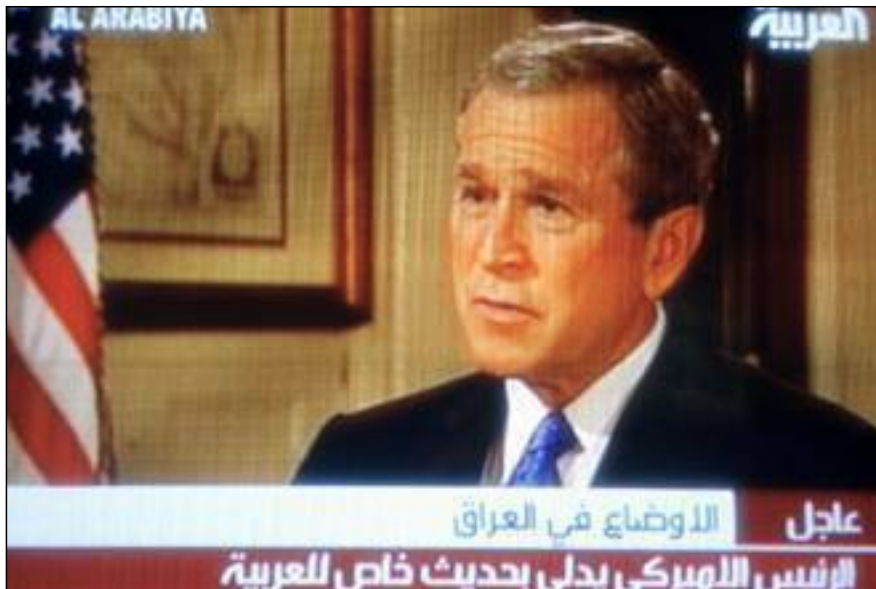


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In an exclusive interview with AlArabiya TV Bush denies he is an "enemy of Islam"



Bush discusses core issues plaguing the Middle East (File)

DUBAI (Mona Moussly)

American President George W. Bush spoke exclusively to Al Arabiya television on Friday and denied that he was an "enemy of Islam" as he vowed to push forward with Middle East peace and warned of a nuclear-armed Iran.

The hour-long interview at the White House tackled the core Middle East issues and gave Bush "the opportunity to talk for the first time to the Arab world to address them with the big concerns."

But one of the most pressing question asked by Al Arabiya anchor, Ellie Nakozi, was one most Muslims want the answer to; is it true you want to destroy Islam?

"No, it's not ... it just shows a couple of things: One, that the radicals have done a good job of propagandizing," he replied.

"We are having an Iftar dinner tonight. This is the seventh one in the seven years I've been the president," Bush said, adding he wanted to wish Muslims a happy Ramadan.

"The reason I do this is I want people to understand about my country... that one of the great freedoms in America is the right for people to worship any way they see fit," he said.

The interview comes as the Bush administration is failing miserably in the Iraqi quagmire, the Israelis and Palestinians are in stalled peace discussions, Lebanon is in the midst of electing a new president and the world wonders if it should brace itself for a war with Iran.

Bush vowed to work on a diplomatic solution to the Iran nuclear standoff and said he believed Iran should not have nuclear "know-how," as it would give Iran the opportunity to carry out the destruction of

Israel.

Bush denied reports in the Arabic media that he had issued orders to prepare for a major strike on Iran during the end of January or February.

"I, of course, said all options are on the table, but I made a pledge to the American people we will work diplomatically to solve the problem," he said.

Israelis and Palestinians are in deep discussions over the framework of the issues to be discussed at a U.S.-sponsored conference due to take place in Washington in November.

Bush said he was "very optimistic that we can achieve a two-state solution."

"We're hosting an international conference that will be attended by interested parties and ... a committee from the Arab League. It is an opportunity for serious, substantive discussions about the way forward and a two-state solution," Bush said.

Speaking of Lebanon Bush expressed his "deep desire to help the Lebanese democracy succeed" adding he was "deeply concerned about foreign interference... (and) that neighboring countries will try to create instability so that this democracy doesn't succeed."

"There's just too many parliamentarians who are trying to work for a peaceful Lebanon being assassinated. And we need to know who is doing that assassinations," he said.

Full Interview

Following is the full text of Al Arabiya's interview with President Bush:

Q- Mr. President, it's nice to see you. It's nice to meet you. And how are you doing?

THE PRESIDENT: Welcome. Come on in the Oval Office. I'm doing great. Thank you. I welcome you here. And I thank you for the opportunity to talk to you about some of the decisions that I have made right here in this Oval Office. I'm honored you've come.

Q - Actually, I want to tell the people of the Middle East that this is the place where big decisions are made. This is the office. But here it comes to my mind that how hard it is on you, Mr. President, to take like -- a big decision like war, for example -- is it that easy to take a decision such like war?

THE PRESIDENT: No, it's the hardest decision a President can make. And when I campaigned for office I never really thought about the decision to put men and women in harm's way. I never thought that that would happen. Circumstances changed, of course, and I had to make some very difficult decisions about how to protect our homeland and take action necessary to -- the actions that I think will yield the peace.

And so whether it be in Afghanistan or Iraq, I was -- I have made those decisions. And I will tell you they're hard decisions, because I understand the consequences. One of the hardest things for me is to meet with a mother. I met with a mother yesterday in Pennsylvania who lost her son in combat. And you know, those can be very tearful and emotional moments, and I understand that. And my -- the only thing I try to do is provide as much comfort as I can, and to assure the mom, in this case, that I thought the decision was necessary for peace, and necessary for our security; and that I valued the fact that her son would volunteer, and that I vowed to honor that sacrifice by achieving our objectives.

Anyway, this is the room where I make the decisions.

Q- But would these moments -- I mean, these emotional moments, would they make you reconsider or rethink about what's going on in our area now (Middle East)?

THE PRESIDENT: Not really. As a matter of fact, I leave most of the meetings reassured that the loved one, in this case, fully understanding what we were doing. See, I believe that, one, it's noble to liberate 25 million people from a tyrant; two, that we cannot allow Iraq to be a safe haven for people who have sworn allegiance to those who have attacked us. In other words, I believe we must defeat the extremists there so we don't have to face them here at home. And three, I believe the spread of liberty will yield peace. And I believe the Middle East is plenty capable of being a part of the world where liberty flourishes. That's what I believe people want.

And so I leave those meetings saddened by the fact that a person has pain in her heart -- and yesterday she had pain in her heart -- but encouraged by the fact that her son died for a noble cause and a necessary cause. And that's exactly what she told me.

Q- Actually, I want to thank you again, Mr. President, for giving us the opportunity to talk for the first time to the Arab world, to address them with the big concerns. I know we have a great deal of questions. I know you have a very tight schedule.

THE PRESIDENT: Sure, I want to show you the Rose Garden, one of the most famous areas.

Q- It's a great chance for me. I heard, Mr. President, also that you are receiving an Iftar.

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, I am.

Q- In the White House, which is, of course, a Muslim ritual

THE PRESIDENT: It is.

Q- But I want to tell you -- and I hope this doesn't bother you at all -- that in the Islamic world they think that President Bush is an enemy of Islam --

THE PRESIDENT: Sure.

Q- That he wants to destroy their religion, what they believe in. Is that in any way true, Mr. President?

THE PRESIDENT: No, it's not. I've heard that, and it just shows [sic] to show a couple of things: One, that the radicals have done a good job of propogandizing. In other words, they've spread the word that this really isn't peaceful people versus radical people or terrorists; this is really about the America not liking Islam.

Well, first of all, I believe in an almighty God, and I believe that all the world, whether they be Muslim, Christian, or any other religion, prays to the same God. That's what I believe. I believe that Islam is a great religion that preaches peace. And I believe people who murder the innocent to achieve political objectives aren't religious people, whether they be a Christian who does that -- we had a person blow up our -- blow up a federal building in Oklahoma City who professed to be a Christian, but that's not a Christian act to kill innocent people.

Q- Exactly.

THE PRESIDENT: And I just simply don't subscribe to the idea that murdering innocent men, women and children -- particularly Muslim men, women and children in the Middle East -- is an act of somebody who is a religious person.

We are having an Iftar dinner tonight -- I say, "we" -- it's my wife and I. This is the seventh one in the seven years I've been the President. It gives me a chance to say "Ramadan Mubarak." The reason I do this is I want people to understand about my country. In other words, I hope this message gets out of America. I want people to understand that one of the great freedoms in America is the right for people to worship any way they see fit. If you're a Muslim, an agnostic, a Christian, a Jew, a Hindu, you're equally American.

And the value -- the most valuable thing I think about America is that -- particularly if you're a religious person -- you can be free to worship, and it's your choice to make. It's not the state's choice, and you shouldn't be intimidated after you've made your choice. And that's a right that I jealously guard.

Secondly, I want American citizens to see me hosting an Iftar dinner.

Q- That's a strong message for the Americans.

THE PRESIDENT: It is a strong message. I want to remind your listeners that one of the first things I did after September the 11th is I went to the local mosque. And I did because I wanted to send a message that those who came to kill Americans were young terrorists, and they do not reflect the views of the vast majority of peaceful people in the Middle East; and that our -- precisely the message I was trying to send, the war is not a struggle against Muslims, the Muslim religion, it is a struggle of honorable, peaceful people throughout the world against the few who want to impose their vision.

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Q- Actually, Mr. President, we are talking about these terrorists and what's going on in the world right now. Are you also a man of war, as some try to describe, President Bush?

THE PRESIDENT: Oh, no, no, I believe the actions we have taken will make it more likely peace happens. I dream it will be -- the last thing I want to be is a President during war. Now, remember, we got attacked. And I responded, after careful deliberation, in an attempt to make sure that -- with a strategy of protecting ourselves. We can't allow these people that attacked us to have safe haven. We must not give them an opportunity to strike us again. And therefore it's important to keep the pressure on.

On the other hand, the ultimate way for peace is for people to realize the great blessings of liberty. And what's interesting, and what has taken place ought to be hopeful to people in the Middle East, is that two young democracies have sprung up where people, when given a chance, voted. See, I believe there is a universal God. I believe the God that the Muslim prays to is the same God that I pray to. After all, we all came from Abraham. I believe in that universality. And I believe a gift of that Almighty to every man, woman and child is freedom. I really do. And I think people, if given a chance, will seize freedom. And it's liberty and free societies -- not -- they don't have to look like America -- an Iraqi democracy is going to be Iraqi, it's going to reflect Iraqi traditions and Iraqi history.

There are some universal aspects to liberty. One, people can vote, people can express their opinion, people can be in a free press, people ought to be allowed to go to the town square and protest against their government without fear of reprisal. And when given that opportunity, 12 million Iraqis went to the polls.

Q- So, excuse me, Mr. President, what you're trying to say is sometimes a decision of war -- you have to take a decision of war in order to achieve peace.

THE PRESIDENT: That's exactly right.

Q- And that's what happened in Iraq.

THE PRESIDENT: First of all, yes. I was very concerned about the dictator in Iraq. He was an enemy of the United States of America. He had ties to terrorists -- I'm not saying those who attacked us on September the 11th, but I am saying ties to terrorists. He had a lot of money that he was willing to spend on weapons of mass destruction. We didn't find the weapons, but he certainly had the knowledge. And in my judgment, over time, he would have been able to develop those weapons, and they would have been -- one thing the Middle East doesn't need is a nuclear arms race.

Q- Yes, we're going to discuss this.

THE PRESIDENT: Well, this guy doesn't -- the man, Saddam Hussein, had capability -- but remember, there's also a human condition. I believe in human rights. I believe every life has value -- whether it be an American life or a life of a person in the Middle East. And this brutal guy killed hundreds of thousands of his own people. And he was unbelievably brutal to neighbors, and, as well, to Iraqis. And there's -- liberation is a powerful -- to me, liberating people is a powerful step toward peace. I wish we didn't have to do this militarily. I was hoping that diplomacy would work. I gave diplomacy a lot of chance to work.

Q- But it didn't.

THE PRESIDENT: It did not work. So the choice was his, not mine. He had the choice as to whether or not this issue would be resolved peacefully. See, that's the interesting thing that has been turned around. And so I don't regret the decision. As a matter of fact, I feel it was the right decision to this day. And now the question is will America keep its commitment to the millions of Iraqis who want this society to work? And the answer to that is, yes, we will.

Q- And here, Mr. President, I would love to ask, I mean, for the Iraqis now, they know and they keep on listening to the news. Sometimes we tell them we want to withdraw the troops. And now we're talking about the partition of Iraq, which is very, very bad news for the Iraqis.

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, it is.

Q- I know you refused this. You want the unity of Iraq. But what if this Iraqi -- what if, in the next administration, another President comes to the office and believes in the partition of Iraq? What's going to happen then?

THE PRESIDENT: I don't think it will happen. I don't think it's going to happen.

Q- How do you guarantee?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, first of all, an American President must understand that Iraq is a sovereign nation operating under its own constitution. And I'm very confident that the will of Iraq will prevail. And I know there's some noise out of here about partition. But most folks who follow this issue don't support partition, and they don't think it's a good idea.

What Iraq is going to have to do is get the proper balance between the central government and the provinces -- the very same thing we've been worried about here in America for years. What is the right

road between the states and Washington? So that's a constant discussion. But that's what they're going to have to do in Iraq as well. And they're going to need the security situation such that they're able to have an honest political discourse.

So our step one was to help them secure their neighborhoods -- and it's working -- and make sure these radicals, such as al-Qaeda and some of these Shiite groups, many of whom -- which are criminal, aren't able to have their way with this society. And now we'll work toward helping these folks have the important discussion about what should be the role of Baghdad, or what should be the role of the provincial governments. And when they get that right, when they get settled out, then I think you'll see a much more unified country.

And it's going to be very hard for an American President or any other outside country to dictate to the Iraqis, here's what your government must look like, because the Iraqis will show over time that they're capable of making these decisions themselves, and they are making hard decisions right now, by the way.

Q- I know that your message, your deep message was -- to the Arab world -- was democracy, freedom, human rights. And you've said too many times that the first message is democracy, is that you have rights, you people of the Middle East, to be free. But now, is democracy still a priority? Because all we hear now in Iraq is, let's achieve security, let's achieve stability. Is democracy in the Middle East on hold now, waiting for security first?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, first of all, no. I strongly believe in the freedom movement. It's ingrained in my soul. It comes from my belief that freedom is universal. And I believe freedom is ingrained in everybody's soul and if just given a chance, they'll reach for it.

Now, in Iraq, in order for the government to have breathing space, to be able to do the hard work of reconciliation so that the dreams of the average citizen in Iraq can be realized -- which is a free society -- there's got to be security.

And so security is really a step, an important step, in the freedom movement. You can't make the decisions if you're worried about getting blown up. And what the enemy wants to do, the enemy of a free Iraq, they want to create enough chaos and confusion inside Iraq that causes people to doubt. And they want, by the way, to kill enough innocent people that causes the American people to lose their patience and determination to help freedom movements.

Not every freedom movement requires military action. But freedom movement does require U.S. commitment to helping reformers and just the average citizen realize the blessings of a free society.

And so the freedom movement is the front and center of our foreign policy, because I understand that the peace that we want -- listen, we all want peace, except for those who are trying --

Q- "Except for those," exactly.

THE PRESIDENT: But peace will succeed, as more and more people become free.

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Q- (All following questions as translated.) Mr. President, we have moved from the Oval Office to the beautiful garden, and here I would like to ask you question that go through the minds of the Arab world. Our world is going through very difficult days.

Let me start with what people expect of me, which is Iran. Mr. President, have you made the decision to

strike Iran, as some are saying, or trying to say that you will not leave your administration and office before you strike Iran militarily?

THE PRESIDENT: I have made the commitment that I would continue to work with the world to speak with one voice to the Iranians, to the Iranian government, that we will work in ways that we can to make it clear to you that you should not have the know-how on how to make a weapon, because one of the great threats to peace and the world would be if Iranians showed up with a nuclear weapon. It would give them an opportunity to blackmail or threaten or possibly follow through with their stated objective, which is the destruction of Israel.

I, of course, said all options are on the table, but I made a pledge to the American people we will work diplomatically to solve the problem. And that's why you see us at the United Nations working with the EU countries, and China and Russia, to send that clear message; and that we're going to continue to impose sanctions and make it harder for the Iranian government to operate in the world until they change their mind, until they come to a new way forward. I have said that if they suspend their nuclear program we will be at the table. But they have so far refused to do that.

I've also spoken to the Iranian people. And I want to make it clear to the people of Iran that the United States respects Iran, respects the people, respects the proud tradition, and that the government of Iran has taken decisions that make it harder for them to live their lives. It's the decisions of the government of Iran that have led to the isolation of the country. And that if this government would only be responsible, would listen to the world, would not continue its weapons program -- the idea of being able to have the capacity to make a weapon -- then there's a better way forward for the Iranian people.

Q- But Mr. President, is there a redline, either a timeline or redline -- I hear from analysts that Iran wants today, or at least trying today to buy time in order for you to wait -- to lose the time that you can make a big decision, such as going to war. In your judgment, is there a timetable, is there a ceiling that if negotiations fail, a decision to go to war would be made?

THE PRESIDENT: The Iranian regime must understand that I'm dedicated to the proposition that they should not continue their desire to enrich, as will be people that follow me in office. There is universal concern about Iranian ambition here in America. This is not a party issue, an issue between one party or the other. When the Iranian President announces to the world that he's going to destroy an ally, or announces to the world that he will end up defying the world -- that no matter who the President is, there is going to be a continued focus and effort to achieve this issue, to resolve this issue.

Q- This issue, before I move to Iraq, which also, a lot of Iraqis are waiting for this -- is there -- there are some leaking to the press, and particularly the Arabic press, is it true that you have issued orders, Mr. President, to your senior generals in the American military to prepare for a major and precise strike that could happen during the end of January or February?

THE PRESIDENT: I would call that empty propaganda. Evidently there's a lot of gossip in parts of the country -- world that try to scare people about me, personally, or my country, or what we stand for. And that kind of gossip is just what it is -- it's gossip, it's baseless gossip.

Q- Mr. President, we have talked about Iraq. And you have tried to give us a message to assure the Iraqi people -- when we were in the garden together -- that you do not believe in the partition or the division of Iraq. And this is a very controversial issue in Iraq. And it is scary to even some of the leadership in Iraq. Just to continue and follow up with that issue, did we reach what we reached because of American mistakes or because of Iraqi mistakes and the Iraqi government?

THE PRESIDENT: I think, first of all, the successes in Iraq have been really quite extraordinary. One, the people of Iraq no longer have to live under a dictatorship -- a brutal dictatorship. Secondly, the Iraqi

people wrote and ratified a modern constitution. Thirdly, there is a government that is in place that is beginning to take on the responsibilities of governing. For example, quite a few billions have been spent in the provinces by the central government -- that doesn't get any focus, but there is a functioning government; there is revenue sharing; there is money to the provinces.

There is still work to be done, no question about it. But the biggest problem facing Iraq was because killers, bombers decided to murder innocent people in order to stop progress. So what I tell people is, is that the reason why there hasn't been smooth progress -- and by the way, it's hard to transition from a dictatorship to a Iraqi democracy -- but the main problem has been not the Iraqis or not the United States, but it's been the fact that people have murdered.

For example, what I find appalling is that al-Qaeda bombed a holy site, a Muslim holy site; that there have been bombs in markets where innocent people are shopping and young children get destroyed by Muslim -- people who profess to be Muslims. Their hearts are so hardened that they're willing to kill innocent people.

And so the task is to deny these people their ability to blow up the innocent. And that's exactly what's happening because of Iraqi bravery and Iraqi forces, and a commitment by the government to deal with murderers. See, I believe murderers murder, and it doesn't matter whether you're a Shiite murderer or a Sunni murderer or a Christian murderer, you're a murderer. And the role of a state is to protect the innocent people from those murderers. And that's what you're seeing taking place in Iraq. But in the meantime, government is beginning to function better.

But people shouldn't be surprised that it's not instant democracy. First of all, the leaders never have had any practice with democracy, and they're learning to get along after years of tension and resentment. I support Prime Minister Maliki strongly, and I support the presidency council strongly. I just had President Talabani in to the Oval Office the other day. And the reason I do is because -- I look for courage and commitment. And these leaders are courageous men, and they're committed to a free Iraq. Has it been perfect progress? No. Is there more work to be done? You bet there's more work to be done. But are things better -- getting better over time? Yes, they are. And that's what's important for the American people to know. And what's important for the Iraqi people to know is that we're going to support them; is that they've got our help, because we want them to succeed, we want them to realize their dreams.

Q- Mr. President, so the words that were said attributing to the White House or the American position about disappointment in Prime Minister Maliki is not true, you are not disappointed in Prime Minister Maliki and this Iraqi government yet?

THE PRESIDENT: I strongly support Prime Minister Maliki. Again, there's a lot of gossip here, as well as overseas. One of the jobs that I have to continue to do is constantly repeat what -- the position of my government. And the position of my government is that Prime Minister Maliki is a good man who is working hard, and we strongly support him.

But it's not just Prime Minister Maliki that we support. We also support President Talabani or Vice President al-Mahdi or Vice President Hashimi. We support those who are committed to peace and committed to the welfare of the Iraqi people. And we support those who are willing to take on these extremists, the few who are murdering innocent people in order to create chaos and confusion inside of Iraq. Again, I repeat, the situation is not perfect, but our country is not perfect. And I'm proud of the courage of the Iraqi citizens.

The Iraqis have been through a lot of bloodshed and violence. And yet they're still strong in their desire to achieve -- the Iraqis will be successful.

Q- Mr. President, let's move to Lebanon. And a lot of Lebanese are waiting. You have met with Mr. Saad Hariri today, and they are all talking about the upcoming elections in Lebanon that could or could not happen. Does President Bush have a specific, preferred candidate in Lebanon that you wanted to support for the presidency of Lebanon? Is there going to be elections in Lebanon that will take place?

THE PRESIDENT: No, I have no specific candidate, and I told that to Saad Hariri. I have a deep desire to help the Lebanese democracy succeed. I am deeply concerned about foreign interference into the presidential election. I am concerned that neighboring countries will try to create instability so that this democracy doesn't succeed, just like I'm deeply concerned that there's been murder on the streets of Beirut, including Saad Hariri's dad, and that the international community must follow through in an expeditious way -- must follow through quickly in holding -- in having an international tribunal, so that those who murdered -- so that the facts come out and those who murdered would be held to account.

There's just too many parliamentarians who are trying to work for a peaceful Lebanon being assassinated. And we need to know who is doing that assassinations, and when they're found out, they need to be held to account; there needs to be a consequence. And the international community has been too slow in getting the international tribunal moving.

Thirdly, I told Saad Hariri that I sent one of our top military men into Lebanon to help them modernize their armed forces. And the reason I felt comfortable doing that is because Prime Minister Siniora showed courage, and had -- as did the Lebanese forces, when they went out to rout out some extremists who were causing chaos or trying to cause chaos in Lebanon. And yet it became apparent to me that this military was full of courageous people but didn't have the modern equipment necessary to defend the country from extremists and/or extremists who had been funded from outside influence.

This is a very difficult situation. I'm hopeful that, obviously, the presidency will be resolved and that a unified government can move forward. Saad Hariri shared with me the strategy of the March 14th coalition, and I was more than willing to listen. I assured him and I assure the Lebanese people that we want to help you succeed.

Q- Mr. President, are we able to say today, for example to the Lebanese people -- and we know that the United States is the most powerful constituency in Lebanon -- can we say to the Lebanese people that you, specifically, Mr. President, will prevent any foreign interference in Lebanon that could be imposed from the outside and have a President that is being promoted by outside force?

THE PRESIDENT: I think maybe that's a promise that I'm not sure I could keep, because the one thing that we did was we worked with France to pass a U.N. resolution to get Syria, Syrian presence, visible presence, out of Lebanon. However, I suspect that there's still a lot of Syrian influence in Lebanon that is not helpful. And one way to make it clear to the Assad government that we don't appreciate this is for the United States to -- is to analyze the sanctions we've placed on the government and think about other ways to continue to send a message and to work with our friends, particularly in Europe, to send the same message. In other words, there has to be a consequence for continued involvement.

And the other thing is, is that I think it's going to be an important signal to send -- is this tribunal. The international community said we ought to have a tribunal. I'm frustrated, frankly, by the pace at which the tribunal is lingering -- it's not moving. There needs to be a definitive moment where the evidence is laid out, and if it's clear evidence -- in other words, if somebody's guilty, they ought to be held to account so that murder is not -- so that there's this clear signal that murder is not going to be accepted. The brave souls of Lebanon who are being killed. Saad Hariri's dad was one, blown up, murdered. Why? Because he supported democracy, Lebanese democracy is for freedom.

And that ought to send a clear message to people throughout the world that it is so important for those of

us who live in free societies to support brave people who are promoting liberty. This man wanted nothing more than the Lebanese mom to be able to raise her child in peace. And yet somebody ordered or somebody followed through with cold-blooded murder to deny those dreams for the Lebanese people. And the same thing is happening in Iraq, and it's unacceptable behavior.

And the United States is firm in its desire to help the average citizen in the Middle East live in peace. It just so happens a peaceful Middle East will make America more secure. So we have common interests. And that's really what I want the people in the Middle East to hear -- that each issue is an issue that's got difficult problems, but there's an interconnection. Extremists want to stop freedom, though. And we want -- we want you to live in peace. And we respect your religion, and we respect your humanity. And our desire for you is to realize your full potential, God-given potential.

Q- Mr. President, of course I cannot conclude this interview without asking the most important question, that is the issue of Palestine. Is President Bush convinced, truly convinced inside, that it is possible yet to achieve peace between Israel and Palestine? Can we achieve the two states, living side by side, and not as two enemies but two friends? Is it possible or is it difficult or impossible to achieve?

THE PRESIDENT: I believe in my soul, in my heart, that not only is it necessary that there be two states living side by side in order to achieve peace, but it's possible. I'm very optimistic we can achieve a two-state solution.

First, Prime Minister Olmert and President Abbas are committed to a two-state solution and are making progress. We've done a lot of dialogue between the two men, and they are making progress. And they're making progress that I believe where the average Palestinian and average Israeli will begin to see what a vision looks like. In other words, something to work for; something that's more tangible than just a Rose Garden speech by the President or hopeful comments by others; something real.

Secondly, that, you know we're hosting a international conference that will be attended by interested parties -- the Arab League, you know, important Arab League group will be there, a committee will be there from the Arab League. And it's an opportunity for there to be a serious, substantive discussions about the way forward, and a two-state solution. A lot of it is going to be empower both parties -- give them confidence to follow through on the vision.

I also want you to know that I fully understand the two-state solution is a part of a comprehensive peace in the Middle East, and that our strategy is to get all concerned countries to the table; to get this comprehensive peace moving forward in a way that is tangible and real, so people can see it. In other words, I'm not interested in just a photo opportunity, and I don't think anybody else is going to be interested in that. I really want to see if we can advance the progress. Step one was for there to be a commitment by Israel and the Palestinians to this peace.

And step two is a commitment to the road map. In other words, nobody is going to want have a state that becomes a launching pad for attack. The Palestinians, the average Palestinian doesn't want that, and surely the Abbas government doesn't -- and Israel can't stand that.

And so we've got -- we got to work a lot with the Palestinians to help their security forces -- and we are -- and to help the President and the Prime Minister with economic aid, tangible economic aid so the average Palestinian can see a better life ahead, can realize there's something better than violence. And so I am very optimistic about it, about the prospects for peace.

Q- Mr. President, on behalf of myself and Al Arabiya TV, I would like to thank you very much for this opportunity. You were very generous with us on time; I know you have a very hectic schedule. Thank you very much for this opportunity. And I hope to meet with you again when you also are in a position to

achieve some of our democracy in our region. Thank you, sir.