

## Extra Feature Story

### President Bush Tours Middle East to Build Support

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**President Bush visited six Middle East countries in eight days in an attempt to firm up support on key diplomatic issues, including peace between the Israelis and the Palestinians and unified pressure on Iran.**

The president travelled to Israel, Kuwait, Bahrain, United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia and Egypt. He also visited the West Bank, where he met with Palestinian leaders.

#### Israel and peace with the Palestinians

It was President Bush's first trip to Israel as president, although he was there in 1998 as governor of Texas.

During the visit Mr. Bush called on Israel to dismantle "illegal" settlements in disputed lands it has occupied since the Six-Day War in 1967. He also called upon Palestinians to guarantee that no part of their land remain a safe haven for terrorists.

Following his meeting with Palestinian leaders in the West Bank, the president said he was confident that there will be a comprehensive peace agreement between the Israelis and Palestinians by the end of the year and the end of his term as president.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict was a focus of President Bill Clinton's foreign policy, but President Bush had not engaged the two sides until a summit he hosted in Maryland in December.

#### Kuwait, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates

The president's next stop was to the first of five Arab nations in the region, Kuwait.

This country is the home of Camp Arfijan – an Army base in the region built with the cooperation and support of the Kuwaiti government. The government has been a strong U.S. supporter since President George H.W. Bush helped free the state from the Iraqis during the first Persian Gulf War in 1991.

While in Kuwait, Mr. Bush visited U.S. troops and their leader in Iraq, General David Petraeus.

He also travelled to Bahrain, the smallest Arab state in the Persian Gulf, made up of a string of islands that are 3.5 times the size of Washington, DC.

Then President Bush travelled to the United Arab Emirates, home to Abu Dhabi -- considered the richest city in the world. Mr. Bush also visited the city of Dubai, where he made a speech asking for support among Arab states on the Iran issue.

Dubai has a large Iranian business community.

Although a recent American intelligence report stated Iran has not been developing nuclear weapons since 2003, President Bush said Iran is a danger to the region and continues to have nuclear ambitions.

The United States is also concerned that Iran, a sworn enemy of Israel, is supporting Islamic militants throughout the region, including Afghanistan, Iraq, Lebanon and the Palestinian territories.

"Iran's actions threaten the security of nations everywhere," the president said. "So the United States is strengthening our longstanding security commitments with our friends in the gulf and rallying friends around the world to confront this danger before it is too late."

### **Saudi Arabia**

The next stop was in Saudi Arabia, a longtime U.S. ally.

As part of a deal to gain more support for the peace talks between Palestinians and Israelis, the administration announced its intent to sell the oil-rich kingdom \$20 billion in weapons.

While there he asked the oil-rich states to consider the impact that high oil prices were having on the American economy. Oil recently hit a \$100 a barrel high for the first time.

Conceding that demand is outpacing supply, Mr. Bush asked OPEC, the organization of oil-producing nations, for increased production, the Associated Press reported.

"When consumers have less purchasing power because of high prices of gasoline – in other words, when it affects their families – it could cause the economy to slow down," he said. "I hope that OPEC, if possible, understands that if they could put more supply on the market it would be helpful."

Mr. Bush also asked for support for a Palestinian and Israeli peace plan. Many Arab nations do not even have formal diplomatic relations with Israel, who they believe have taken lands illegally from the Palestinians. The only Arab nations that have formal relations with Israel are Jordan and Egypt.

It is unclear what progress was made as the Saudi foreign minister, Saud al-Faaisal, acknowledged that Israel's continued settlement development in Palestinian areas "cast doubt on the seriousness of the negotiations."

"I don't know what more outreach we can give the Israelis," Saud al-Faaisal said.

### **Egypt**

The president finished up his trip in Egypt, where he met with Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak.

"We are keen on supporting peace efforts," Mubarak said. "We are ready, hand-in-hand with the United States of America," and others to work for the "sake of a comprehensive and just peace, to put an end to this Israeli-Palestinian conflict, to open new horizons for the Middle East for a more peaceful and secure future."

**-- Compiled by Annie Schleicher for NewsHour Extra**

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