



March 19, 2002

The Vice President Participates in a Media Availability with Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon

CHENEY: I want to begin by thanking you, Prime Minister, for the tremendous hospitality that you have shown to me and to my wife and our entire delegation. I was delighted to have the opportunity to reaffirm the strength of America's commitment to the security and well being of our friends in Israel. The prime minister and I have discussed a wide range of issues, including our cooperation in the war against global terror, and our shared concern about the spread of weapons of mass destruction. We reviewed ways of further strengthening our bilateral relationship, and how the United States can continue to support the expansion of economic opportunities for Israelis.

Israel's Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and Vice President Dick Cheney discuss a vision of peace for Israel and Palestine as they conduct a press briefing in Jerusalem, Israel, March 19. "It is our hope that the current violence and terrorism will be replaced by reconciliation and the rebuilding of mutual trust," said the Vice President.

We also discussed ways of ending the terror and the violence that have brought so much suffering to the people of this region, especially during the last 18 months. The prime minister and I have also had an excellent opportunity to discuss ways to advance the prospects for reaching a cease-fire and implementing the Tenet and Mitchell plans. I expressed my appreciation to the prime minister for his commitment for implementing Tenet and Mitchell, and for his efforts to facilitate the work of General Zinni, including the IDF's withdrawal last night from Bethlehem and Gaza. The prime minister made clear to me that his priority is assuring the security of the Israeli people, and he believes that can best be accomplished through a cease-fire and the implementation of Tenet by both sides.

I also want to emphasize a commitment of the United States to do whatever we can to help the parties achieve a durable cease-fire, and to fulfill their obligations under Tenet and Mitchell.

General Zinni has had very useful discussions with the Israeli and Palestinian leaderships. He had laid out what is required to move forward, and he has made clear that failure to fulfill the requirements of Tenet and Mitchell will torpedo this process.

We will remain very actively engaged in this extremely important effort in the days and weeks ahead. In order to help General Zinni's mission as the Tenet work plan is being implemented, I told the prime minister that I would be ready to meet with chairman Arafat in the period ahead at a site in a region to be determined, the Tenet work plan requires 100 percent effort by chairman Arafat to stop the violence and the terror, and I would expect the 100 percent effort to begin immediately.

I asked General Zinni to meet chairman Arafat this morning, to convey the same message that I shared with the prime minister. I can not emphasize enough how important it will be this week for chairman Arafat to take the steps to get the cease-fire started, and to start implementation of the Tenet work plan, namely to speak to his own people personally about the importance of ending violence and terrorism, to issue clear instructions to his security services, to enforce the cease-fire and to follow up closely these efforts to insure implementation for the plan.

These steps, if taken by the chairman, would create the environment that would make a meeting beneficial to the Zinni mission. I am pleased that both the Prime Minister and that Chairman Arafat have agreed with this approach.

President Bush has laid out a vision of peace for this region in which two states, Israel and Palestine, would live alongside each other within secure and recognized boundaries. That vision can be achieved. It is our hope that the current violence and terrorism will be replaced by reconciliation and the rebuilding of mutual trust.

SHARON (THROUGH TRANSLATOR): Thank you, sir. (inaudible) I welcome (inaudible) and accept with joy Deputy President of the United States, my friend, Richard Cheney, and the very distinguished groups that came with him.

The friendship between Israel and the United States is a true one. And there is a deep commitment between the two states that have to do with the basic values which mean this aspiration for freedom, for security for the citizens and for the state.

Your visit today has also been under the sign of coordination -- full coordination in matters that concern both states and where we have common interest whether local or regional. I will keep on standing by the United States and by President Bush who is a very determined and courageous leader fighting international terrorism.

Israel is a peace seeking country, and I will do every effort for Israel to arrive at peace and security. The aim, my aim and the aim of the government I'm having is a full cessation of fire and entering immediately the Tenet plan and to do every effort in this respect. We have decided to cease fire and to do every effort in order to enter both Tenet and Mitchell plans and to arrive at the implementation and eventually political negotiations and, if God, may also arrive at peace. (inaudible) determination and this is the task before us and this I will implement.

At several times in the past that for true peace Israel would be ready to make very painful concessions but not when it comes to security and the security of its citizens. We are all for cessation of fire. We are for peace. But as in the past, I can only say that the Tenet agreement, meaning stopping terrorism and violence and fire, we need a commitment on the part of the Palestinians and this is a pre-condition. I have told the vice president that the implementation of Tenet will enable Mr. Arafat to go outside of the borders of the territories and this has been decided in the smaller Cabinet meeting this morning.

Mr. Vice President, the cessation of fire and terrorism, the true war against the infrastructure of terrorism means a better future for this region.

Mr. Vice President, I would like to thank you again for the effort you are doing in only to help us to arrive at a better future in this region.

(UNKNOWN): Question will be from the foreign press. Yes, please.

CHENEY: This is...

QUESTION: Tom Rom with...

CHENEY: ... Tom...

QUESTION: Tom Rom, AP.

CHENEY: ... Rom, AP.

QUESTION: Thank you.

CHENEY: I'm sorry, I forgot you're foreign press here.

(LAUGHTER)

QUESTION: Mr. Prime Minister, you in the past have suggested that Yasser Arafat was irrelevant, have you changed your opinion? Do you think he can be counted on to keep a truce?

And, Mr. Vice President, can you tell us something about the meeting you talked about, will this be soon? Will it be on this trip? And will it pave the way to a meeting between Mr. Arafat and the president?

SHARON: If Mr. Arafat will be accomplishing what we demanded from him, first, to stop terror, violence and incitement and to take all the necessary actions against terror in order to reach cease-fire in accordance with Tenet plan, I think that we'll be happy about it.

CHENEY: The question of whether or not the meeting occurs will be determined by General Zinni. He will make a

determination based upon whether or not the Tenet plan is being implemented by the Palestinians and whether or not the specific provisions that I've mentioned here today are in fact being implemented. The meeting can take place relatively soon, if in fact that process happens, possibly as early as next week. But again, there's been no specific time set yet and no specific locale, although we're going to work on that.

It will be some place in the region. And again, as I say, the key element here is that Tenet must be being implemented in the eyes of General Zinni, the president's special envoy, in order for the meeting to take place.

QUESTION: How about with President Bush, second question?

CHENEY: That hasn't been discussed.

(UNKNOWN): Second question, (inaudible), please.

QUESTION (through translator): And, Mr. Vice President, please, if you can, tell us, as a result of your visit to the region, what is the current American policy towards Iraq and how does Israel fit in this policy? Is there a coordination? Did you coordinate anything with Prime Minister Sharon concerning a possible American action against Iraq?

SHARON: (ANSWERING QUESTION IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE).

QUESTION (through translator): I'll...

CHENEY: Respect for (ph).

(UNKNOWN): And she translated the (inaudible).

QUESTION (through translator): Would you like -- I'll give you the question and the gist only. The question was whether after having approved Arafat to leave, would he also be allowed to return to the (inaudible) after having left the territories and this also when there are bomb attacks?

And there was another question which has to do with the failing of the Zinni mission, whether this was the reason that why the forces have withdrawn and whether this has been the reason for all the concessions that have been made recently?

The answer of the Prime Minister was as follows:

There is a full coordination with the government of the United States, President Bush, as well as the Deputy President Mr. Cheney. And the head of the administration know quite well that they -- we have the right to defend ourselves, and this is also approved by the administration. There was no pressure, neither at this visit nor in president visits, on the contrary, there was lots of friendship and understanding between both sides.

And to the first question, it was already been explained that Mr. Arafat's leaving the territories are under the conditions that he would also implement the talent -- Tenet plan if was in that time. And because of the timetable, he will be able to get to Beirut. And we know that if he is getting to Beirut, we are also expecting to hear a speech that would also address the importance of peace and stability of the region. We certainly hope so. But if there will be some bomb attacks here at -- when he is absent and there will be incitement wherever he is speaking, and I hope this won't happen. This is what I hope, and because he must understand the importance of such an arrangement, then we'll have to convene the Cabinet and to decide, and I can't deny one thing or another.

CHENEY: With respect to the question on Iraq, the United States has made clear in statements by the president and others in his administration that we are concerned about the Iraqi pursuit of weapons of mass destruction and in particular, the failure of the government of Iraq to comply with U.N. Security Council Resolution 687 agreed to at the end of the Gulf War which committed Iraq to get rid of, eliminate all of their weapons of mass destruction. We know that that has not happened, that they have not complied with 687. We know that they have chemical weapons. Of course they've used them in the past against the Iranians and the Kurds. We know they have biological weapons, and we know they are pursuing nuclear weapons.

The concern that we have as a government I expressed during the course of my travels. I consulted with the host governments that I visited with about the situation in the region and in particular, about Iraq's role and about their failure to comply with U.N. Security Council resolutions. I had extensive discussions with Prime Minister Sharon on these issues. We have discussed them before, and obviously, we would expect to stay in very close consultation going forward with respect to how we might best deal with this threat. That's the commitment I made to all of the governments in the region that I visited with during the course of this trip.

(UNKNOWN): Next question please.

CHENEY: Mr Reardon (ph).

QUESTION: Good morning, Prime Minister.

Morning, Mr. Vice President.

Mr. Vice President, what's preventing the announcement of a cease-fire here and now today? Secondly, is there a deadline for implementation of the Tenet plan which, if passes, would actually torpedo the Zinni mission?

And, Prime Minister Sharon, on the issue of Iraq, are you prepared to say today that you would support a U.S.-led attack on Iraq even if that required restraint from the Israeli government in the face of an Iraqi attack on Israelis?

CHENEY: If I might go first, Prime Minister.

There's been great press speculation about the possibility of a military action against Iraq. I have said repeatedly throughout the course of my travels in response to those questions, one, no such decision's been made. And secondly, we never speculate about perspective future operations.

With respect to the question of a cease-fire, the point is Tenet. There's an agreement, has been an agreement to work towards the implementation to actually begin to implement the Tenet plan and to move from that into Mitchell. That gets us to a cease-fire. So the -- I think the focus here should be on the Tenet plan that General Zinni is working to implement, that we believe is the right process by which we can achieve the ultimate result of a cease-fire.

I wouldn't speculate beyond that. General Zinni's the man who's in charge on a day-to-day basis, who's working very closely with both the Israelis and the Palestinians, and I wouldn't want to get in to any other level of detail than I already have this morning.

QUESTION: (inaudible) deadline issue (inaudible)?

CHENEY: We want to move just as quickly as we can.

SHARON: Thank you.

We have been supporting the courageous decisions and the great leadership that has been shown by President Bush, by Vice President Cheney, by the American leadership in the struggle against terror, local terror, regional terror, international terror. (inaudible) it may be as the most important decision that has been taken. We supported it then, and we will support and back any American decision which (ph) will come to Phase B or any other phase in that struggle against terror. We regard terror as the greatest danger to our free society, to our values and I would (ph) say to our lives.

As about the second half of your question, we discussed all those issues, and I think that -- I think that both sides know exactly if something like that will occur what we are going to do.

Thank you.

QUESTION: Udi Segal (ph), Israel Channel 2 Television.

Mr. Vice President, I have a question for you, how can United States criticized Israeli army activities in the occupied territories against Palestinian terror while in the last few months U.S. Army had killed hundred and thousand of innocent civilians in Afghanistan during its war against terror there? Didn't you think that you're using here a double moral standard?

CHENEY: I don't believe that I would accept the premise of your question. The notion that we have killed thousands of innocent civilians in Afghanistan is simply inaccurate. We exercised great care, as I'm sure the Israeli Defense Forces do, to do everything you can to avoid in your conduct of your operations any loss of innocent life. Loss of innocent life is a tragedy whenever it occurs, but I don't believe either the United States or Israel can be said to have been oblivious to the importance of doing everything we can in the conduct of military operations to avoid the loss of innocent human life.

(UNKNOWN): Next question please.

QUESTION: Allen Cypress, "Washington Post."

Mr. Vice President, at each of our last nine stops, leaders of U.S. allies in the Arab world have urged you to take into consideration the plight of the Palestinians in its ongoing conflict with the Israelis, yet you'll leave the region without holding a single meeting with a single Palestinian, even as you have a prospect of meeting perhaps sometimes in -- sometime in the future with Chairman Arafat. What concern do you have that these U.S. allies in the region will see this as a blatant disregard of their concerns and that this will undercut your effort to nurture relationships in the region and to cement the support for the continuing war on terrorism?

Thank you.

CHENEY: I think -- again, I disagree with your interpretation of events. It's -- we believe that it is appropriate, as I've laid out this morning, and as Prime Minister Sharon has agreed and now Prime Minister -- or excuse me, Prime Minister Sharon has agreed and Chairman Arafat have agreed, that if there is implementation of Tenet in a manner that's satisfactory to General Zinni, then I have agreed to make a trip to a location in the region yet to be determined where I will in fact sit down with Chairman Arafat. I don't think that justifies the charge that somehow we are ignoring the Palestinian people.

In fact, we're working very hard, the presence of General Zinni, as well as the -- a lot of the conversations we've had during the course of our session here is aimed specifically at trying to achieve an end to the conflict that has plagued Israelis and Palestinians these mast -- past many months. So I am hopeful that the effort that we're making here today will result in giving General Zinni the kind of support he needs in order to move forward to achieve the objective of the full implementation of Tenet.

(UNKNOWN): Last question. (inaudible) Israeli IDS Radio (ph).

QUESTION: Vice President, does your statement today indicate that you changed your mind regarding Arafat -- Chairman Arafat that you said in the future there is no point to talk with him?

And, Mr. Prime Minister, -- (through translator) -- before Israel's last military operation, your stance and that of the Defense Ministry was that Israel was embarking upon this operation in order to convince Arafat to operate against terror and to push the Palestinians to ask for a cease-fire. As we see that after the operation, the one that is asking for a cease-fire is actually Israel and the vice president is actually may be meeting with Vice President Cheney.

CHENEY: If I may, Mr. Prime Minister.

What we've said in the past about Chairman Arafat is that we wanted him to make an all-out effort to support an end to the violence before we agree to meet with him. It's my view that if he does in fact keep the commitments and obligations that are embodied in the Tenet plan and fulfill those conditions that I've talked about here this morning that are taken directly out of the Tenet plan, then in fact he will have done what we said needed to be done prior to the time he had a meeting with a senior American official.

SHARON (THROUGH TRANSLATOR): Thank you. The decision that was adopted by the government to enhance...

(END AUDIO FEED)

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