

Arab Responses to George W. Bush's June 24 Speech

Jul 11, 2002



Brief Analysis

On June 24, 2002, President George W. Bush stated, "Peace requires a new and different Palestinian leadership, so that a Palestinian state can be born." His speech elicited initial favorable reaction from Arab governments, which has evolved amid negative Arab media response.

Initial Positive Government Response vs. Negative Media Response

Jordan Government: "President Bush's speech is in line with our position that an endgame and a timeline should be defined so that a political process can be relaunched on solid grounds." — Official Jordanian statement, BBC, June 25, 2002

Media: "In his long-awaited speech, US President George Bush gave Sharon all the time he wanted to apply his destructive policy against peace in the region. . . . The US president began the speech by calling for new Palestinian leadership. This is a Sharonite demand one hundred percent, although Bush covered it up with the expressions of democracy, transparency, and elimination of corruption." — "A Disappointing Speech" (editorial), al-Dustur (Amman), June 25, 2002

Egypt Government: "The Palestinian Authority has supported this statement. If it has agreed on it, then we support it, because it is balanced to a great extent. . . . I don't see in the statement a call for the removal of Palestinian President Yasser Arafat." — Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak, Jordan Times, June 26, 2002

Media: "Washington has believed Israel. The ant is thus leading the elephant. . . . Bush had his eyes on Jewish votes to enable Republicans to win the Congress next year." — Egyptian columnist Imad Umar, "Silent for Ages," al-Akhbar (Cairo), June 26, 2002

Saudi Arabia Government: "This was an important speech in which the President outlined a vision for a final settlement to this longstanding dispute. Peace is not possible without the US assuming a leadership role. President Bush has now done that; and that is good news." — Foreign policy advisor to Saudi Crown Prince Abdullah, Adel al-Jubeir, June 24, 2002

"The President's initiative contained several positive elements, including a clear American commitment to finding a solution to the crisis in the Middle East. It is imperative that the United States assume a vital role in this respect. . . . As for the reforms requested by President Bush, the Palestinians themselves have called for such reforms and are currently working towards that end." — Official Saudi Arabian statement, Saudi Embassy, June 26, 2002

Media: "Once again Mr. George Bush Jr. has forayed into the arena of international politics with an attempt to introduce a peace plan on the Middle East, a region governed by domestic interests within the United States, and a US legislature throttled and stifled by a zealot Zionist lobby. Waffling as he has been since he took office, Mr. Bush has possibly failed to notice daily incursions by the Israelis into Palestinian lands." — Tariq al-Ma'ina, "There Goes Mr. Bush Again!" Arab News (Jedda), June 29, 2002

Mixed Attitudes within the Palestinian Leadership Yasir Arafat (leader of the Palestinian Authority): "President Arafat

and the Palestinian leadership have welcomed the ideas presented by President Bush. The President and the cabinet view the ideas as a serious contribution to pushing the peace process forward." — Official statement from Arafat's office, June 25, 2002

"Asked by reporters if he thought Bush was referring to him [in the speech], Arafat responded, 'definitely not.'" — Mohamad Bazzi, "A Muted Response," Newsday, June 26, 2002

Saeb Erekat (chief Palestinian negotiator and a senior aide to Arafat): "The Palestinian people have chosen President Arafat as their leader and the world and President Bush must respect the democratic choice of the Palestinian people. . . . [Arafat was chosen in] free and fair elections [and Palestinian leaders] don't come from parachutes from Washington or from anywhere else." — CNN, June 25, 2002

Ahmed Abdel Rahman (secretary general of the PA cabinet): "It is the first time that an American administration recognized that the only solution for this conflict is to end the occupation and to have a state to live in peace beside Israel this is a historic change in the American stand." — BBC, June 25, 2002

"Bush's statements were not accepted by the Palestinian leadership, and it is a severe interference in internal Palestinian affairs" — Xinhua (Beijing), June 25, 2002

Ahmed Qurei (Abu Ala) (speaker of the Palestinian Legislative Council): "We are people under occupation, and regardless of whether we made some mistakes and there is corruption, we want a plan that will end the occupation so that we will be able to establish our own state. . . . The [Bush] conditions are intervention in Palestinian affairs in an arrogant and patronizing manner, especially as they are given as orders to people." — al-Quds, June 25, 2002

Hardening Government Stances over Time Egypt: "In remarks after Mubarak met a U.S. Senate delegation and a senior Arafat envoy, Foreign Minister Ahmed Maher accused Israel of 'obstructing peace and stability in the region. Egypt strongly supports the democratically elected Palestinian leadership and refuses any attempt to outflank it.'" — Associated Press, June 30, 2002

Jordan: "We support Palestinian reforms, but that is not the main problem." — Jordanian foreign minister Marwan Muasher, Jordan Times, July 8, 2002

Saudi Arabia: "The Kingdom is against the interference in the Palestinians' affairs. We should let the Palestinians determine who their president is. A foreign state, like the United States or other states, should not impose a president on the Palestinians." — Saudi General Intelligence Service head Prince Nawwaf Bin-Abd-al-Aziz, "Saudi Intelligence Chief Decries U.S. Position on Iraq, Arafat," al-Sharq al-Aswat (London), June 29, 2002

This report was compiled by Alexander Benard.

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