

Bush Looks to U.N. for Mideast Solution

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The Associated Press
Monday, July 31, 2006; 9:26 PM

MIAMI BEACH, Fla. -- President Bush acknowledged growing international pressure for an immediate Middle East cease-fire Monday but dismissed any idea of simply "stopping for the sake of stopping" without a plan for lasting peace.

Bush said the United States was working with allies for a United Nations Security Council resolution to get a "sustainable cease-fire, a cease-fire which will last" _ but not necessarily anything immediate.

The U.S. also is seeking the authorization of an international force to help secure Lebanon. Bush told television interviewers that U.S. troops probably would not be deployed on the ground as a part of it, but might help with logistics or command.

"I think most nations would not see us involved, and most people understand that we're committed elsewhere," Bush said in an interview with Miami television station WPLG. "But also, however, if there's a need for some maybe logistical help or help in command-and-control, which we're good at, they may want to consider us."

Bush met Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and National Security Adviser Stephen Hadley for dinner at the White House on Monday after he returned from Florida and Rice returned from her mission to the Middle East. The Israeli attack that killed 56 civilians in Qana _ the deadliest single incident in the onslaught against Hezbollah militants _ prompted Rice to cut her trip short.

Earlier Monday, Bush made it clear that the U.S. position in firm support of Israel had not changed, despite the strike that heightened criticism from other nations.

The president, speaking to members of the Coast Guard in Florida, said the world must remember that the Islamic group Hezbollah started the fight and that Israel is exercising its right to defend itself.

During his speech he made no direct reference to the Qana deaths. But he said, "We mourn the loss of innocent life, both in Lebanon and in Israel."

More than 500 people have been killed in Lebanon since Israel began bombing its neighbor in an effort to weaken Hezbollah militants based there. Hezbollah has been sending rockets into northern Israel, killing 18 civilians in addition to 33 Israeli soldiers.

Asked about the Israeli attack later in an interview on Fox's "Your World with Neil Cavuto," Bush said the deaths had added pressure on Israel to stop bombing. But, he said, "stopping for the sake of stopping can be OK, except it won't address the root cause of the problem."

"Yesterday's situation was awful," Bush said. "I understand that, but it's also awful that a million Israelis are worried about rockets being fired from their neighbor to the north."

Although pro-Israel sentiment runs deep in Congress, Sen. Chuck Hagel, R-Neb., broke with the president Monday and said Israel's pounding of Lebanon was hurting America's image in the Middle East. "The sickening slaughter on both sides must end now," Hagel said. "This madness must stop."

Hagel has also been critical of the administration's Iraq policy.

The fighting began July 12, when Hezbollah captured two Israeli soldiers. The tensions overshadowed Bush's overnight trip to Florida, where he wanted to highlight his efforts to improve port security, the economy and hurricane preparedness after the disastrous response to Hurricane Katrina last year.

Bush stopped briefly at the National Hurricane Center, a room filled with maps and monitors of the hurricane zone. Christopher Landsea, a science and operations officer, told Bush of a paper he had just written that found there was not a consensus linking hurricane patterns to global warming.

The president replied, "There is a consensus you're doing good work."

Bush said it was important that people take the center's forecasts seriously, and he noted that the height of hurricane season begins next week and runs through mid-September. After a pause, National Hurricane Center Director Max Mayfield corrected him. "Actually, mid-October," Mayfield said.

Later, Bush took a half-hour boat tour of the Port of Miami to examine security improvements. Then his motorcade took him to the exclusive Gables Estates neighborhood, where he attended a private fundraiser at the home of industrial developer Armando Codina that brought in \$1 million for the Republican National Committee.



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President Bush, center, participates in a breakfast meeting with community leaders, including his brother, Florida Gov. Jeb Bush, seated at left, at Versailles Restaurant & Bakery, Monday, July 31, 2006, in Miami. (AP Photo/Mariz N. Ghanbari)