

**News and Current Events :: US is obliged to support its 'old friend' Israel - Bush**

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The US has a responsibility to defend the State of Israel, which is "an old friend" and a "democratic country," US President George W. Bush told the French daily Le Figaro in an interview published Saturday.

Bush's affirmed commitment to Israel came in response to a question about whether successive "US presidents are obliged to defend Israel at every occasion."

Asked if this is worth the cost — increasing international criticism of the US for its "pro-Israel policy" — Bush reminded his interviewer that he was "the first US president to stand before the UN and announce to the whole world a commitment to creating a Palestinian state living side by side with Israel in peace."

Although the 2005 deadline for the creation of a Palestinian state, as envisaged in the road map, has been deemed unrealistic by the US, Bush was optimistic that it would eventually come to fruition.

The ongoing violence and the resignation of former Palestinian prime minister Mahmoud Abbas have made it impossible to keep up with the Road Map timetable, Bush said.