



THE WHITE HOUSE
PRESIDENT
GEORGE W. BUSH

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White House Press Secretary Scott McClellan Briefs Reporters Sunday

9:14 A.M. EST

MR. McCLELLAN: Good morning. I want to run through a little bit of yesterday and today, how the President was informed about this.

Secretary Rumsfeld called the President at about -- approximately 3:15 p.m., yesterday. The President was at Camp David. The Secretary informed the President that U.S. forces believed that they had captured Saddam Hussein. Secretary Rumsfeld -- well, let me back up. The conversation began by Secretary Rumsfeld saying, something to the effect of: Mr. President, the first reports are not always accurate. The President interrupted the Secretary and said: This sounds like it's going to be good news. And Secretary Rumsfeld then continued and said: General Abizaid called me, he feels confident that we got Saddam Hussein. The President said: Well, that is good news. (Laughter.)

Both expressed --

Q Did he use the word "confident"? I'm sorry. He used the word "confident"?

MR. McCLELLAN: Well, I don't know the Secretary's exact words, but essentially something to that effect.

Both expressed some caution at this point, because it was not confirmed. The President and the Secretary talked about how -- discussed the potential that this could be an impostor, so they were still cautious at that point. The President felt that -- the President said that this ought to be reported from the theater, it is a military matter. The Secretary agreed with him.

The President asked him how confident General Abizaid was, and the Secretary said that he was very confident. And the President asked him how they know that it was Saddam Hussein. Secretary Rumsfeld at that point, I guess, gathered a little bit more information, called the President back and informed him General Abizaid had confirmed through some identifying marks on Saddam Hussein, and I think you can probably get that from General Abizaid, himself.

Q What time was that call?

MR. McCLELLAN: This was all pretty -- shortly after the initial call.

Q This is still yesterday?

MR. McCLELLAN: Yes, this is shortly after the initial call at 3:15 p.m.

Q Where was Abizaid?

MR. McCLELLAN: Well, he was in Iraq.* The President said that he was going to call the Vice President and Dr. Rice. The Secretary said something about who would contact Secretary Powell, and the President said he'll have Condi inform Secretary Powell and Andy Card. The President then informed the Vice President and Dr. Rice. He was at that point, as I said, still reserved in his judgment, expressing some caution.

The President also in that period told Mrs. Bush that: It looks like we've captured Saddam Hussein, and she said: Great.

Q But Cheney was his first phone call after learning about this?

MR. McCLELLAN: I'll try to double check that. I know he contacted the Vice President and Dr. Rice right after he got off the phone.

Q So Rice told --

MR. McCLELLAN: She informed Secretary Powell and Andy Card.

Q You don't have the President's words when he told Cheney or Rice?

MR. McCLELLAN: No, I think it was -- I was just kind of describing the way he was looking at it.

MR. McCORMACK: She also talked to Tenet, too.

MR. McCLELLAN: And Director Tenet. Okay.

Q Where?

MR. McCLELLAN: I'm sorry? Well, she's here.

MR. McCORMACK: I don't know where she was.**

MR. McCLELLAN: Okay, we'll double check that for you. But the President called her.

Then a little bit after 5:00 a.m., this morning, Ambassador Bremer called Condi to confirm that it was Saddam Hussein. And at 5:14 a.m., Condi called the President and reported to him, and that was

essentially confirmation that we got Saddam Hussein at that point.

Q Was he asleep at the time?

MR. McCLELLAN: Let me double check. I suspect he was already awake at that point, but let me double check that.***

Q He had not been briefed in between the two calls?

MR. McCLELLAN: I'm sorry?

Q Had he not been briefed in between the two calls?

MR. McCLELLAN: I'll try to double check that. I'm sure that there were conversations throughout the day, but those are the ones I know of.

Let's see, this morning the President -- Senator Frist contacted the President this morning. The President spoke with Prime Minister Blair. He spoke with --

Q When?

MR. McCLELLAN: This was a little bit after 8:00 a.m., this morning.

He spoke with Director Tenet. The President also spoke with Mr. Pachachi the acting president of the Iraqi Governing Council, and expressed his congratulations. The President -- oh, I might add, too, that -- let me back up on the calls.

The President and Mrs. Bush watched the briefing this morning. The President was particularly moved to see the outburst of joy from the Iraqis during the briefing, the Iraqi journalists.

Q Was he in the residence?

MR. McCLELLAN: Yes, he was in the residence at that point. And, getting back to the calls. When he was talking to Mr. Pachachi, the President let him know that he was very moved by the outburst of joy from the Iraqis during the briefing. And the President said that he believes in the future of the Iraqi people. He's also spoken with Secretary Rumsfeld this morning; he spoke with General Abizaid, to congratulate our troops; and he's spoken with Secretary Powell. And last I left the Oval, President Aznar. I think that's --

Q Powell and then --

MR. McCLELLAN: I'm sorry?

Q Abizaid, Powell and Aznar were the others?

MR. McCLELLAN: Yes, Aznar.

Q And he talked to Rummy this morning, also?

MR. McCLELLAN: Yes.

Q Were all those calls from the Oval?

MR. McCLELLAN: And he will be making -- he's making additional world leader calls; I'll keep you posted as I can.

Q Are we going to hear from him today?

MR. McCLELLAN: He will be talking to other coalition partners and world leaders, as well. You can expect to hear from the President at approximately noon today. He will make remarks in the Cabinet Room, it will be pool coverage.

Q Cabinet Room, you said?

MR. McCLELLAN: Cabinet Room, pool coverage. Just to give you a couple general comments, the President believes this is very good news for the Iraqi people. He is very happy for the Iraqi people. Saddam Hussein was a brutal, oppressive dictator who was responsible for decades of atrocities. And the Iraqi people can finally be assured that Saddam Hussein will not be coming back, and they can see it for themselves.

The President is particularly proud of our men and women in the military and all their sacrifices and all their successes that they have achieved, and he congratulates our troops.

Q Was the President briefed at all on how Saddam Hussein was found, what Saddam Hussein might have said?

MR. McCLELLAN: He has been briefed on those matters, I don't have a complete readout of that, but he has been briefed on those matters.

Q Is that pretty much all you've got?

MR. McCLELLAN: That's pretty much it. I will keep you posted, but you'll hear from the President.

All right, thank you everybody.

END 9:21 A.M. EST

* General Abizaid was in the theater, but not in Iraq.

** Dr. Rice was in Washington.

*** The President was already waking up when Dr. Rice called.

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