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Press Briefing by National Security Advisor Steve Hadley on the President's Bilateral with Prime Minister Maliki of Iraq

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MS. PERINO: I have National Security Advisor Stephen Hadley here. He has a limited amount of time, about 15 minutes; we can maybe push it to 20, but then he's got to get back upstairs. But he attended the meetings this morning. He can provide you a read-out on that and answer a few of your questions. And then I'll be back later today, probably with Mike Kozak, in order to talk about the U.N. Security Council meeting on Africa.

MR. HADLEY: The President had about a 30-minute meeting with Secretary General Ban Ki-moon. They talked about climate, global climate. They, of course, had both attended the dinner that the Secretary General had last night on that subject. The President made clear that the effort he is leading later this week, in terms of the emerging economies meeting, was something that is to support and feed into the U.N. process, and the Secretary General, of course, indicated his appreciation for that, and also his appreciation for the President's leadership on this climate issue.

They talked a bit about United Nations reform. The President gave a preview to the Secretary General of what he would say in his remarks -- about the importance for U.N. reform, and as part of an overall U.N. reform-U.N. Security Council reform and also reform of the Human Rights Council.

He also talked a little bit about Burma and the importance of supporting a political transition in Burma, and how important it was for all of us to urge the junta not to crack down on the peaceful protests that are clearly and currently going on in that country.

The President expressed appreciation for the Secretary General's leadership on Sudan, and the Secretary General indicated that he wanted to expand the U.N. role in Iraq.

The President then went and had about a 15-minute conversation and call with the President of the General Assembly. The discussion there was a little bit about background on where his country is in terms of his political evolution, and also a discussion of U.N. reform and U.N. Security Council reform.

The President then came back to the hotel. He had about an hour-and-a-quarter session with Prime Minister Maliki of Iraq. The President emphasized the importance of passing the outstanding

legislation, that he saw it as part of the reconciliation process. He also wanted to talk to the Prime Minister about the security relationship between the United States and Iraq, and particularly defining a strategic relationship between the two countries over the long-term.

The Prime Minister talked about the liberation of his country first from Saddam Hussein, and now the need to liberate his country from terrorism and extremism. He talked about the enemy of a future Iraq being sectarianism and his struggle against sectarianism, and the need for support from all political groups in the Iraqi political context as part of reconciliation.

They, I think, had a good conversation. They talked about the need to move forward promptly defining this long-term security relationship, which the Iraqi leadership has requested and which the President wants to pursue, as he announced in his recent speech on Iraq. They talked about the need to respect Iraqi sovereignty, and that that will be one of the elements that will be addressed in the process of defining the long-term relationship between the United States and Iraq.

They also talked about the importance of a balance between the powers of the central government and the power of the provinces, and particularly in the context of Anbar province, for example, and Sunnis that are turning against extremists, fighting al Qaeda, and want to have a stake in the political process, that part of that will be to clarify the authorities of provincial and local governments as a way in which people can have more control of their localities. This is a principle that actually was endemic in our thinking for a post-Saddam architecture for Iraq. It is something that is in the Iraqi constitution. It is reflected in the creation of provinces and local authorities which did not exist under Saddam. And it's something that is now being addressed in the provincial powers law, which is pending and is being developed. And the two men indicated that getting this relationship between the center and the provinces right is an important element of the future of Iraq in getting buy-in to the -- buy-in from all communities in a unified future for the country.

I think that summarizes, really, the breadth and character of the discussions. And I'm glad to answer any questions.

Yes, ma'am.

Q Was there a discussion of Blackwater, and if so, how did that go?

MR. HADLEY: There was, as I mentioned, a general discussion of the importance of recognition of Iraqi sovereignty. It was -- Blackwater was something that, after the formal meeting, the Secretary of State and the Prime Minister talked about.

As you know, there is -- the United States and Iraq are working together to look at this incident and related incidents, and to talk about how to ensure that the sovereignty -- one, that there's better cooperation and coordination in these kinds of operations; two, that Iraqi sovereignty, of course, is reflected; and three, that also there is a way in which -- that the security can continue to be provided to our State Department personnel.

As you know, in addition, the Secretary of State has authorized her own internal review of the

relationship and the rules of operation under which these contractors operate, and that is, of course, separate from what we are doing together, jointly, with the Iraqis.

Q But can you say if it did actually come up between the two leaders?

MR. HADLEY: It came up as sort of something that -- one or the other referred to the Blackwater issue as raising these questions of sovereignty. But in terms of specifics, it was something that was addressed, part of the sort of, quite frankly, the ongoing conversations the Secretary of State has had with Prime Minister Maliki on this subject. And that came up after the meeting.

Q The talk of Iraqi sovereignty -- is that how it came up in the discussion with -- between the two leaders, that Maliki brought it up and --

MR. HADLEY: This issue of recognizing Iraqi sovereignty and making appropriate adjustments as we go forward, as we start talking about adjustments in our mission of our forces and in our force presence, of course, is an issue that we've talked about for over a year or so with Iraqis. And it came up in that context because it is one of the issues that will need, of course, to be addressed as we define the long-term relationship between the United States and Iraq. And it gets its expressions in conducts of operation, cooperation with the police, obviously things like Blackwater.

Q Steve, do you expect when the President meets with Karzai tomorrow he's going to bring up the same topic? We've heard from folks in Afghanistan that they want to control, maybe shut down these private security companies, as well.

MR. HADLEY: I've not heard that. And we'll obviously have to see what President Karzai raises. I'm not really aware that that is -- that the issue of private security companies has been an issue in Afghanistan. There have obviously been concerns about military operations and civilian casualties, as you would expect. And it's also, of course, in the context of an enemy in Afghanistan that makes attacking and killing civilians a key element of its strategy. So it's a complicated question and one that we have addressed, and I'm sure we'll continue to address with Afghan authorities.

Q -- the emphasis on Burma in the President's speech. Why was that emphasis there, and what does what's going on there have to do with U.S. national security?

MR. HADLEY: Well, one of the things the President wanted to try to do in this speech was to call the United Nations back to first principles, and of course, one of the first principles is freedom. And in the Declaration of Human Rights, that freedom is not only from freedom from terror, freedom from violence, freedom from tyranny, but also freedom from want and lack of education, disease, and the like. And the President thought it was important to remind the General Assembly that that is the essence of the charter of the United Nations.

Of course, part of that is the advance of freedom. I mean, it was founded after World War II as an institution to preserve the freedoms that had in some sense been won by that war. And obviously that's what's going on in Burma today. The Burmese people are making clear that they're tired of the junta and they want some say over their own future. And what better opportunity and location for the

President to call attention to that? That's not new, it's something that he's been talking about, something that the First Lady has been very vocal and very visible on. You've seen what's happening in the streets now; the march of the monks -- and it was a very appropriate setting, very appropriate time for the President to come out very firmly on that issue, and he didn't want to miss that opportunity.

Q Conversely, why so little discussion of the Iraq war?

MR. HADLEY: Well, we've had an enormous amount of discussion of the Iraq war for most of the month of September. And in terms of the United Nations, of course, we had that very successful event yesterday that the Secretary General conducted, which was an opportunity for the United Nations and others to focus on the way forward on Iraq in terms of the International Compact. So that was really an opportunity to address the Iraq issue. And of course, the United Nations has recently expanded the mandate of their mission and appointed a new person there to head that mission.

So we think that that event, hosted by the Secretary General and which Prime Minister Maliki participated, to talk about the International Compact, talked about the way forward in Iraq and our mutual obligations to try and help the Iraqis to establish their own freedom, that was a good venue and a good opportunity to talk about the U.N.'s role and all of our obligations there. It seemed, therefore, given that plus all the conversation we've had on Iraq for the last three or four weeks, it was probably a good opportunity for the President to put some additional issues on the table that he feels very strongly about.

Q The President is planning an event in Crawford with the ASEAN nations in the next months. Will Burma be part of it? Will it be invited?

MR. HADLEY: We haven't worked out the details of that, and when we do -- I'm not ducking it, we just haven't worked through all the details of that. And when we will, we'll try and come back to you on it.

Q What's really new in this announcement of new sanctions against Burma, since the U.S. already has a series of measures in place -- I believe including a travel ban? And secondly, can you recount for us a bit of what happened -- why the President's speech from the TelePrompter ended up on the White House website completely with the typos --

Q U.N. website.

Q -- U.N. website -- complete with typos --

MR. HADLEY: Dana mentioned something to me about that, I don't -- as I was standing there, about to come here -- so I can't address that.

In terms of Burma, what really it is, I think is an example of us turning up the pressure and broadening the focus. So, for example, in terms of the sanctions, it will also talk some -- those who provide support to and financial to the regime. And in terms of the travel ban, it's going to be extended to those who have been abusers of human rights, but also to their families.

I think what we're trying to do is, in our own actions and by getting attention from the international community, to ratchet up the pressure on this regime, to get them to understand that there is a time now for a political transition and that they should be using the turmoil in the country as a vehicle for planning and achieving that transition, rather than trying to crack down on it and turn the clock back to a time that the Burmese people are no longer willing to tolerate.

Q What do you make of the things that President Ahmadinejad said yesterday, including his statement that Iran does not believe in nuclear weapons?

MR. HADLEY: We've heard a lot of pretty remarkable statements from the Iranian President about the Holocaust, about Israel, about conditions in his own country. And I think I'll just let his words stand for themselves.

Thank you very much. Yes, ma'am.

Q One more? Prime Minister Maliki has been described as saying he does not believe there is any longer a concern of influence within his country from Syria or Iran. Did he and the President discuss at all the Israeli strike on targets within Syria?

MR. HADLEY: No, they talked about the -- a little bit about the activities in Iran, and some of the things -- some of the concerns we have about Iranian support into Iraq for those elements that are attacking innocent Iraqis, attacking Iraqi security forces, and attacking our people. This is obviously a source of continuing concern, and will be something we'll continue to talk to the Iraqi government at all.

Thanks a lot.

MS. PERINO: I'll be back at 5:30 p.m. Need anything right now?

Q The speech --

MS. PERINO: On the speech -- your question about the speech, the drafts are circulated, and there was an error made in trying to make sure that interpreters had what they needed. I don't know how the draft of the speech -- it was not final -- was posted, but it was, and it was taken down. There's really nothing more to say about it.

Q And they were phonetic spellings of various countries -- as well, we understand.

MS. PERINO: That's not unusual. We do that for many speeches.

Q Does the President have a hard time pronouncing some of these countries's name?

MS. PERINO: I think that's a offensive question. I'm going to just decline to comment on it.

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