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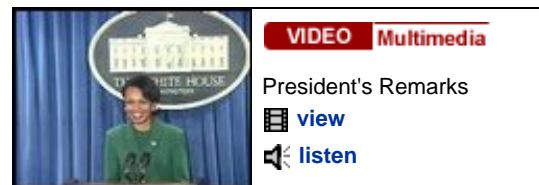


For Immediate Release
Office of the Press Secretary
November 13, 2003

Dr. Rice Briefs on the President's Trip to the UK

Press Briefing by National Security Advisor Dr. Condoleezza Rice on the President's Trip to the United Kingdom
The James S. Brady Briefing Room

1:08 P.M. EST



DR. RICE: Good afternoon. I've got a couple of comments, and then I'll be happy to take your questions. First, I'm going to give you a brief overview of the President's schedule for the state visit to the United Kingdom.

At the invitation of Her Majesty The Queen, the President will travel to the United Kingdom to affirm the broad and historic alliance shared by the United States and Great Britain. The depth of the special relationship between our two countries cannot be overstated. The United States has no greater friend. We share common interests, a common history and common values. Primarily, the United Kingdom and the United States share the desire to support all of those who seek freedom, democracy and peace. It is that tie that binds us inextricably.

The President is looking forward to the opportunity to meet and talk with the British people. In particular, he will extend his appreciation and gratitude to British soldiers and their families for the sacrifice and commitment in the war on terror.

On Tuesday, November 18th, the President and the First Lady will depart Washington for the United Kingdom. Upon arrival that evening, they will participate in a private welcome at Buckingham Palace.

On Wednesday, the President and the First Lady will formally welcome -- will be formally welcomed to the United Kingdom by Her Majesty and the Duke of Edinburgh.

Following the ceremonial welcome, the President will meet briefly and separately with Conservative Party and Liberal Democrat leaders. That afternoon he will deliver a speech at the Banqueting House, Whitehall Palace, on the transatlantic alliance and his forward strategy. After the speech, he will meet with British families who lost loved ones on September 11th, 2001.

On Wednesday evening, the President and First Lady will attend the state banquet in their honor at Buckingham Palace. And we all look forward to seeing the President in tails. (Laughter.)

On Thursday, November 20th --

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Q Does that include the President? (Laughter.)

DR. RICE: We're looking forward to it.

On Thursday, November 20th, the President will visit the Tomb of the Unknown Warrior, tour Westminster Abbey, and meet with British soldiers who fought in Afghanistan and Iraq, and with their families.* The President will then meet with Prime Minister Blair at Number 10 Downing Street. The two leaders will hold a joint press availability, attend a working lunch, and host a roundtable on HIV/AIDS. That evening, the President and First Lady will host a reciprocal dinner for Her Majesty at the Ambassador's residence, Winfield House.

On Friday, the President and First Lady will attend the Queen's official farewell, and then depart London for Northern England, where they will join Prime Minister Blair and Mrs. Blair for a visit for Sedgefield in the Prime Minister's home district. There the President's schedule will include lunch with the Prime Minister and a group of his constituents. The President and First Lady will return to Washington on Friday evening.

With that, I'm happy to take your questions. Let's start -- David.

Q Condi, there's -- even as Ambassador Bremer is going back to Iraq to discuss with the Governing Council options for how to accelerate the transfer of power, there appears to be a good deal of frustration among those Iraqi leaders with the with the United States, a feeling that the United States is strong-arming them and that they lack legitimacy in the face of fellow Iraqis. How do you address those concerns now?

DR. RICE: David, I think that if you look at how much the Governing Council has actually been able to achieve in terms of an economic program, in terms of overseeing ministries that have done things like a, thus far, very successful currency reform and exchange, a lot has been achieved by that group in coordination with the CPA. Indeed, the ideas that Jerry Bremer brought with him from Washington, many of them have been bubbling up from within the Governing Council. And anything that is done will be the work of the Governing Council, because the Governing Council is the one that will report to the United Nations on December 15th about its time line, moving forward for the transfer of greater authority to the Iraqi people.

So we have a great deal of common interest here. This is not easy. The Governing Council has only been in existence for a short time. They're learning to work together at numbers of 24. No, it's not easy, but it has been successful. And I think when Jerry Bremer goes back and has these discussions, this will be something that the Governing Council will be putting forward as the way that we and they will transfer authority to the Iraqi people.

So I don't think that tensions is the right word. I think that, clearly, it's not an easy process of putting together institutions and trying to govern a place that has been under totalitarian rule for as long as Iraq has.

Q How can you, at once, reach your end goal and not tell them what to do, given the fact that they have not met deadlines and they don't appear like they're able to?

DR. RICE: Well, first, I think there is a new determination on the part of the Governing Council to try and do just that. They know that we haven't -- that we all have, under the U.N. Security Council Resolution 1511, a December 15th deadline. They want to meet that deadline. They, too, know and believe that they have obligations to the Iraqi people. They've been saying, we want more authority; we think we can do more. And it is Jerry Bremer's assessment that that is, indeed, the case.

And so they're going to go back, they're going to work out a program. This has been a good process. And Jerry has guidance and the views of the administration on some of the ideas that are being discussed. He'll go back and do that, and I think in several days we'll know how that all comes out.

Q Condi, --

DR. RICE: I was pointing at Jim, but go ahead, John.

Q On the London visit, as you know, there are substantial protests that are planned while the President is there. And there have been reports that British security services are concerned that members of al Qaeda may try to infiltrate the demonstrations, posing as protesters. Do you share those concerns, and do you have any intelligence to suggest that al Qaeda members are, in fact, trying to do that?

DR. RICE: We have enormous confidence in British intelligence and British security services and, indeed, the British police. And so the -- obviously, we're working with them to make certain that this visit is secure and safe. But we -- the President, as he said in Australia, he understands free speech, welcomes free speech. People can protest and say what they want. It's a good thing to remember that the kinds of things that we're fighting for worldwide are so that people can have free speech and protest. It wasn't possible in Iraq or in Afghanistan just a few years ago to have the same liberties and freedoms that the people in Britain will exercise when they protest. And as long as we all keep that in mind, I think it's -- we have no problem with people protesting. And I don't think that anyone has concerns about the Brits' ability to handle all this.

Q Understood, and I understand the President's love for democracy and free speech. But I'm wondering, is there any substance to these concerns that al Qaeda members may try to infiltrate the protesters?

DR. RICE: John, we are confident that our services and the British services are working to make this a safe visit for the President. And we're very confident in the capability of the British to handle this.

Q Condi, would you just clarify one thing on Iraq? It seems that the administration has dropped its previous objections to having some sort of interim government that would exercise sovereignty, and that the effort now is to determine how such a government would be selected. Is that where things stand?

DR. RICE: Jim, we've always wanted to turn over authority to the Iraqi people, as they built capability to take it on. And we are looking now at what that means, in terms of what kind of governing structures, what kind of relationship to the CPA that will take. Obviously, it's important to look at the circumstances of greater authority having been taken on by the Iraqis, the ministries taking on more authority, and adjust to those circumstances. And so nobody has ever tried to be locked in stone about the forms that -- by which -- or the mechanisms by which we would try to transfer more authority.

It is still important that the Iraqi people have a permanent constitution. It's still important that they have elections for a permanent government. Nothing has changed. But what is also important is that we find ways to accelerate the transfer of authority to the Iraqi people. They are clamoring for it, they are, we believe, ready for it. And they have very strong ideas about how that might be done.

And that's why Jerry Bremer really came back here. They're getting ready for a December 15th deadline. When we talked, Jerry and I talked, it was very clear that with a essentially two-week hiatus coming up -- the President going abroad, then Thanksgiving, Secretary of Defense traveling in Asia -- it was important to get some reaction on the U.S. side to some of these proposals, because the Iraqis are trying to move and we'd like to move with them.

Q But in September, officials had argued, repeatedly, that what needed to happen first was that you had to write a constitution, have some sort of referendum on the constitution, then have elections before sovereignty could be granted to an Iraqi government. I take it now there is more flexibility on the administration's part --

DR. RICE: We're trying to be flexible and responsive to the fact that the Governing Council and other Iraqis believe that that time line is probably longer for a permanent constitution than they believe accords with their ability to take on certain responsibilities and functions. And so it's the time line on the permanent constitution that's really extended.

Q Would you concede, I guess, what appears to be the obvious, that a big part of the reason why you want to expedite the transfer of power is because the security situation has gotten so bad and so out of hand, and that you feel the need to give Iraqis more power and really get the U.S. out of there, has really grown --

DR. RICE: It's not a matter of getting the U.S. out of there, then. It's a matter of recognizing that the Iraqis want to take more authority and responsibility. We believe they can take more authority and responsibility.

They are taking -- the response to the security side is the increase in Iraqi security forces -- not the political side, but to increase the number of Iraqi security forces -- because the kind of dangers that are being faced there, the kind of security circumstances and challenges that are being faced on a daily basis are going to be better dealt with by Iraqi security forces, with us in support of them, than by our coalition forces alone.

And I was asked the other day, what makes you think the Iraqis will be more competent in dealing with foreign terrorists and with Baathists. And one answer is, they will know that they're Baathists and that they will know that they're foreign, which is already a very big step ahead. So the response to the security side is to increase the number of Iraqis involved in their own security. Of course, the more stake that Iraqis have in their own political future, the better. But we believe that the few who are trying to keep Iraq from moving forward and progress need to be exposed by Iraqis as doing that.

And you had a situation November 1st where these terrorists were threatening schoolchildren. Now, I can't believe that any Iraqi thinks that this is appropriate behavior. These are the same people who were torturing and maiming their Iraqi -- fellow Iraqi citizens, and they're being exposed for who they are. But the response on the security side is to increase the number of Iraqis in security.

Q If I can follow -- the President, on the way back, or during the Asia trip, was talking about how surprised and happy he was that the Asian leaders were so supportive of the situation in Iraq. Given that, how disappointed are you that Japan is not going to send troops?

DR. RICE: Well, Japan has said that it wants to think about the timing of doing that. We understand that. And we feel fully supported by Japan, believe that they're doing what they believe they can do at this point in time. Japan is, after all, the largest donor, largest single donor, bilateral donor, for the reconstruction. And so we're very pleased with what Japan is able to do and understand that countries have to make their own determinations about what they can do.

Q Dr. Rice, can you outline beyond the issue of security what areas would you expect the Iraqis to take more authority and responsibility in? And how rapidly does that happen compared with the previous timetable?

DR. RICE: Well, there wasn't a very clear previous timetable. What there was were there were some steps that were going to be taken, but no real timetable. But the first real demand for a timetable came out of 1511. And the -- that's the December 15th timetable. And so this is a timetable that's being built anew. Fortunately, it's being built in the context of knowing what Iraqis are already doing.

The ministries, I think, have come much further along in running the day-to-day affairs of the country than probably most people thought possible. We've had a couple of those ministers here. They, of course, do it with the help of CPA advisors; they do it with the help of the CPA, in general. But they're really running those activities. I think you probably will see the Iraqis more involved in decisions about how the -- about setting the priorities, for instance, on reconstruction. They've already been involved in those discussions in the broadest sense. But where there are trade-offs to be made, I assume they would be involved in making some of those trade-offs. They've been very involved in an economic plan. So there are lots of activities that they're already taking; expect them to take more.

Q Does the President bring to his meeting with Blair any particular issues that need to be decided on in terms of the pace of the turnover in Iraq? And will he address the concerns expressed by some British officers in Iraq that the United States is not listening to them enough?

DR. RICE: Well, I was just with the Foreign Minister -- Foreign Secretary Straw, and with their representative, Jeremy Greenstock, their counterpart to Jerry Bremer, and I think that the sense is that the coordination is really quite good there. And, of course, we've been working with the British in military terms since the beginning of this war, not to mention in the planning while leading up to it. So I don't think there are problems of people not listening to the British. The British have very good experience. They have been doing very well in the south. And if there is more that they would like to say, I'm sure we would be more than happy to hear it. And so if there are more mechanisms for hearing British input, I think everybody wants to hear it. They're very experienced.

Q Are there any changes in the framework that will be decided, though?

DR. RICE: Let me be very clear. The decisions about how this time line looks for December 15th is a Governing Council decision. And so the important discussions that Jerry Bremer goes back to have now with the Governing Council, having had the input from the administration on several ideas, should really be the focal point of how this goes forward. Obviously, the Prime Minister and the President will have a long time to talk about how to move this all forward. But the Governing Council -- this has to be the Governing Council's plan and the Governing Council's timetable.

Q Understanding, Dr. Rice, that it is the Council's decision, still we're making recommendations to them. At the risk of being called for a trick question, is this timetable going to be up in a year?

DR. RICE: You mean, will the timetable --

Q Are we recommending a year?

DR. RICE: No. I don't -- maybe it is a trick question, because I don't know what it is we'd be recommending in a year.

Q There are published reports that the United States would like the handover to be completed within a year.

DR. RICE: Well, first of all, the notion that the United States is going to transfer more authority to Iraqis to take care of the affairs of Iraqis, that can happen at any time, and hopefully will happen well short of a year. It's already happening, and it will continue to happen over a period of time. Questions about what legal arrangements might be made between the United States -- the coalition and the Governing Council or any Iraqi entity I think have to be part of the timetable. But, no, we haven't set any deadlines ourselves.

Q Or recommended any?

DR. RICE: We have not set any deadlines ourselves.

Q Will you need to go back to the U.N. if there's a change made in the order of constitution, elections, which the resolution now describes?

DR. RICE: I think if you look carefully at the resolution, it says, without prejudice to -- I can't remember the exact language, but, without prejudice to changes that --

Q There's room.

DR. RICE: Right, there's room, there's room. Again, let me be clear. The Governing Council and Ambassador Bremer are going to talk about how to transfer authority more quickly. They will talk about the relationship of that to the involvement of the Iraqi people in their political life and how to get that involvement done more quickly. Precisely how that relates to any particular structures or relationship to the CPA, I think we'll have to wait and see. But the U.N. resolution is not constraining.

Q And today you met with Netanyahu and Israeli officials.

DR. RICE: I have not yet.

Q Okay. That given -- (laughter) -- to what extent is the Israeli fence still a problem to the United States? And what have you decided about the loan guarantees and whether to deduct that --

DR. RICE: The fence is -- continues to be a problem. And, first of all, the President has made it pretty clear that he -- his vision of the two-state solution would be one in which you didn't need a security fence. But that said, the two primary concerns are that this not be a fence that somehow prejudices an outcome, a territorial outcome. And secondly, that it not infringe, or it infringes as little as possible, on the lives of ordinary Palestinians. And that's been the nature of the discussions with the Israelis and continues to be the nature of the discussions.

They have made some adjustments to the route of the fence. Those are appreciated. For instance, they've made some adjustments, I think, that have helped a lot in regards to the largest Palestinian university, and we'll see what other adjustments they might be able to make. But the issue of how this relates one way or another to loan guarantees, I think at this particular point is premature.

Q Dr. Rice, a question on Iraq, and one on Iran. On Iraq, you said that the time frame for drafting a constitution is what may now take longer. On the substance of the constitution, how much control -- understanding the Iraqis themselves are drafting this -- how much control is the United States prepared to give up, if, for example, it was to turn out that they wanted a constitution that would call for an Islamic state, or would not necessarily recognize the autonomy of the Kurds, or something like that? Is the U.S. prepared to say, fine, it's your constitution, you do it your way?

DR. RICE: David, we did make certain representations at the beginning of this conflict about, for instance, the territorial integrity of Iraq. And so that's important. And it's an important obligation, we believe, but one that we actually think the neighbors have a great stake in, too.

As to what actually goes into the constitution, we've been impressed with the degree to which all of the principles that have -- that, for instance, the Governing Council adopted when it first came into being -- much of the polling that is being done in Iraq suggests that the Iraqis are committed to notions of human rights, that they are committed to notions of equality under the law. These are the kinds of discussions that any new democracy has to have.

If you notice, the Afghan constitution that is now being debated is clearly an Afghan constitution. But it enshrines many of these basic principles. And so I think the answer is that we trust that people have instincts toward these very basic values of human rights and of liberty and of common decency. We will try to help a country, a society, that has not had a horizontal conversation politically for really most of its existence, and certainly not for the almost 30 years of Saddam Hussein's rule. But of course, it has to be an Iraqi constitution, just like the Afghan constitution is an Afghan constitution.

Q My question on Iran is, the IAEA turned out this fairly detailed report you're probably seeing now. The Iranian position on this is that it proves that they do not have a nuclear weapons program. I was wondering what conclusions you drew from that and what conclusions you drew from the public CIA report --

DR. RICE: Well, I saw one Iranian statement that it should lay to rest any concerns about what's going on in Iran. I think that's a, shall I say, an overstatement of the case. The IAEA report made clear that the Iranians have been concealing, that they've not been truthful in the past. And I think the issue now is are they going to be truthful in the future? Are they going to come clean about what had been going on in Iran, what is going on in Iran? Are they going to agree to verification measures and protocols that give the international community some confidence, given that they weren't transparent in the past, that they're going to be transparent in the future? I think that the IAEA report raises very serious concerns about what has been going on in Iran and what might be continuing to go on in Iran.

So the international community has an obligation, knowing now what we know about Iran's behavior, past behavior, to make sure that anything that is signed on to with the Iranians takes account of that past, and really insists on performance from the Iranians -- not promises from the Iranians, but performance from the Iranians. And that's the discussion that we're going to have in the IAEA Board of Governors.

But I think the IAEA report was very strong. And while it said that there was no evidence of a nuclear weapons program, they made very -- quite clear that given what they had learned, and given this long history, that it was going to take a while to really understand the full extent of the Iranian program.

Q Let's go back to Iraq. Two questions on Iraq. One, is there concern that as Ambassador Bremer goes back with these new ideas, these new options, that some of the minority groups -- the Sunnis, the Kurds -- they reject this idea of waiting on the constitution and holding another election?

DR. RICE: Let me be clear. Nobody is going back with ideas that say, wait on this or wait on that. There is -- clearly, the Governing Council has felt that the time line is fairly long for a permanent constitution. And so

that then poses a dilemma, which is, how do you get authority and responsibility transferred to the Iraqi people, how do you get them working in a political process, given that that may be a longer time line. That's the discussion they're going to have.

They, in fact, have had ideas of their own, which were the ideas that were brought back here. He's not going back with proposals generated in Washington. These were ideas that he had had discussions with them, came back here, got some input from Washington and will go back now, and I think they'll decide on a course. But the course will clearly have to be an Iraqi course.

Q You're not concerned about those specific groups saying, look, we'd rather do it the way we've been heading, do a constitution first and then not have some kind of election for another interim body?

DR. RICE: First of all, I wouldn't jump to any conclusions about exactly what they're going to go back and talk about. I have seen all kinds of ideas in all of your stories about what it is Jerry Bremer is going back -- (laughter) -- let me tell you that you're all over the map, and that's just fine, from our point of view, because it means that we are not preempting important discussions that the Iraqis are going to have with Jerry Bremer.

The protection, obviously, of minority rights is an important element of any functioning democracy. And I'm certain that that concern of the Kurds or the Sunnis will have to be taken up in whatever process is designed.

Q Saddam Hussein -- there's been some reporting today that Saddam Hussein may be coordinating all of the most recent attacks, that he had been waiting and sort of holding out, and now he's running a planned campaign.

DR. RICE: Yes, I saw the story, too. I don't think we have evidence to -- very much evidence or really any evidence to back that up. But there's a lot of speculation as to what role Saddam Hussein may or may not be playing. One thing he's doing is he's trying to preserve his own skin. So I wonder how much time he has for coordination.

About the trip -- last question.

Q You'll be going to Britain right before the elections in Northern Ireland. The last time the President was there he emphasized the work of the Good Friday Accord. The parties supporting the Good Friday Accord are losing some of their momentum. Will he take this opportunity to bolster his belief in it?

DR. RICE: Absolutely. The President has been very impressed with what Prime Minister Ahern and Prime Minister Blair have been able to achieve and were achieving. There was progress -- progress on the decommissioning. This is a very, very tough problem. But the United States, of course, has been very much involved through Richard Haass, who has been our special envoy for this. And I'm sure that the Prime Minister and the President will have discussions of this, and I can assure you that if there is anything that the United States can do to bolster the chances for success for the Good Friday Accord, the President will be prepared to offer to do that.

Thank you.

END 1:37 P.M. EST

* On Thursday, November 20th, the President will visit the Tomb of the Unknown Warrior, tour Westminster Abbey, and meet with family members of British servicemembers who died in Iraq.

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