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Press Briefing by National Security Advisor Steve Hadley

Best Western Grand Hotel Hungaria
Budapest, Hungary

1:19 P.M. (Local)

MR. SNOW: We're going to do just a quick sort of a joint briefing here. We've got Steve Hadley and Julie Ansley here to talk about the President's visits today with the President and Prime Minister of Hungary, and entertain any other questions of consequence that you may have. Steve, why don't you come up, and you can give a summary of the morning's meeting.

MR. HADLEY: I'll run through the day, and then talk a little bit about what was discussed. The President began this morning with an embassy greeting, meeting with the men and women who support U.S. government activities here.

He then met with the President of Hungary, went to the Parliament Building, where he met with the Prime Minister. After a meeting with the Prime Minister, of course, there was a brief meeting with the press. He then met with the Speaker of the Parliament, and then had an opportunity to greet various leaders of the political parties here in Hungary. And then there was a social lunch where the two leaders and the President -- President and Prime Minister and President Bush made some brief comments.

The two longest substantive meetings were, of course, the meeting with the President and the Prime Minister. At both of those meetings, the subject of democracy and freedom came up, of course. This being the 50th anniversary of the 1956 uprising, freedom and democracy are very much on everybody's mind. The President paid tribute to the spirit of the Hungarian people that despite the events of 1956 stood strong and ultimately resulted in the freedom that Hungary achieved in 1989.

They talked about Hungary could not only be an example to the world about the power of freedom, but also, in some sense, Hungary can share the lessons it has learned from its own transition to freedom and democracy with other countries not only in the region, but around the world. All three leaders talked about the responsibility of those who know freedom to support others in their quest for freedom. There are a lot of ways in which that support can manifest itself, but they all agreed that it is the responsibility of those who are free to help those who would be free.

There was a discussion of issues of the day. President noted and thanked the Hungarian officials for Hungary's understanding that freedom is also on the march in Afghanistan and Iraq and the willingness

of Hungary to participate. They have been participating most recently through the NATO mission in training in Iraq; they are present in Afghanistan, they are considering a PRT, heading one of the provincial reconstruction teams in Afghanistan. And the President expressed appreciation for their support in freedom's cause more generally.

There was a discussion about the Balkans, the important period of moving towards the question of final status for Kosovo, the importance that any final status arrangement provide protections for minorities, and particularly the Serbian minority in Kosovo, and that also it provide a prospect for the Serbian people to move towards greater affiliations with Europe and European institutions, so that it sees that as its vocation and ultimate destination, in terms of close association with the institutions of Europe.

There was a lot of discussion about energy, about the need for diversification of sources of energy, about the need to invest in alternative technologies, the kinds of things we've been talking about in the past -- clean coal technology, ethanol, hydrogen propulsion for cars and the like. A lot of interest in the Hungarian government and cooperation on those items.

There was some discussion about Russia. President Putin had recently come to Hungary, made some helpful comments about the history of this period, and particularly the history in 1956, and a discussion about how we could reassure Russia that promoting democracy and freedom not only within Russia, but among Russia's neighbors is not some kind of effort to encircle Russia, but is, in fact, a good thing for Russia, because democratic states make good and peaceful neighbors.

I think that's the gist of the conversations, really, with both the President and the Prime Minister. There was also some discussion about Iran, the desire that we all have to find a resolution of the nuclear issue through negotiation and diplomacy, the need for solidarity, and the remarkable degree of solidarity there is between the United States, Europe, Russia in these conversations, and of course, the next step there is for the Iranian government to respond to the proposal that they received here around the first of the month.

And, Tony, I think that's really what transpired by way of substance over the course of the day.

Q Former Defense Secretary William Perry just called on President Bush to launch a preemptive strike against the ballistic missiles that North Korea is said to be about to test. What does the United States think about that idea?

MR. HADLEY: Well, we've been pretty clear what we think about that idea, namely about the test.

Q No, I mean --

MR. HADLEY: I'll get to that. I get it. I'm not being cute. Look, we've been concerned for a long time about North Korea's development of ballistic missiles and their willingness to sell them. There is, of course, a missile technology control regime that is out that we are supportive of, as is most of the international community, that is trying to stop the trade in longer-range ballistic missiles. So we've been concerned about the North Korean program for some time. We've expressed those concerns to the North Koreans.

As you know, they adopted voluntarily a moratorium in 1999, and reaffirmed it several years later. And our position is that the North Koreans, as we've all said several times, should not test -- should not test; they should respect their own moratorium. That is the message we sent. That is the message the Chinese, Japanese, South Koreans and everybody else has sent to the North Koreans -- that we are trying to deal with a broader set of issues with North Korea through the six-party talks and a test would obviously be disruptive of those talks.

And the solution is for North Korea to decide to respect its own moratorium, not to test this missile, come back to the six-party talks, and let's talk about how to implement the agreement for the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula that was reached last September. We think diplomacy is the right answer, and that is what we are pursuing.

Q Yesterday you said that the -- it was waiting too long for August 22nd, for Iran to submit their response to the offer. What day would you like for them to respond? Is it by the time of the G8 foreign ministers' meeting next week, or when?

MR. HADLEY: We saw that report about the 22nd of August. We've also heard other things from various Iranian sources. So it's not quite clear what is the message that we're being sent. So what we have said, at the time that this proposal was made, I think around the -- on or about the 1st of June, that a response ought to come in weeks, not months, and it ought to come through the same channel through which the offer was made, that was, to Solana to Larijani, so that we know that it is an authoritative response, so that we know what is the position of the Iranian regime. That's what we would like to see. Obviously, we think it is a good proposal. It has a lot in it for the Iranian people, in terms of economic assistance and things that will open up the Iranian people to the world. We don't see why it takes a long time to respond to what is a very constructive proposal.

So, obviously, we think weeks, not months. We're into weeks. We ought to get a response soon. And there are a number of meetings that are coming up where first foreign ministers, and then heads of state and government of the states involved will be getting together. And, obviously, it would be helpful to have a response before that set of meetings associated with the G8 come forward. But what we've said is, weeks, not months, and we're into weeks. And we think it's a good proposal and the Iranians ought to come back and provide some indication of acceptance, so we can start working through the details.

Q When you say you're hearing things from other various Iranian sources, what are you talking about, the various news accounts of different people speaking, or what?

MR. HADLEY: We're hearing various people speaking, some of which is reported in the press, some of which we're hearing outside the press. And what we need is an authoritative response.

Q Steve, could I just clarify that? You said, hopefully before the foreign ministers' G8 meeting.

MR. HADLEY: I said that there are a number of meetings, and it would -- obviously, coming up. In association with the G8 there's foreign ministers, the actual heads of state and government. It would

be helpful and useful if we could get a response and know where the Iranians are before those meetings, it would advance the negotiating process.

Q So is it fair to say that you're hoping a response before June 29th -- is that fair, one of the seven meetings?

MR. HADLEY: I don't have anything to say more than what I really said -- weeks, not months. We're into weeks: sooner would be better. We don't see why it should take a lot of time. And, obviously, if it can come before this sequence of meetings or during this sequence of meetings, that would be helpful. That's really all I've got.

Q Is this being communicated to the Iranians through an official channel, or is this being communicated through your words today and the President's words yesterday?

MR. HADLEY: There have been communications of a more official nature to the Iranian tongs.

Q You're saying it would be helpful.

MR. HADLEY: Right.

Q You're not willing to set any sort of deadline, it would just be helpful if it came before this date.

MR. HADLEY: It would be helpful.

Q And is there any outside date? When do we start saying it's months, instead of weeks? Two months from the 1st of June?

MR. HADLEY: We're going to have to see. It's going to depend largely on what the Iranians do. If they give us a response in the next couple days, this is going to be a moot point. If it isn't, we'll have to see where we are.

Q But no deadline?

MR. HADLEY: We're not trying to do this through an arbitrary set of deadlines. We're trying to do this in a way that is respectful of the Iranian people and respectful of the regime, and is most calculated to get a positive response. That's how we're trying to manage this.

Q I had a question on the trade discussions yesterday at the summit. The Europeans have said that both sides have agreed to put forward new agriculture offers in the Doha Round talks. Is that a correct characterization of what occurred in the summit meetings yesterday?

MR. HADLEY: What we have said, and what the President reaffirmed, is that we made a very forthcoming proposal with respect to tariffs, and particularly tariffs in the agricultural area and trade-distorting agricultural subsidies. It was a very ambitious proposal. The President did it in order to try

and get the negotiations going. But when he made that proposal, he made it very clear that our kind of boldness needs to be matched by boldness on the part of the other sides -- that is to say from Europe and from the G20 on agriculture, but also we need a little bit of boldness and courage in the areas of services and non-agricultural products. And our take is we have seen some proposals, but not of the kind of commensurate scale as the one that we made, and that's what we need to see. We need to see it from the G20 and from Europe with respect to agriculture; we need to see it from a variety of countries on services and non-agricultural products.

So we know that we're in the zone of where we can get what we ought to have, which is an ambitious Doha Round that gets tariffs down. Because, remember, the principal beneficiaries of this Doha Round are going to be developing countries. That's why it's called the Development Round for Doha. And in order for us to do that and to achieve that kind of result, and make the most of this opportunity, people have to be ambitious. And the President has been ambitious, has made a bold opening move, and we need other parties to make comparable moves of similar boldness, so that we know that we're really going to try and do this and achieve what is possible here. Then we can get into the details of negotiation. That's what we need to see next.

Q So the U.S. has not agreed to put forward another agriculture offer, then, because that's what the Europeans have said occurred yesterday at the summit meeting, that Borroso and Bush agreed that both sides would do offers?

MR. HADLEY: Look, there's going to be a negotiating process, obviously, to get this done. But where we are now is what the President has made is a bold proposal and what we're looking for is a bold proposal back.

Q The Italian Foreign Minister D'Alema that you saw last week in Washington, met yesterday with the Iranian Minister Mottaki -- at the end of the meetings, D'Alema said there is no reason to have an atomic weapon in Iran in a close time, and he also said that the risk to repeat in Iran the mistake was done in Iraq. Do you agree with him?

MR. HADLEY: I don't know what he said. I mean, I know what you said he said. Look, Iran has said it wants a peaceful nuclear program. That's what its government has said. What we and other countries have said is we have no problem with a peaceful nuclear program. Indeed, our President has been out talking about nuclear power as an important aspect of energy security and diversification. So we have said the issue is not whether Iran can have a peaceful nuclear power program.

The problem is that the history of the program that they have been conducting -- which, over a period of 18 years, large portions of which were not disclosed to the IAEA, as the Iranian regime was required to do -- raised questions about Iran's intentions, and therefore, Iran needs to reassure the international community that it is only interested in a peaceful civil nuclear program.

And that's what the EU3 -- sorry -- the UK, France, and Germany -- were negotiating with Iran, a series of assurances that would reassure the international community that Iran is only pursuing a peaceful program, rather than what we have reason to believe is a peaceful program as a cover for a nuclear weapons program. That's what is so troubling. And that is what we need to do, and that's why we think

it starts with a suspension of the enrichment program, which is the way you get the fissile material that would allow you to make a nuclear weapon.

A suspension of the enrichment activity, and then a return to negotiations so we can come up with an arrangement that will ensure the Iranian people that they will have access to civil nuclear power and ensure the international community that it will only be a peaceful civil nuclear program, not a route to nuclear weapons. That's what we need to do.

Sir.

Q Mr. Hadley, although it's of course been 50 years, the U.S. inaction in what happened here in Hungary is very much a part of the story and the history. Will the President acknowledge that publicly in any way, number one? Number two, could you foresee this administration doing what the Eisenhower administration did in any similar set of circumstances today?

MR. HADLEY: The President will have an opportunity to address the broader question in his speech this afternoon. I think one of the things that, as I mentioned, came out of the discussions he had today is that as he and the Prime Minister and the President said, those of us who enjoy freedom have an obligation to support those who are seeking freedom. And that's an obligation I think, drawing from the lessons of history, we all need to take seriously.

Sir.

Q Sir, I had two questions, if I may. The first is, the Iranians seem to be sending mixed signals through mixed channels. Would a way of responding to that be to say, definitively, that if they wait until August to respond they risk, by August, facing U.N. Security Council action already?

MR. HADLEY: We think we've been pretty clear about what needs to happen next and when, in some sense, the timing when it needs to happen. And I think our best judgment is that that's the best way to get -- to encourage a positive response from the Iranians, and that's what -- from the Iranian government, and that's what we're trying to do.

Sir.

Q It's been reported in the last week or so that three years ago, right after the fall of Baghdad, the Iranians made an unsolicited offer to us to engage in negotiations, and they had held out the possibility of working to reduce terrorism in Palestine and also trying to resolve the nuclear concerns. Can you tell us why the United States did not take that initiative at that time, and why things have now changed that you would be willing to entertain that, at least, if they're willing to meet your conditions?

MR. HADLEY: I really don't know what that article was based on, I must say. And I just -- I don't know what was talked about. What we've said and where we are is that we have -- our addressing with the EU3, which we've identified before -- Russia and China -- we're addressing the issue of Iran's nuclear program. We have made an offer. We've indicated that if they will suspend their enrichment program,

we will join the negotiations and try to resolve the nuclear issue.

We think that is the place to start. We have, as the President has indicated, a long set of concerns with Iran: what they are doing in Iraq, their support for terror, their treatment of their own people in terms of denial of freedom, and the like. But in terms of negotiations, we think a good starting point for addressing those issues is an Iranian-government response to the proposal that was made and a resumption of the negotiations on the terms that we described.

Those other issues, obviously we would like to see progress on those issues. And one of the things we've said publicly is if Iran is interested, for example, in making progress on their activities in Iraq, one of the things they can do is stop the flow of weaponry and other materials across the border from Iran into Iraq that are being used to kill innocent Iraqis and, in some cases, our coalition.

So you don't have to have a negotiation for the Iranian government to decide that it's in their interest to work constructively with this new Iraqi government and be a force for stability rather than, of course, for disruption, and to try to save lives rather than doing things that are actually putting lives at risk. You don't need a negotiation for that. That's something that the Iranians can do. And if we can get into a negotiation framework on the nuclear issues, and can make progress on those issues, that would be a good start towards addressing a broader set of issues.

Yes, ma'am.

Q There has been some suggestion, as mentioned before, that the U.S. should shoot down a test missile should North Korea launch it. Systems are in place in the United States. Would the U.S. launch a preemptive missile? Or is there any other way of defusing this diplomatically? The line has been only that Pyongyang should come back to the table. It's obviously not going to do that at this moment.

MR. HADLEY: Well, we hope it would come back to the table, and we would hope that it would be a little sobered by the unanimous message that the international community has sent, which is that a North Korean missile test right now would be, again, breach of North Korea's unilateral undertakings, and our view is in breach of the commitment in the September agreement under the six-party talks to try and promote stability in the Korean Peninsula. So it would be a violation of those understandings and would be disruptive of resolving the broader set of issues with Korea. So I hope they will get the message. They certainly are being sent it by all the principal players through every available channel. And we would hope they would reconsider.

MR. SNOW: We've got about five more minutes, so if you want to continue pursuing the foreign policy questions, we'll do that, if you want to entertain other questions, we'll do those, as well. But I know a lot of you are going to have to preset for the final event on this trip. So I'm just stepping in and giving you a little time code.

Mike.

Q May I just follow-up on that question, and ask you more generally, the philosophy of what the missile defense system is, when it might be used -- there was a Washington Times report that it had been

alerted, or somehow the readiness of it was raised. Could you just talk to us a little bit about what about that you can describe or what we can know about it?

MR. HADLEY: Yes, can I consult briefly with my colleague here for a minute?

MR. SNOW: We're ready now. (Laughter.)

MR. HADLEY: We're ready, but I'm not quite sure what we should say.

Q Tell us everything. (Laughter.)

MR. HADLEY: Where should I begin? No. Look, I've tried in a number of different ways to make the point that the way out of this is for the North Koreans to decide not to test this missile. And that is the way out of it. And, obviously -- and I really need to just stop it right there. I really need to stop it right there. I'm sorry about it, but that's really what I need to do.

Q Also on the missile. The South Korean defense minister said that they don't think the launch is imminent. What's our reading of where they are?

MR. HADLEY: There's sort of two pieces -- one, there's an issue of intentions, what the North Koreans are intending to do, and that's sort of -- you have to kind of read people's minds. The other issues are what are they prepared to do, or what are they -- do they have the capability to do. And I think what we've said publicly is we're watching it very carefully. And preparations are very far along, so you could, from a capability standpoint, have a launch.

Now, what they intend to do, which is what a lot of people are trying to read, of course, we don't know. What we hope they will do is give it up and not launch.

Q Back to Iran and this question about weeks, not months. I'm a little unclear, because it seems Iran is saying, we are talking about weeks -- eight weeks. And I'm wondering, A, do you think they're doing this in some way to irritate, and B, what can be done, aside from talk? At some point you pull the incentive package off the table?

MR. HADLEY: Well, I think what we've done is sort of laid it out pretty well. I mean, if it's from June 1st -- June, July, August -- that's three; that begins to sound like months, doesn't it? Now, it's true, months are made of weeks, so arguably, everything is in weeks. (Laughter.) But come on. What we've said is, weeks, not months. And what we've also said is that if Iran does not suspend and does not return to the talks, we have agreement from our key allies to go forward in New York. And at some point, at some point, if we do not get the kind of response we seek in weeks, not months, we have the option of going back to New York and pursuing a U.N. Security Council resolution.

Now, you could dig all you want; that's all there is, because we are trying to work this through diplomatic channels in a way I described to maximize the chance that the Iranians will see it is in their interest to accept this proposal. That's really all I've got for you.

Q From your talk yesterday, if you had any with Javier Solana, who is fresh from a visit to Tehran, about the kind of amendments you want to see in these incentives and what are exactly the issues you have with the incentives presented to them?

MR. HADLEY: The issue really is we need a response, timely, in weeks, not months, and there needs to begin with a suspension of enrichment. That's what we need to see. That, then, opens the door for negotiation. And we can deal with the issues of the offer that was made.

Q Did he bring any particular demands from Tehran? Did he mention anything?

MR. HADLEY: What we've really been focusing on is getting a response out of the Iranian government. That's really what we need -- we need to see to unlock this.

Q Can I just follow up on North Korea again and just make one more try at this? I know you don't want to say, go beyond anywhere, but you're talking about a missile defense system, so one would assume if this missile were in any way threatening us, that you would want to at least attempt to shoot it down, as a missile defense. Can you go that far and say whether that would happen? At least reassure people?

MR. HADLEY: Reassure people that --

Q That if they were to launch, that there would be --

MR. HADLEY: Let me try this. We have a missile defense system, which you know, that is being what we call a long-range missile defense system that is basically a research, development, training, test kind of system. It does, of course, as you know from the press, have some limited operational capability. And the purpose, of course, of a missile defense system is to defend -- of that missile defense system is to defend the territory of the United States from attack.

Anything else? Steve.

Q This document that was unclassified yesterday, Republican lawmakers released it pointing toward 500 weapons dumps or munitions found in Iraq since 2003, of some chemical weapons. Do you consider this as a smoking gun of some sort, proving the WMD charge, or is this old material that is pre-Gulf War? What do you make of it?

MR. HADLEY: I think really it is what it is. There's a declassified, I think one-pager, that the intelligence community has cleared. I don't know whether that's been released to the press.

Q It has, yes, it has.

MR. HADLEY: That's really the story, I think. And I don't have a whole lot to add. It sort of, it is what it is. And I think -- I read that statement quickly last night and it's really all we can say about it. And I think

people are going to have to draw their own conclusions.

But the bottom line is, 500 chemical munitions in Iraq, and obviously we're concerned about the potential threat they pose to Iraqis and to our forces.

I think I'm done. One more shot?

Q Let me try on North Korea one more time.

MR. HADLEY: You can try.

Q Okay. One question is, you talked a little bit about this before, what you think the motives are behind North Korea doing what they're doing. And two is, how confident is the President in the missile defense system as it is now?

MR. HADLEY: I've described the missile defense system I think accurately. It is a research development and testing capability that has some limited operational capability. It's really the best I can do.

In terms of North Korean intentions, you know, this is a very opaque society and very hard to read. And you know it's very hard -- I can speculate on intentions. I don't think it would be useful. What we need to do is look at their capabilities, and that's what we're trying to do.

Okay, thanks very much.

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