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Press Briefing by National Security Advisor Steve Hadley

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1:50 P.M. EDT

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MR. SNOW: With apologies, we're not going to give you a lot of time to catch your breath. We are now going to wait for a couple of seconds here, do an off-camera, on-the-record briefing by National Security Advisor Steve Hadley, who will talk a little bit about the last couple of days and answer questions. We're going to need to get out of here at 2:15 p.m. or so, so we can get back in time to get back on our way home, as well.

Steve?

MR. HADLEY: Is this a little too soon? Do you need five minutes to digest what you've heard, or should we go ahead and start?

Q No, go ahead.

MR. HADLEY: I'll just say a couple things at the beginning, if I could. I met with some of you before the trip here, I think last Friday, and we tried to say that this is an informal meeting of the two leaders. We tried to suggest it was not a formal summit; that we wanted an opportunity for the two leaders to spend time together informally, and talk about what's ever on their mind.

President Bush 41 and Mrs. Bush were very gracious hosts. They structured the session and the time here at Kennebunkport in a very gracious way that helped achieve that objective. So there was a lot of time when the two men were alone or informal settings, whether it was meals or boat trips, fishing trips, or just walking around the property. And we think that the atmosphere was good, and it contributed to the strengthening of the relationship between the two men, but also giving them an opportunity informally to discuss the issues of the day.

We, as I said, did not try to make this a formal summit with declarations and deliverables and all the things that you -- that are usually associated with summits. That said, there are a number of things that have been done or will be announced in the next day or two that are evidence of the intensity of the relationship between these two countries.

As some of you know, what's called a Section 123 Agreement was signed here on Friday and Moscow, which will permit civil nuclear cooperation between the United States and Russia. Secretary Rice and Foreign Minister Lavrov will be signing some documents tomorrow dealing with a proliferation initiative to try and assure countries that want peaceful civil nuclear programs that they will have the support of the international community, but have that support in a way that does not contribute to risks of proliferation.

There will be also a document talking about -- beginning to talk about the relationship between the two countries on strategic nuclear forces in the aftermath -- expiration of the START I agreement in 2009. These join a number of other areas where we are cooperating with Russia in the nuclear field, whether it's the Global Nuclear Energy Partnership, or the joint strategy and initiative against global terrorism. It's been an area of productive cooperation.

I think with that I'll stop, and I would be glad to take your questions.

Q Basically, the question that have already been asked of you, about addition and substitution between the two plans. Did I hear it correctly that -- President Bush saying that no matter what else you put on the table, the plans for the Czech Republic and for Poland are going ahead?

MR. HADLEY: I think you heard the two Presidents say what they've said before, which is that President Putin has said that he hopes his proposals are in lieu of what has been talked about with the Czech Republic and Poland, and you heard the President say that we continue to think that those elements we're talking about there can be part of a broader solution.

So I think, though, what you saw was actually a very interesting shift, and some real progress on this issue, as President Putin made clear, I think, a question that some of you had asked me in the wake of the first meeting on this: Is he really interested in cooperation with the United States and with other countries in the area of missile defense? And I think he answered that question very strongly in the affirmative today.

He made a number of suggestions of how Russia could increase its contribution to such cooperation. He talked about the upgrade of the Azerbaijan radar. He talked about a warning center and a fusion center in Moscow; something we've talked about for three years, have not done. He talked about a similar center, perhaps in Brussels. He talked about possible new facilities.

But I thought what was most interesting -- he said this is a dialogue that should occur not only bilaterally but in the context with a number of other countries, all countries in Europe who want to participate in this dialogue. He specifically thought it would be useful to do it in the form of the NATO-Russia Council. And he said in the -- sorry, yes, NATO-Russia Council -- and he said in the end of the day, I thought interestingly, that cooperation in this area of missile defense could be an element of important cooperations and strategic partnership between the two countries. He's willing to see it in a very strategic context. And I think that's a very encouraging sign.

Now, is there a lot of work to do? Is there a complete harmonization on the positions of the two sides? Of course not. And that's why there will be working groups getting together to start to work these

issues. A lot of these questions about what are -- these pieces could do to contribute to a regional architecture are technical issues that'll have to be resolved. And I think you'll find, probably, defense ministers and foreign ministers getting involved. And obviously the reports will go back to the two Presidents.

So we're at the beginning of a process, but I think it answered the question, is there a real opportunity for cooperation on missile defense between the U.S. and Russia. Clearly, yes. And, can this be done in the context of a broader cooperation in Europe? Clearly, yes. And I thought it was interesting that President Putin specifically singled out the NATO-Russia Council as a form of cooperation.

Yes, ma'am.

Q But, Steve, the President said that he was very supportive of the idea of bringing in NATO, doing this through the NATO-Russia Council. But from your point of view, wouldn't that also tie the U.S. hands, bringing in more countries, the whole NATO decision-making process? Is this really an idea that you're interested in?

MR. HADLEY: We've been talking with NATO about missile defense and trying to increase NATO's interest in missile defense for at least 15 years.

Absolutely. We want to have NATO involved in this. This is an issue of providing defense in the context of our mutual defense commitments to all the NATO countries. So of course we would like to pursue this in NATO.

Yes, sir.

Q What was the reference that Putin made at a certain point for the European countries, that we've decided not to participate to this dialogue, in terms of economic consequences and political consequences?

MR. HADLEY: I read it the other way. I read it that countries that see themselves and see their strategic interests will want to participate in this because this is an important issue from a security standpoint. So I think what he was making the case was, again, something that you got from his comments, this is a very important dialogue, potentially, for the United States and Russia, but also for the countries in Europe. And I think he was basically saying it's important enough that he's confident the European countries will want to participate, and so am I.

Yes, sir.

Q Do you think that President Putin's proposal will influence in any way the negotiations that you are having right now with Poland and the Czech Republic?

MR. HADLEY: We're having a lot of conversations with Poland, with the Czech Republic, in NATO, with Russia. We have a lot of things to talk about. Again, these things are going to take time, all of

these conversations are going to take time to come to fruition. And we have that time to do it, and what the President has said is, look, let's get all the pieces on the table and start from the proposition -- there is a common threat to Russia, Europe and the United States, let's do an assessment of that threat, let's talk about all the ideas that are on the table about how to deal with that threat, and let's come up with a system that can be an example of regional cooperation that protects Russia, Europe, and the United States. That's what he's talked about.

Yes, sir.

Q Steve, can you imagine that a radar station in southern Russia could substitute the one that you are planning in the Czech Republic? Because your experts have -- this could only be an addition.

MR. HADLEY: Well, there are radar system and there are radar systems, and they all have their unique capabilities and unique contributions. And this is one of the things the experts need to talk about, because there are certainly early warning radars that are required in order to indicate that a missile is on the way. There are other radars and capabilities that are required to give the kind of targeting information that would allow an interceptor to successfully intercept that target.

So this is -- that's the whole point of this. You need a systemic approach to this problem. You need radars of various kinds. You need information sharing and Interneting, something that President Putin talked about. You obviously have interceptors. There are various kinds of those and configurations that have to be tailored to the threat. There's a huge amount of technical work that needs to be done here, and this was an invitation to get that work begun.

Yes, sir.

Q Is it acceptable for the United States to have these information exchange center in Moscow and Brussels, not on the American soil?

MR. HADLEY: We've proposed with Russia, and indeed agreed with Russia, over three years ago, to have an information exchange center in Russia -- and maybe even longer ago than that -- and for a lot of reasons it has not gotten done. So we very much would like to see this center, which the two Presidents, I think, talked about and agreed on years ago actually getting stood up.

Yes, sir.

Q Did Kosovo come up between the two leaders, and was any progress -- if so, was any progress made on that issue?

MR. HADLEY: They talked about it. This is an issue that Secretary Rice and Foreign Minister Lavrov have spent a lot of time on. There are a lot of ideas, as you know, that are being circulated and talked about. This is an issue that's talked about in a lot of forums. We're talking about it bilaterally. We are, of course, talking about it with our European allies. There's a conversation going in the United Nations. There are a lot of ideas going on. And what the two leaders said, basically, is, look, we want our

Secretary of State and Foreign Minister to supervise and continue those discussions to see if we can find a solution on the way forward.

Kelly.

Q When President Putin talked about, "we hope we are playing the same game," did you get a sense that there are still lingering suspicions about how the U.S. and Russia are approaching these issues? Did you get that feeling at any point, despite all the warm words that have been used today?

MR. HADLEY: I didn't. I looked at that in a different way. I thought, these are both men with a real sense of humor and I thought this was kind of Putin's -- as a throwaway line. I didn't give it the sort of seriousness that you're trying to give it to it.

Peter.

Q The Russian spokesman said -- Dmitry Peskov said there was discussion of succession in the elections and so forth. Could you talk about that?

MR. HADLEY: There was a lot of discussion at dinner and in the session in the hour before dinner. And I should say one other thing. These men -- two men have had now a lot of opportunities to talk with one another and a lot of it was where it was just one-on-one. So I'm telling you what I know about the conversations I was party to, and also what I've been debriefed on the others. This is not a dodge. It's just trying to give you a sense of the kind of setting and how this meeting went forward.

There was a lot of discussion about politics: about Russian politics, about our politics, about timetables. You know, these are two politicians getting together. Surprise, surprise, they spend a lot of time talking about politics.

It was a wide-ranging discussion. There was also some discussion about economic issues in Russia. The President talked about some of that today. One of the interesting things that President Putin talked about was their economy is growing at, sort of, 6 percent, 7 percent, 8 percent a year. This last year, I think, he said it was 7.7 percent. And only 1.6 percent of that was attributable to oil revenue, which is an indication that the Russian economy is diversifying. And this is something President Putin wants to do.

There was a lot of discussion about history. President Putin talked about the siege of St. Petersburg, then Leningrad, which went for a thousand days. And the population of St. Petersburg at the beginning of the siege was 2.5 million and the population at the end of the siege was 400,000. And he talked about the impact of that on his own family, which was caught in that siege.

So my point is just to say, this is a very wide-ranging discussion. It allowed these two leaders to talk in a lot of forums and a lot of subjects, and to, again, strengthen the relationship between them.

Peter, do you want to follow up?

Q Is that in the context of discussing democracy? I.e. Russia's been through --

MR. HADLEY: What I was trying to give you an idea of is the range of discussion over the course of the day. I'm trying to give you a sense of how this conversation unfolded. So there was a lot of discussion about politics, a lot of discussion about economics, some discussion about history, some discussion about family, some discussion about dogs. I mean, it was a wide-ranging discussion. (Laughter.)

Q Did President Bush come away from this convinced that President Putin then will step down and not have a caretaker or attempt some other scheme to retain power next year?

MR. HADLEY: President Putin has said very clearly that the constitution requires him to give up the power, and that that's his intention to do, and there will be a presidential election. He did not say anything inconsistent with that.

Q Did they talk about the war at all, and did they talk about the politics of war in Washington?

MR. HADLEY: The President talked a little bit about Iraq, but not a lot, in the conversations I was in. Not really a lot. And I don't know if there were -- they did in the other conversations. But it really was not a major focus of the conversation.

Yes, ma'am.

Q Can you just talk a little bit more detail on START, and what we can be expecting, what kind of progress --

MR. HADLEY: I think I'm going to let you see. There will be a document that will come out tomorrow, and the easiest thing to do is let that document come out. There will be some backgrounding that will be done at that time, and people will be available to answer your questions.

Q Do you think that the differences that existed in March have been bridged?

MR. HADLEY: They've got a document that the two -- the Foreign Minister and the Secretary of State will sign.

Sir.

Q Any discussion of Nunn-Lugar? Experts say that the program needs updating, needs more resources.

MR. HADLEY: Actually, they went through a list of the areas of cooperation, and that was one of them that I didn't happen to mention, and it was referred to briefly. The interesting thing about that is Nunn-Lugar, of course, is in a context of a broader program to help Russia safeguard its nuclear storage

facilities. That program is going well. It's, in our judgment, pretty well funded, and we seem to be on track for what the two Presidents agreed on about a year ago, which would -- that work would be completed by the end of 2008 as a legacy of the two Presidents.

I talked to Senator Lugar, actually, earlier this week about this program, and he's actually going to be involved in some events associated with it. I've not heard anybody concerned about it. It seems, so far as I know, to be proceeding in a good track.

Yes, sir.

Q Do you feel confident after this summit that Russia will support tougher sanctions in Iran?

MR. HADLEY: I think the Russian President said publicly that we're really -- they are continuing to be in agreement with a two-track policy that we need to pursue in the U.N. Security Council tougher -- an additional U.N. Security Council resolution that would have additional sanctions. There has been some discussion of what the elements of that -- at the same time, of course, is the door remains open for the conversations with Larijani and Solana to bear fruit. That door is open. As the President made clear, we are very supportive of the Iranian people. We think Iran should have a peaceful nuclear civil energy program. We have no problem with that. We simply have to have assurances that this does not give rise to a nuclear weapon program.

And so I think both Presidents are on the same wavelength, in terms of a two-track: further sanctions and pressure from the U.N. Security Council, and at the same time, trying to find if there isn't some kind of negotiated solution.

Yes, sir.

Q How concerned did you find, or did the President find Mr. Putin about Iran? Is there -- do you share with Russia the same concerns we see in the United States? Do they share the same concerns as you, sir?

MR. HADLEY: I do. I think they do. I think they see it very much the same way. I've said that before. And if you listen to the leaders as they talk about it, it's very much the same. This is a serious problem for them and for us. In some sense, it's even more serious to them, since Iran is much closer to them than to the United States.

Q Was there a today development on the loose nukes issue? President Bush said we talked about nuclear security and made great strides in setting a foundation for future relations between the U.S. and Russia in dealing with nuclear security issues. And I was wondering --

MR. HADLEY: That's -- what he's referring to is both the things we've done, but also looking forward to the announcement tomorrow that I referred to about this -- basically a proliferation initiative that we'll be talking about.

Yes, sir, way in the back. And then you after that.

Q (Inaudible.)

MR. HADLEY: Sorry, I'll get you gentlemen behind, and I'll get you next.

Q The President mentioned they did discuss North Korea a little bit. Could you tell us, what was their discussion about, what was their attitude toward any recent movement in the six-party process?

MR. HADLEY: The discussion I was in was fairly brief. The President thanked President Putin for the role they played in resolving the Banco Delta Asia issue, and they both agreed that the next step was obviously for North Korea to start performing its obligations under the February 13th agreement.

Yes, sir.

Q What is your personal impression -- does Mr. Putin rule out American anti-missile complexes in Polish republic and Czech Republic? And how essential to the United States to get Russia's agreement on that?

MR. HADLEY: You've heard the two Presidents on it. I've tried to put it in the broader context. I don't really have anything to add.

Yes, sir.

Q Is it fair to say, based on the comments of the two leaders and your comments here, that there is a broad agreement, in principle, that NATO should be involved in the missile defense system?

MR. HADLEY: Absolutely.

I think that's it. Thank you very much.

END 2:10 P.M. EDT

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