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Office of the Press Secretary
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Press Gaggle by Dana Perino, Dan Price, Assistant to the President for International Economic Affairs, and Dennis Wilder, NSC Senior Director for Asian Affairs

Aboard Air Force One
En Route Chitose, Japan

2:18 P.M. EDT



MS. PERINO: Okay, we are on our way to Japan for the G8. I'm going to let Dan Price just say a few words, because you've heard from him a lot this week, but he'll just remind you of the main issues that we have going in. Dennis can talk a little bit about the day we're going to have in Japan when we get there, with the bilateral, and then I'll follow up with other questions on topics outside of that.

MR. PRICE: Yes, I'll just give really a brief summary, because earlier this week I gave an on-the-record briefing which, I understand for some of you was numbingly detailed.

The President is looking forward to having very good discussions, not only with the leaders of the G8, but with the various "so-called" outreach leaders, the leaders of the seven African nations will be there, as well as the leaders of Brazil, India, China, Mexico, South Africa, Australia, South Korea, Indonesia who will be there as well.

It is a very, very full agenda. As you know, there are issues of development and disease, poverty alleviation, issues related to the global economy, protectionism, the Doha Round, investment liberalization, oil prices. There are issues relating to food security and food prices. There are issues relating to climate change. There's a series of political and security issues relating to counterterrorism and nonproliferation, as well as regional challenges with respect to Zimbabwe, North Korea, Burma, Sudan, Middle East, Iran, and a host of other issues facing these leaders.

As I said, the President is looking forward to the discussion. As he indicated, there are a number of overarching themes that we will seek to underline. The first is accountability and keeping our promises. The second is continuing our efforts to alleviate disease and poverty through the new health initiatives on health care workers and neglected tropical diseases, as well as sending a very strong message on confronting protectionism, especially through the Doha Round. And he will underscore his commitment to push toward a prompt conclusion of a balanced outcome in the Doha Round this year, recognizing that it requires contributions not only from the G8 countries, but also from the major emerging economies.

I will stop there, and turn it over to Dennis, who can give you a briefing on the events when we land and the bilateral with Prime Minister Fukuda.

MR. WILDER: Thanks. This is the President's fourth visit to Japan as President of the United States. Of course it's the first time he will go to Hokkaido, the northern -- largest northern island in Japan. Very much looking forward to, on the first day, having a bilateral set of meetings with the Japanese leader, Prime Minister Fukuda. After he lands, he will go into a meeting with Prime Minister Fukuda and his senior staff for about an hour. Following that, they will have a press availability, and then after that will be a dinner, a private dinner. In this case, it will be a very small dinner with the Bushes, Mr. and Mrs. Fukuda, and the Ambassador of the United States to Japan, Tom Schieffer, and the Japanese Ambassador to the United States.

In terms of the agenda of this meeting, as you probably saw, the President talked to Japanese reporters earlier this week and made clear that Japan is the cornerstone of American foreign policy in East Asia. Many ways you can argue that this period of the Bush presidency has been a golden age in U.S.-Japanese relations; it's one in which we have become stronger partners in the region and in the world. We are, of course, working on a very ambitious program of realignment of our military forces in Japan. They'll discuss that. The Japanese are helping

to move 8,000 Marines to Guam, and their dependents, and we are realigning our base structure in Japan to move some of our bases out of urban areas and to consolidate bases for a better relationship with the Japanese people.

In addition, later this year, the United States will for the first time deploy a nuclear carrier to Japan. The Kitty Hawk is being retired, and we will be for the first time basing a nuclear carrier there, which we're very grateful to the Japanese people for all the support they give to forward-deployed American forces in this area of the world.

Other issues that the two leaders will discuss -- obviously the six-party talks, and the next steps in the six-party talks, will be an important part of the agenda. We are hoping that we will have the heads of delegation meeting of the six-party talks next week in Beijing. Chris Hill is going out to Beijing to begin those consultations early next week, and then we hope as soon as possible to be able to hold the heads of delegation meeting there.

Q Next week meaning the same week as the G8?

MR. WILDER: The heads of delegation may be either next week or the week thereafter, at the end of the week.

Q Do you have rough dates?

MR. WILDER: We don't have dates yet. We're still working with the six parties to settle the exact dates, but we're coming close.

Q Well, when you say "next week" -- I'm sorry, because it's Saturday, are you referring to --

Q Are you on Japanese time?

Q -- this upcoming --

MR. WILDER: I'm saying the end of next week is probably the earliest they can occur.

Q So it would be around the 11th?

MR. WILDER: The 11th, 11th or 12th, right. So we're talking about having heads of delegations meet probably at the end of next week or early the next week.

Q That's for the next steps on North Korea.

MR. WILDER: Right. There are several things, obviously, that the heads of delegation will be working on. One is the verification mechanism, how we will do verification of the declaration that the North submitted. They'll also be working on completing the steps in second phase. For example, we still have de-fueling of the nuclear reactor that needs to occur. And so while about half of the rods have been taken out of the reactor, we need to have the rest of the rods removed and placed in the spent fuel pond. So there are many issues related to that that need to be worked out.

And then, of course, a discussion of the next phase, moving from disablement to dismantlement, and dealing with the questions of ultimate disposition of the nuclear materials in North Korea.

So we're at a very pivotal point in the six-party process, and the President and the Prime Minister of Japan will want to compare notes and make sure we are working on the same page as we move forward.

In addition, they'll want to discuss assistance in Africa. Japanese have a very ambitious program for assistance in Africa. And as you know, the President is very eager to see not only the United States, but many other nations help with poverty alleviation, health and other issues in Africa.

I think I'll stop there, and let you ask any questions you might have.

Q What's Japan's role in Iraq these days? Would you expect that to be changed in any way?

MR. WILDER: Japanese today have a logistics unit stationed in Kuwait that operates C-130 flights into Iraq. We're very happy for the support they provide the Iraqis in that way. They also, of course, provide substantial financial assistance to Iraq for development and construction of the infrastructure in Iraq. They also, with Afghanistan, provide the refueling operation for Operation Enduring Freedom, and that is a major contribution as well to the war on terror.

Q The Japanese leader has made movement on climate change the key issue for him. So what is the President likely to give him?

MR. WILDER: Where is Dan?

MS. PERINO: I can answer for you. He had to go. It's not any different from what Dan said earlier this week, what the President said on Wednesday and Thursday in his interviews -- I guess Wednesday were the Japanese interviews -- which is that -- a couple of things. One, if you go back to 2007 and the G8 -- and you know these G8s build on one another -- in May 2007, President Bush said, let's start the major economies meeting process, so that we can have a workable setup, where all the major economies are at the table, so that that can feed into the U.N. process. He said that last May, right before the G8 in Heiligendamm. That was welcomed there. Then we had the MEM meeting there in September. There's been many others around the world. In fact, I think most recently there was, just like last month, one in South Korea.

So a lot of this is culminating towards getting an agreement that we can move forward on at the G8 and the MEM -- remember, there's a G8 meeting on climate on Monday or the Tuesday -- Tuesday, and then the next day is the Major Economies Meeting. So that will be Wednesday.

One key point on the Major Economies Meeting, which I think that everybody in the G8 recognizes and supports, is that we have been able to lead an effort where all the major economies are still at the table, and they're speaking with one voice, in terms of we need to work together to solve a problem. It is our shared responsibility and our shared solution that will help get us there.

When it comes to specifics about how each country is going to do that, that's a little bit harder. And people are working on that in their own respective capitals. We're working on it in ours. Just look at the debate over the past several years, but most recently right there in the Senate, in June. And other countries are starting to grapple with it, including countries like India and China, and India last week putting forward legislation.

So we are very pleased that this past year we've been able to keep everyone together, cement that process, keep that glued together. I think it's fed well into the G8 process, and we are hopeful we'll be able to accomplish what Prime Minister Fukuda has set out.

Q But you would be able to accomplish that if the United States got on board with what the Japanese want, which is similar to what Merkel wanted last year.

MS. PERINO: There's a lot of inputs that go into this. And the President of the United States is not only thinking of his constituents, but of how do you make this actually work in a way that is practicable. And so we will continue to talk about it, we'll represent our interests, and we will continue to make sure that India and China and other developing nations are at the table, because one thing that we have realized -- that we have been able to get people to realize over those past years, that if you don't have them, you're not going to solve the problem anyway, because it's a global problem of global emissions. So we'll have to see how it goes.

Q Two questions for Dennis. One on the Japanese Prime Minister. He's obviously been very weak politically at home, with low approval ratings. Do you know what he's looking for from the President tomorrow, to try to help him out?

MR. WILDER: I think it's quite clear that the Japanese are eager to have the United States continue to play the very positive role we've played on the abductee issue. Japanese public has very strong feelings about getting positive progress on that. The President has said we're not going to forget that issue, that it's going to be part of

the six-party process. I think the Japanese Prime Minister will, of course, want to hear the President repeat those assurances, that the United States is very committed to seeing progress on this issue. So I think that will be a key issue for the Prime Minister, but also for the Japanese people.

Other issues, I would guess, that the Japanese Prime Minister is going to be eager to discuss -- how we move forward on climate issues in the -- both the G8 and the Major Economies Meeting; I think they'll want to compare notes on U.S.-Japan global policy in a lot of different areas of the world -- Iran, Burma, I've already mentioned North Korea.

MS. PERINO: Africa.

MR. WILDER: Africa, of course.

Q Okay, and then one question on China, if I may. The President met, or I think gave an award a week or two ago to two Chinese lawyers who were then detained last week by the Chinese authorities. Can you, one, tell us anything about the meeting the President had with those, and whether the President or anyone in his administration has contacted the Chinese about their fate?

MR. WILDER: Just to be clear, the President met with Chinese awardees who were given an award by the National Endowment of Democracy. Every year when the National Endowment for Democracy gives these awards, the President has met with the awardees. So he met in the Roosevelt Room with several of the awardees, some of whom also were there receiving awards for people in China who were not able to be there, because they're imprisoned.

We were disturbed to see that the Chinese refused to allow some of those awardees to come to a meeting with Congressman Wolf in Beijing. And we did make representations. Our ambassador in Beijing made representations to the Chinese side that we thought this was an unnecessary detention of these individuals. They did not actually arrest them, they simply detained them so that they could not come to the meeting with Congressman Wolf. The Chinese claim was the appropriate procedures hadn't been taken. We find that a rather thin argument. The President will push President Hu at their meeting, their bilateral meeting, to continue to open up China, to continue to make it a freer place, to continue to open to freedom of religion, freedom of press. And of course he'll want to hear what happened during the meetings in Beijing with the representatives of the Dalai Lama.

Q So those lawyers are not in jail or anything, or house arrest, anymore?

MR. WILDER: My understanding is they are not. And I believe that's what we know to be the case.

Q Can I ask you a question on -- if Africa is part of the outreach in this session, what level does Zimbabwe and the problems there factor into these discussions? Are there going to be any discussions specifically on dealing with Mugabe?

MR. WILDER: Yes, I believe it will be part of the G8 statement. It will be a part of the G8 discussion. I think that the G8 will strongly condemn what Mugabe has done, and will strongly question the legitimacy of his government and his governing of Zimbabwe.

Q Any specific actions being discussed by the members?

MS. PERINO: I think we'll have to wait and see how the meeting goes. I know we've got it on the agenda, of something to talk about, but we'll keep you updated if there's more on that.

Q Is the President going to -- he's meeting tomorrow, I guess, with the African -- is he going to make any requests of them on Zimbabwe?

MS. PERINO: I'm sure he'll continue to ask them to speak out and speak, as some of them have done, very strongly. But let's let that meeting take place, and we'll update you after it happens.

Q What do you expect from the G8 statements on food and oil prices?

MS. PERINO: Since Dan had to go, I think we can -- I'm going to refer you to his extensive briefing from Tuesday and Wednesday, because not a lot of it has changed. And we'll see if we can get you more, but he had to go back up to the front.

Q Dana, the bottom line is, we are not going to see any long-term goal declared either by the G8 or by the Major Economies Meetings?

MS. PERINO: I didn't say that. I think we're going to have to see what we're able to achieve. I'm not going to foreshadow it here. It's always a tricky thing that the press tries to get us to do, as we're going into a meeting that hasn't even started yet. So let us see how it goes, and then we'll keep you updated along the way. I have Jim Connaughton who is on board as well. If he has more on the flight, we could bring him back, or we'll just keep you updated while the meetings are ongoing. I'll have him and Dan, and be able to get information out of those meetings as quickly as possible and feed it back to you.

Q Has the President met with the current Prime Minister before, the Japanese -- is this his first meeting or second meeting?

MR. WILDER: No, he came to Washington. He had a meeting in Washington with Prime Minister Fukuda. And of course they spoke last week on the phone.

Q When was that? I remember it, but what month was that?

MR. WILDER: March, I believe.*

Q Quick social question. What's he doing for his birthday?

MS. PERINO: I don't know yet. I've got to ask him. You know, he had a big birthday party last night, with friends and family, as he always does on the 4th of July. And he had a wonderful chocolate and vanilla cake with vanilla ice cream. So I don't know what more he'll do tomorrow.

MR. WILDER: We hear rumors that the Japanese are going to surprise him with something. We don't quite know what it is.

Q Rumors or fact?

MR. WILDER: I don't work for the Japanese side, so I guess I have to say rumors.

Q Do you know anything?

MS. PERINO: No, I don't, I really don't.

Q Are they premature, or are they -- (laughter.)

Q I have another question, on Iran. What is the U.S. response to Iran saying -- Iran's --

MS. PERINO: We're going to have to consult with our allies about what Iran's response means. We haven't had a chance to fully do that yet, so those -- our representatives are talking with the rest of the P-5, the P-5-plus-one, in this regard, which also equals six, which is very confusing to me sometimes. But we'll just have to see how that is received by others before we make a formal response, because that's how we've been able to keep this process working, is making sure that everybody is coordinated and had a chance to talk to one another before talking about it in the press -- with the press.

END 2:38 P.M. EDT

*President Bush and Prime Minister Fukuda met in the Oval Office on November 16, 2007.

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