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## Press Briefing by National Security Advisor Stephen Hadley on the President's Trip to the NATO Summit

James S. Brady Press Briefing Room

3:25 P.M. EDT



MR. HADLEY: Good afternoon. On Monday, the President and Mrs. Bush will travel to Europe to participate in the President's sixth and final NATO summit.

The President will first visit Ukraine to celebrate the democratic transition that has taken hold in that country since the 2004 Orange Revolution. He will express his support for the aspirations of the people of Ukraine to see their country take its rightful place within Europe, including within its transatlantic institutions, as Ukraine continues its process of reform.

The President will then go to Romania so he can participate in the NATO summit and conduct bilateral meetings with Romanian authorities. The President will travel to Constanta, on Romania's Black Sea coast, to meet with President Basescu at his official retreat. Romania is a close partner of the United States and has proven to be a valuable NATO ally since it joined the Alliance in 2004. The two Presidents will discuss a range of bilateral issues.

The President will then attend the NATO summit in Bucharest. The holding of the NATO summit in Bucharest is testimony to how the process of NATO enlargement has contributed to the successful transformation of Romania and other new democracies in Central and Eastern Europe. The NATO summit will highlight how the NATO Alliance continues to transform itself to meet the challenges of the 21st century. We expect NATO leaders to take decisions to enhance NATO's capabilities to deal with those challenges, including through enhancing NATO's special operations capabilities, as well as pursuing collective defense and cyber and missile attacks.

We also expect allied leaders at the Bucharest summit to invite new members to join NATO, and in doing so, help stabilize the Balkans. As you know, candidates are Albania, Croatia, and Macedonia. The Alliance will reach out to Georgia and Ukraine, making clear that NATO is open to all democracies in Europe that meet the standards of membership. The President believes that NATO would benefit from Georgia and Ukraine as members, and that these nations would benefit from being a part of NATO.

The strongest NATO vehicle to help Georgia and Ukraine prepare for membership, of course, is what's called the Membership Action Plan, or MAP. And the allies will decide at Bucharest whether to accept Georgia and Ukraine's request to begin a MAP program.

After the NATO summit, the President will visit Croatia, to congratulate the people of that country for their impressive reforms that they have made, and for discussions with Croatia's leaders.

Let me go over the details of the schedule, if I might. On Monday evening, March 31, the President and Mrs. Bush will arrive in Ukraine.

On Tuesday, April 1, President Bush will meet with President Yushchenko of Ukraine, and later with Prime Minister Tymoshenko. The President will also have a chance to meet with the leader of the opposition, as well as the Speaker of the Parliament. The President and Mrs. Bush will visit St. Sophia's Cathedral, and a public school where they will view a student presentation on preventing HIV/AIDS. The President and Mrs. Bush will then depart Ukraine for Bucharest, Romania.

On Wednesday, April 2nd, President Bush will deliver remarks in Bucharest and then travel to Constanta to meet

with President Basescu of Romania. President Bush will return to Bucharest later that day to meet with the Secretary General of NATO, before participating in a working dinner of NATO leaders.

On Thursday, April 3rd, President Bush will participate in the NATO summit in Bucharest, at which it is expected that allied leaders will take decisions on new members. The President will then participate in a NATO summit meeting with the leaders from nations invited to join the alliance that morning. He will then participate in a Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council, so-called EAPC. That will be a working lunch. The EAPC includes all 26 NATO allies plus 23 NATO partner countries from Europe and Central Asia.

After the lunch, the President will participate in a meeting on Afghanistan. At this meeting, NATO leaders will be joined by Afghan President Karzai, Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon of the United Nations, and our other partners in Afghanistan, including the European Union, the World Bank, and all nations contributing troops to the International Security Assistance Force, or ISAF. We expect NATO nations and its partners in Afghanistan will demonstrate their firm commitment to Afghanistan over the long term, with pledges of additional contributions and renewed resolve to help Afghanistan succeed. Together, these leaders are developing a comprehensive approach to strengthening Afghanistan sovereignty and the democratic process.

On Friday, April 4, President Bush will participate in a summit meeting of the NATO-Ukraine Commission, followed by a summit meeting of the NATO-Russia Council. He will also meet with the Prime Minister of Romania. The President and Mrs. Bush will then depart for Zagreb, where President Bush will meet with the President of Croatia.

On Saturday, April 5, President Bush will meet with the Prime Minister of Croatia. The President will also deliver remarks in Zagreb and participate in a working lunch with leaders of those nations who have been invited at Bucharest to join the NATO Alliance. The President and Mrs. Bush will then depart Croatia.

The President has been invited by President Putin to visit Sochi in the Russian Federation. It is his intention to accept this invitation and to try to go to Sochi after the stop in Croatia. The details are still being worked on this stop. And the President expects to return to Andrew's Air Force Base from Sochi sometime on Sunday, April 6.

And I'd be glad to answer your questions.

Q In his talk today -- or telephone conversation with President Hu, did the question of the missile fuses come up? Was there a discussion of that? What did the President say?

MR. HADLEY: It came up very briefly, and basically the President indicated that a mistake had been made. There was very little discussion about it. You've probably seen the press release that came out from the Chinese side on President Hu's side of the conversation as -- if you noticed, it didn't even get mentioned. So it was a very small part of the conversation.

Q And the meeting with President Putin in Sochi, is that because progress suggests that the two should meet? Is there something going on, the talks that Secretary Gates and Rice -- is there something behind it?

MR. HADLEY: As you know, we talked before Secretary Rice and Secretary Gates went to Moscow. I think we mentioned that we -- the President thought there was an opportunity to try and consolidate a variety of activities that we have ongoing with Russia, and to resolve some outstanding issues with Russia in kind of a strategic framework that could be the basis for the relationship going forward. We've talked a bit about that. The President had some conversations with President Putin, sent him a letter on the subject. Those were encouraging enough so that Secretary Rice and Secretary Gates went, here in the last two weeks, met with President Putin and their counterparts. Progress was made at that time. A Russian delegation is in Washington today. They are meeting as we speak and continue to have some progress.

So this is an opportunity for the two leaders to meet, assess what progress has been made, and see whether we can come together with a framework that can, as I say, consolidate areas where we're cooperating together, maybe resolve some outstanding issues such as missile defense, and provide a platform for the relationship of the two countries going forward.

Q When you say that the allies will decide whether to accept the Membership Action Plan for Georgia and Ukraine, are you not saying whether the United States fully supports this, or does it? Is this what the President wants and will urge?

MR. HADLEY: The President has made it clear in his comments that he thinks it's very important that the door of NATO remain open for new members. He's said that he thinks membership would be good for NATO and it would be good for Ukraine and Georgia.

He is in consultation with his counterparts; those consultations continue. We believe -- he believes that NATO should welcome the aspirations of these countries for NATO membership, and that in Bucharest it will result in a clear path forward -- it should result in a clear path forward for those countries coming out of Bucharest.

So let me say that he's very forward-leaning on this issue. But, again, we respect the process that NATO has established, that we will continue consultations that have been quiet consultations -- we think those are most effective -- and we will respect the fact that this is a decision that NATO makes by consensus at the summit. And he will be an active participant in those conversations.

Q So he's not saying whether he favors it.

MR. HADLEY: That's all I can say. As I said, he's leaning very far forward. And I think you can get a good sense of his logic from the comments I just made, which restate some things that he's said several times before.

Yes, sir.

Q You said progress made on outstanding issues like missile defense. What sort of progress are you talking about?

MR. HADLEY: The main issue there is to find a way, in concrete terms, to reassure Russia that the radar and missile installation that is planned in Poland and the Czech Republic are, as we say, about potential threats coming to Europe, coming to Russia, if you will, from the Middle East, and are not aimed at Russia. And we are trying to find a formula of measures which would give Russia some confidence on that, that would also be reciprocal with respect to facilities that Russia has offered up that might be part of an integrated missile defense system protecting Europe and Russia, and are also respectful of the sovereignty of our Czech and Polish allies.

The President has talked about maybe we should take a -- maybe the United States, Russia and Europe should work together to develop a regional architecture, as, if you will, equal partners in developing that architecture, that would use resources contributed by the United States, Europe and Russia to provide against a threat -- a defense against threats from the Middle East that could threaten Europe, as well as Russia. That's what we would like to see occur.

And part of that, of course, is a series of transparency measures and confidence-building measures that make it clear that that is a system that is about threats -- common threats from the Middle East, not about threats from Russia.

We think it's very clear it's a very limited system that could be easily overwhelmed by the Russians. But we are prepared to look at some transparency and confidence-building measures, again, respectful of the sovereignty of our Czech and Polish allies, that, nonetheless, would give Russia some reassurance.

Q Beyond missile defense, were there other outstanding issues where you've made progress?

MR. HADLEY: We're trying to work with them on the issue of what to do when the START I treaty expires, whether we should look at extending the Moscow Treaty, which, as you know, has limitations on deliverable strategic nuclear warheads; whether there are some transparency and verification and confidence-building measures that should be part of the mix. So that's another issue that we are working on.

There are a number of economic issues where we made good progress; we would like to consolidate that progress, in terms of WTO accessions, a bilateral investment treaty, things of that sort.

Q Pretty quickly after this trip ends, we're going to hear the public testimony of General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker about the progress report in Iraq. The President had the briefings today. Can you give us any kind of readout of what the President is hearing from military advisors right now about the situation in Iraq, what's going on there, and where you are in the process on the progress report?

MR. HADLEY: Well, as you know, the President met with the Joint Chiefs today. He had an opportunity to meet with Secretary Gates and with Chairman Mullen yesterday. A day before, he had a fairly long video -- secure video conference with General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker. So he is getting a good appreciation for the range of their views and their current thinking. Obviously they are going to come forward here with a formal set of recommendations. The second week in April they will have an opportunity to explain those -- their assessment of the situation to the Congress. And after that point, I think the President will have an opportunity to indicate what decisions he has made. So we're in a fairly systematic consultation process.

I will say that the conversations today with the Joint Chiefs were much broader than just Iraq. It was a step back look of what are the challenges we faced here in the next decade, the war on terror generally, the importance of Iraq and Afghanistan as elements of the war on terror, concerns about the health of the force, and some of the reforms that are going on to deal with these problems. So it was a good, healthy conversation.

You know, this is the third, fourth, fifth of a series where the President has found it useful, almost on a quarterly basis, to sit down with the Chiefs and have an exchange of views. They are very rich conversations. They like them, we think. The President certainly enjoys them. And this was very much in -- of course, they talked about Iraq, because that's the issue that's on a lot of people's minds, but it was really of a piece of this sort of fairly regular, now, consultations between the President, the Chiefs, the Chairman and the Secretary of Defense.

Q -- a quick follow on the substance of it, though. There's sort of a storyline developing that there are likely to continue to be troop cuts, as expected, through July. Then there will be an assessment in late summer, early fall, and that it's highly unlikely the President will have a large number of troop cuts by the time he leaves office. Would you challenge that storyline, or do you think that's accurate?

MR. HADLEY: I've seen that storyline, and I think the best thing to do is for us to wait, let General Petraeus, Ambassador Crocker come here, give an assessment of the situation, how they see it, and what their recommendations are going to be. I mean, this has been a good process, a structured process. A lot of speculation in the press. There will be an opportunity to lay the whole thing out, and I think we ought to wait for their testimony.

Steve.

Q Could you talk a little bit about the latest round of violence that we've seen in Iraq in the last few days, what significance you attach to it? And how, in your mind, does that color this decision that's now being made --

MR. HADLEY: It's very interesting, what's going on. You know, one of the questions -- it answers a couple of interesting questions people have had for a while. One, a lot of people have said, including we, but a lot of critics have said what's lacking is the Iraqi government stepping up, taking responsibility for security, and demonstrating the capability to take responsibility for security. Other people have said there's a concern that this is a sectarian government; that a Shia-led government is going to be unwilling to crack down on Shia militia, Shia death squads.

And what's interesting is that Basra is now a province that has gone to what's called provincial Iraqi control. That is to say, Iraq is now responsible for security in Basra. And as many of you know and as many of you have written, Basra has been an area where there has been a lot of unrest, there has been intermittent violence, there had been very active militias, there's been active -- some -- a high level of corruption, and a real question in the minds of the people of Basra of who's in charge -- is it the government in Baghdad? Is it the governor? Or is it militias and criminal elements?

It's been an issue that people have written about and that the Prime Minister has talked about. And you may remember almost a year ago, maybe more, he went down to Basra and said, it is time for law and order to return to Basra. And what he's really done is take that matter into his hands, go down to Basra, and to assert the authority of the central government, but more to the point, the authority for the rule of law in Basra.

This was an operation we knew about, but it is a Iraqi-conceived, Iraqi-led operation with Iraqi forces, in which the Prime Minister has gone to Basra, where they have responsibility for security, in order to re-establish the rule of law, and to crack down on criminal gangs, and to deal with Shia death squads and others that have stepped outside of the rule of law.

So, yes, the consequence is the militias and criminal groups have reacted with violence. But it is in reaction to an effort by governmental authorities to reassert control in an area which had become pretty lawless. And so in some sense this is an indication of the continued maturation of this government in its willingness and capacity to take increasing responsibility for security. I think it's a very interesting story. You folks are covering it, and it's well worth covering.

Michael.

Q If I can go back to China for a second, two questions about the call today. First of all, was there anything that the President heard in his conversation with the Chinese President that made it more encouraging than the public statements we've heard from the Chinese so far that they are interested in some kind of dialogue with the Dalai Lama, or more open to some of the things that the President has been urging? And more broadly, on Chinese relations, is the President concerned that China, as the Olympics is approaching, is proving to be cracking down on civil liberties, openness, dissent. Are they worried about their corporation on the whole gamut of issues that were mentioned in the statement today -- Burma, Darfur, things like that? Do you feel like there's basically -- is he worried that there's backsliding from the Chinese on some of these issues as the Olympics approaches?

MR. HADLEY: Well, look, he takes these issues that you described very seriously. They need to address -- and his purpose -- whether Olympics or no Olympics, these are important issues that need to be addressed. And what the President wanted to do, as he said, was use the relationship he's built with President Hu over time to raise these issues and speak very clearly and frankly with him about them. And it was a very good exchange.

We can -- I think a couple things that struck me about the conversation -- and I would refer you to the readout the Chinese authorities did in Beijing of the conversation -- couple things are of interest. He said that it is China's consistent stand that the Chinese mainland and Taiwan should restore consultation and talks on the basis of the 1992 consensus, which sees both sides recognize there is only one China, but agree to differ on its definitions.

The interesting thing is whether this is an indication or a signal of a willingness to open dialogue on a basis that in previous years had been accepted by both parties. That was very -- pretty interesting. Secondly, I thought it was interesting -- the President pushed very hard on the need to -- concern about violence in Tibet, the need for restraint, the need for consultation with representatives of the Dalai Lama. As you know, there have been consultations between Chinese authorities and representatives of the Dalai Lama in the past. Those have been suspended. The President urged that those be restored as part of a process for Chinese authorities to addressing, reaching out to and addressing the grievance of the people in Tibet.

And I thought it was interesting that President Hu said that the government was willing to continue contacts in consultation with the Dalai Lama as long as -- and, again, as he said, there's an abandonment of Tibetan independence and stopping activities that involved crimes and the use of violence. And of course, as you know, the Dalai Lama has been very public in his views on both the issue of independence and the use of violence.

So again, the question is whether this will turn out to be an opening for a consultation process between Chinese authorities and representatives of the Dalai Lama. So we'll have to see. There were some interesting elements of the statement and I think we'll have to see over time whether they come to fruition in respect to both the Taiwan and --

Q President Hu did not just brush of the President on Tibet?

MR. HADLEY: No, it was a very lengthy exchange. And it was well prepared, and you got a good flavor of it in the release that was issues by Beijing's authorities. It was a serious conversation on really all of the issues, and they were Taiwan, Tibet, North Korea and Burma.

Q If I could, questions on a couple of issues. On the fighting in Basra and Sadr City -- does this move us closer to -- does this advance the prospect of more U.S. troop withdrawals, this Iraqi initiative in those two places, in the

sense of showing Iraq being able to take on more of the load for its own security?

MR. HADLEY: I don't know, look, we'll have to see when General Petraeus and Ryan Crocker come back. We are in the early stages of this operation. We're going to have to see how it works out and it sorts out.

I think one of the things I'd seen in the press that some people have been concerned about is whether this puts the cease-fire at risk, or whether this activity is inconsistent with the cease-fire that Sadr had declared for his forces, originally over six months ago and recently renewed. And, again, this action is not against parties who are abiding by the cease-fire. These are against elements who have stood outside of the cease-fire, have used violence against innocents or to advance their cause, or to people who are engaged in criminal activity.

So I think it's fair to say this is -- this should not put in jeopardy the cease-fire. It's not a move, as we read it, by the central government to repudiate the cease-fire in any way, but is to insist on what we've insisted, and the government has insisted on for months, that people who step outside the rule of law and use violence, whether Sunni or Shia, will be held to account.

We have been -- Iraqi forces and coalition forces have been going against so-called JAM elements and extremists and militias using violence here for some months, and I think you need to see this in that context, and also in the context of going into Basra and doing what the Prime Minister said over a year ago he would do: bring law and order to Basra, which has been a difficult situation.

Q And if I may, on the meeting in Sochi, is this likely to be the last time the two Presidents meet before Mr. Putin turns over power to Mr. Medvedev? Is Putin expected to be at the NATO summit, do you know?

MR. HADLEY: He has accepted and said he is coming to the NATO summit. As I said, there is a meeting of the NATO-Russia Council. Since it's a summit, it will meet a head-of-state, head-of-government level. And President Putin has said that he will come.

Q And the meeting in Sochi the last time the two leaders are likely to meet before Mr. Putin steps down?

MR. HADLEY: I would expect so. I mean, I think the -- I think Mr. Medvedev is sworn in in May. That's not too far. So I think this is right. But I think it's also an indication by the two leaders that there may be an opportunity here to, as I say, provide a strategic framework for the relationship, identify areas of cooperation, resolve some outstanding issues so that the relationship is in good shape to be handed over to their two respective successors.

Sir.

Q Mr. Hadley, I was wondering -- back to China and the phone call today -- was there one particular thing that prompted the President to call today? The violence in Tibet has been going on for almost a couple weeks now. Is there anything that triggered today --

MR. HADLEY: Well, there are a couple things. One, the Taiwanese election presents an opportunity to encourage China to reach out to Taiwan and to try and resolve differences, and the President did not want to let that go by. And that election, of course, was just this last weekend.

Secondly, there seemed to us to be -- we have talked a lot about Tibet. The Secretary of State has made some comments. We've sent messages through a lot of channels. Particularly since the President was going to be talking to President Hu Jintao about Taiwan, he wanted to use that as an opportunity to talk about Tibet. And in some sense, the message is the same. There's an opportunity here and China needs to seize it.

Three, there have been ongoing discussions, as you know, on North Korea, an effort to get North Korea to come forward with a complete and correct declaration. This has been going on for a while. It's time to bring this to conclusion. As you know, China, as part of the six-party talks, has been critical in this conversation that members of the six-party talks together have had with North Korea. It was time, I think, for the President to signal to Hu Jintao that it's time for all the parties of the six-party talks, including China, to reengage with North Korea. And, again, if you've got that agenda, you don't want to not talk about Burma, because Burma is a very important issue, and China has real influence on it.

So you put all those together, seemed like a good time, and seemed like to be a fairly robust agenda. And as you can see from the readouts by the two sides, it was a very substantive conversation.

Q And a quick follow-up on Georgia and Ukraine. You mentioned the aspirations of the MAP invitation, the President has mentioned it. What I'm wondering is, how far is the President willing to go in pressing it? I mean, is he ready to go to the mat?

MR. HADLEY: The President has talked about this. As you know, he takes the freedom agenda very seriously. And when countries aspiring to democracy works in progress, come forward and say, we would like to join your Atlantic institutions, he's strongly inclined to say, yes, because what we've seen about the prospect of NATO membership -- and again, what is on the table here is not NATO membership for Ukraine and Georgia tomorrow. What it is for them is to get into this program, which is one that allows countries to prepare for membership. And, again, that process can take a fairly long time, is fairly rigorous. Standards have to be met.

But what we've learned in our experience in Central/Eastern Europe is that can provide a useful framework to encourage countries to make the right decisions they need to make to advance their own reform and democracy. And certainly the President is strongly inclined to want to help countries, aspiring democratic countries, on the road to greater democracy, to use all the instruments we can to help encourage that activity.

Q Two questions, please.

MR. HADLEY: Two more.

Q Australian Prime Minister Rudd's visit on Friday -- what are the major accomplishments you expect?

MR. HADLEY: Well, I think part of it is for these two men to meet face-to-face and get to know one another. This is obviously one of our most important relationships. It's longstanding. The relationship is in very good shape. The two men have had one meeting, I believe, when the President was in Australia here about a year ago. They've had a good telephone conversation. The most important thing, I think, is for the two leaders to establish a good personal relationship and, in their public comments, to make it clear to the people of Australia and people of the United States that the relationship between those two countries, which has been so important to both sides, is strong and will endure under new leadership in Australia.

Q Any arm-twisting, any expectation of more troops, more Australian troops?

MR. HADLEY: Australia has been a terrific partner.

Yes, sir.

Q Can I ask two real quick? One is, to what extent do the framework discussions with Russia relate to Russian concerns about NATO? Is there any element of that in his conversations? And the other question is, can you talk at all about the prospects of additional troops being announced by anyone for Afghanistan, in particular, France?

MR. HADLEY: Well, we'll have to see. I mean, I was advised that President Sarkozy is in London today. He made a statement talking about that he would come to Bucharest with some positive statements about France is willing to help and maybe increase its role in Afghanistan. Obviously that would be a very positive thing.

These things, in terms of the issues at the NATO summit and the strategic framework agreement, these are on separate tracks. We've been very clear that NATO is not a threat to Russia. It's interesting that these NATO summit will feature a meeting of the NATO-Russia Council, which was a mechanism by which Russia is able to engage with NATO. As you know, many people have forgotten there are Russian personnel who are actually assigned and serve in NATO Headquarters. There is an active program of engagement between NATO and Russia.

So I think these are really separate issues. And there is an opportunity -- there's an opportunity to advance our agenda at NATO. There's also an opportunity, through the Sochi visit, to try and advance a relationship and our agenda between the United States and Russia, and the President is going to try to take advantage of both.

Sorry, thank you very much.

Q One follow on Afghanistan?

MR. HADLEY: One follow on Afghanistan. Yes.

Q At what level is the President going to push our allies to do more in Afghanistan -- troops, money, otherwise?

MR. HADLEY: Well, we, as you know, have been pretty vocal in comments we've made. Secretary Gates had an opportunity to press the case very strongly at a recent NATO defense ministerial meeting and in other conferences in Europe. So I think it's very clear that we all need to do more. And I think the President's message is going to be one of the importance of success in Afghanistan, the need for all countries to make it as a priority, the need for us to develop a more integrated strategy for success, and the need for all of us to do more. And I think that will be his message.

Thank you very much.

END 4:00 P.M. EDT

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