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Background Briefing by a Senior Administration Official on the President's Bilateral Meetings

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6:34 P.M. EDT

MR. McCORMACK: Ladies and gentlemen, this is the briefing you've all been waiting for -- all day long. (Laughter and applause.) We have a senior administration official here who is going to be -- has a few words to say about the **President's meetings with Prime Minister Singh of India and Prime Minister Koizumi of Japan**. And then he'll take a few questions from you.

With that, I'll turn it over to our briefer.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Hi. I'm the senior administration official. The President met with Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh this morning at 8:05 a.m. And he met with Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi at 3:00 p.m. And let me tell you a little bit about those two, and then I'll take some questions.

This was the President's first face-to-face meeting with Prime Minister Singh. The President called him on the telephone to congratulate him after his coalition came to power several months back. They had

a very strategic discussion addressing bilateral issues, regional issues, and economic issues principally.

This meeting between President Bush and Prime Minister Singh comes just a few days after the United States and the government of India signed and completed phase one of what we call the strategic partnership, sometimes called the "Next Step in Strategic Partnership," NSSP, which is a series of steps that we take, together with India to reduce the barriers to high-tech and space -- commercial space cooperation, and to strengthen cooperation on non-proliferation.

The NSSP was announced in January of 2004, and with this we've now completed phase one, which was initialed by the Indian Foreign Secretary, Mr. Saran, in Washington, with Mark Grossman, Under Secretary of State for Policy.

This is an important accomplishment and now sets up the two governments to work on phase two of the Next Steps in Strategic Partnership. And the two leaders agreed that they were going to stay on course and we were going to work deliberately to move forward with this next phase in the partnership, which would involve some more regulatory and other steps to further reduce the barriers to high-tech cooperation and to strengthen cooperation on non-proliferation. It's an important piece of the relationship.

The two leaders also talked about the situation in Iraq, and Dr. Manmohan Singh and his people pointed out that, for India, success in Iraq is critical and that elections, successful elections, and the advance of democracy in Iraq is critical, and pointed out that in India, a country with 150 million Muslims, there is not a single al Qaeda terrorist, and the reason, in large part, is because democracy in India works. It was an important discussion. And the Indian Prime Minister reaffirmed that his country stands by to help with the democratic process in Iraq, as well.

The two leaders talked about the regional situation, increasingly with India. We talk now not only about bilateral issues like the Next Steps in Strategic Partnership, but also about how we can work together to bring greater stability, peace, and prosperity to South Asia and beyond. They touched, in particular, on the situation in Burma, where the United States and India share an interest in seeing Aung San Suu Kyi let out of house arrest, and, again, full democratic participation for the democracy movement there. And they touched on other issues in the neighborhood.

The President is always interested in hearing how things are going on the composite dialogue between India and Pakistan. The foreign ministers between their two countries have met, and Prime Minister Singh and President Musharraf will meet here in New York for the first meeting in his new capacity as Prime Minister.

We continue to encourage both parties to move forward with positive steps. And, indeed, they have started talking about a range of confidence-building measures. We have offered our assistance, but ultimately this requires goodwill and hard work of the leaders in both Islamabad and Delhi, and all evidence is that they're committed to that process, despite the fact there are many tough issues still to be resolved.

On Afghanistan, Prime Minister Singh and the President agreed that it's an important and striking thing that over 10 million Afghans have registered for elections. The President thanked Prime Minister Singh for the role India has played in trying to ensure there is a fair and democratic election in Afghanistan. They are playing some supporting role and providing some help in that. And they talked about terrorism, of course. And Prime Minister Singh reiterated that the United States and India are both committed to eradicating terrorism.

And finally, on the economy, where the Prime Minister gave -- he is a trained economist, and gave his readout on how Indian economic reform and development are going. And the two leaders agreed we're going to strengthen our dialogue on economic issues.

Should I go on to Japan and then open up? Prime Minister Koizumi has met the President before, many times. The meeting addressed a number of issues which we're working between the two countries. The situation in Iraq, where Japan has been a stalwart ally and member of the coalition, the President thanked him for that support. And Prime Minister Koizumi reiterated how critical it is to Japan, the United States and the entire international community that in both Iraq and Afghanistan the rebuilding process, reconstruction, movement of democracy succeed; that failure is not an option. And Prime Minister Koizumi was quite adamant about this. And, of course, the President agreed.

They talked a bit about North Korea, where Japan and the United States are working together in the six-party talks to urge and press North Korea to verifiably end its entire nuclear weapons programs. We're very much on the same page with Japan on this. And the two leaders agreed that we need to move forward with the six-party talks to achieve de-nuclearization on the Korean Peninsula.

On Security Council and U.N. issues, the Prime Minister reiterated Japan's interest in a permanent seat on the Security Council. And the President reaffirmed that the U.S. position on that hasn't changed, and they agreed that our two governments would continue consulting at the experts level on Security Council reform and how to make progress.

They talked about our global posture review. The U.S. and Japan have been exchanging ideas on how to modernize our alliance and our presence. The Prime Minister agreed that we need to accelerate these talks, both at the strategic level, but also among experts on the two sides. And this would be on how the U.S. military presence in Japan should be shaped as part of our global posture review and how the U.S.-Japan alliance should be modernized. And the two leaders agreed that this has to be done, and can and will be done in a way that both strengthens deterrence and the effectiveness of the U.S. military presence, while at the same time addressing the concerns of the communities in Japan and reducing the burden.

I know the Japanese press will ask me, so I'll preempt this. Yes, the Prime Minister raised Okinawa in this context, and the President understands the sensitivities and sees this global posture review in our talks with Japan as a way to begin making progress on that.

And they talked about some economic issues. The Prime Minister gave a very brief update on the economy, on his plan for postal -- privatization of the postal saving system, which is of high interest to U.S. firms who want to be in that market, as well.

And on beef, which is -- BSE, and Sean can tell you what the acronym stands for -- but, the so-called Mad Cow disease. And the two, the President and the Prime Minister agreed that we need to work to open the Japanese market as soon as possible to beef. There are expert level and technical talks, and based on the Prime Minister and the President's discussion today, we will resume those talks and pick up very quickly to try and make progress on this.

Why don't I end there and take questions on both the India and the Japan bilat.

Q Was this the first time that **Prime Minister Koizumi raised Security Council membership** directly with President Bush? And you said the policy had to change, but it's been a while since you articulated it. Could you do so for us?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: He raised it in Crawford, and he raised it in Sea Island. And it's been the U.S. position that it makes sense for Japan to be on. But beyond that, they just agreed that we needed to have our two governments and the people who work U.N. issues get together and strategize and think through how the process of Security Council reform and overall U.N. reform should move forward.

Q Could I ask you if the issue of **Taiwan** came up?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: No, it didn't.

Q **Koizumi seems** to almost always raise the issue of Charles Jenkins, putting him on trial for desertion. Has Koizumi sort of dropped that?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: No -- yes and no. As you may know, Sergeant Jenkins turned himself over to the U.S. Army and is the process of pre-trial talks. And there's been file footage of him in a modern -- he deserted in '65, I think -- but wearing a modern U.S. Army sergeant's uniform and talking to the Army lawyers. So this issue is now with the Army. And Sergeant Jenkins is talking to them, and they're in the pre-trial discussion phase.

Prime Minister Koizumi did thank the President for the U.S. position on this, and what might have been a tough political problem was handled very professionally by everybody involved, and it's now in the hands of the uniform code of military justice.

Q Can I ask you, too, why did you package **Afghanistan and Pakistan** together today? Was it just the obvious, that they share a border and the terrorism problem --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Just now? Oh, there wasn't any packaging or linkage of those discussions today. They did, really, a kind of tour of the whole region and exchanged views on developments from Nepal to Burma, but the entire environment in South Asia.

Q I mean, the two leaders met with the President today together, and then Pakistan meets again

separately with the President tomorrow.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: No. Today, Prime Minister -- there were several meetings. I'm not briefing on the trilateral meeting, but there was a bilateral with Prime Minister Singh, and there's a bilateral tomorrow morning with President Musharraf of Pakistan and the President. There was another meeting today with President Karzai, President Musharraf and President Bush. I wasn't in the meeting. It was a very small group -- basically, though, to talk about Afghan elections and reaffirm support.

Q Could you talk -- what did **Prime Minister Koizumi** say about Okinawa? I don't cover this every day.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: He just -- in the context of the discussion about U.S. global posture and talking to Japan about the Japan piece of that, Prime Minister Koizumi said that this is a good project, he's going to work to accelerate discussions on this.

Q -- want U.S. troops out of Okinawa?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: No, he didn't say that. What he wanted to raise for the President, and he's done this before, is sensitivities in Okinawa. There has been -- there was a helicopter crash a few weeks back and the Prime Minister wanted to let the President -- reiterate for the President that, for Japan, for the government Japan, this is an important issue, because on Okinawa, it's a sensitive issue. So he was putting it on the agenda and saying that as we go forward, and as we accelerate our talks about U.S. presence, it was his hope that we would strengthen deterrence, increase the efficiency of the alliance and of U.S. military presence, and also address -- find ways to reduce the burden, and he said, particularly on Okinawa, which has 80 percent of U.S. forces.

Q If we could move to tomorrow, could you set up the meeting a little bit tomorrow with **Musharraf**? Will they talk about the search for bin Laden, or the struggle with al Qaeda and the Taliban? What will they --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: I think -- I don't want to say too much because they haven't met, of course, but both the U.S. and Pakistan governments are, I think, looking at this meeting in the same way, and that is first to demonstrate that the U.S. partnership with Pakistan and our commitment to Pakistan's success is a long-term commitment. Second, to talk about the war on terror, where President Musharraf made a critical decision in the early days after September 11th to side with us in combating global terror.

He has since stepped up Pakistan's efforts to root out al Qaeda and Taliban elements along the border with Afghanistan and southwest Eurostan and that region, which is largely untouched for over a century. And so progress on that effort is an important topic for them.

Again, the President will be interested in President Musharraf's views on the composite dialogue with India, which by all accounts is going quite well under this new government, and continuing with the progress by the previous Vajpayee government in Delhi.

We share with Pakistan now the goal of wrapping up this A.Q. Khan network and stopping proliferation, and that's an important topic. The long-term process of building democratic institutions in Pakistan, and of course, the economic reform and growth of Pakistan and our cooperation and support for that.

So it's a pretty rich agenda. The overlying -- the overriding theme is that the U.S. has the long-term commitment to Pakistan that needs to succeed on all these fronts with us.

Q -- do you know --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: We'll probably do a briefing tomorrow and I'll be able to tell you how that was handled.

Q Most of us will be gone, so --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: I think he's scheming, so we'll find a way. But --

Q Did any of either the guests or the President make any mention of what American relations -- how it would continue after an election? Was the **election** ever brought up in any of the conversations?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: I am Hatched. I'm covered by the Hatch Act, so I can't talk about politics. But --

Q Can you brief on whether the President or the guests said anything about the election? I'm not asking for your opinion?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Can I?

MR. McCORMACK: Yes.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: The President didn't get into a lot of politics -- a lot of the election politics with these leaders. In fact, one of the important things he said to, I think it was Prime Minister Singh, was how important continuity in U.S. foreign policy is towards these countries.

Q A question about something that was in the President's speech this morning. He mentioned the **Democracy Fund**, and said that the United States was prepared to make an initial contribution. Could you put a number to that? How much is the United States prepared to --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: I can't. That's not really my brief. I'm the Asia director.

Q Does some of that go for Iraq?

MR. McCORMACK: I don't know.

Q On **Japan's permanent** seat -- did they say anything about Japan's possibility of being on the permanent Council without veto power?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: No, I mean, there was no discussion. But that's one of the things that the two governments would follow up on in discussions in the coming weeks and months.

Q And also a follow-up. When they talked about the BSE, did they talk about specific time frames, when they want the Japanese market open again?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: The agreement was as soon as possible. And it's in the interests of Japanese consumers, it's in the interest of U.S. exporters for beef exports to fully resume. And they agreed that as soon as possible that that should happen.

Q No months, no weeks?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: They didn't give a time line or a date specifically. But there will be discussions following up on the President's meeting with Prime Minister Koizumi by the relevant government agencies and experts on both sides to start hashing out those kinds of things.

Q The agreement was to talk more, but not to set any deadlines for an agreement.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: We had a basic understanding that we would have progress on this by the end of the summer.

Q This was raised by the Vice President when he was in Japan.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Right. And so this go back to April. And we had a basic understanding that we should try to get this wrapped up by the end of the summer. And there's been a fair amount of technical expert opinion and discussion shared between the U.S. and Japan. So our view is that we're getting down to the point where it's time to follow through on the expert exchanges and make some decisions.

But there wasn't a decision made today. They're going to keep working it -- within days, I'd say, if not a week or two -- to start looking at what else we would have to do to resume beef exports. We don't think it's much. We think a considerable amount of understanding has been developed, but we're not quite there yet.

Q Does the Prime Minister want to resolve the issues?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Oh, yes. Yes. I mean, this is -- you know, in Japan -- I used to live in Japan, but the people like their beef bowl, and there is a definite consumer need that is not being filled, and there are a lot of industries in Japan that are quite eager to have this resume. So there's an interest on both sides to get this going, but it has to be done in a way where the Japanese government can reassure the consumers. And we think we've gone an awful long way towards

exchanging the opinions and the expert views on how to do that. But we're not quite there yet.

Q Did the President remind the Prime Minister of the understanding that -- to get this resolved by the end of August?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: No, he didn't -- we didn't say the end of August. We said the end of summer, which -- but, you know, I don't know if we're going with the equinox, but --

Q -- we're approaching the **equinox**.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: This came up in -- this came up in Sea Island, and as you noted, the Vice President raised it in April. And a lot of work has gone into it. And the Japanese side, in good faith, has had, as I said, experts working this. But we're getting down to the point where it's time to make a decision based on the scientific work we've done together.

Q Excuse me, I'm sorry. On **North Korea**, did both leaders, Prime Minister Koizumi and President Bush, compare the note on the nuclear explosion in North Korea two weeks --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: No, they didn't.

Q -- of the attention of North Korea at this moment?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: No, they didn't. The meeting was about 35 minutes long, so there wasn't time to get into a lot of detail. We, of course, consult very closely with Japan on the North Korea problem at all levels. And, in fact, Assistant Secretary Kelly was just in Tokyo a few days ago -- or about a week ago. So we have plenty of opportunities to compare notes. But in this meeting, they just only had time to touch on it briefly. It's important. It's always part of the discussions between the two leaders. Where they came out was agreeing that we need to continue pushing for North Korea to participate in the six-party talks and to answer the calls of all of North Korea's neighbors for a complete and verifiable end to their nuclear program.

Q Just to follow up on that -- did they come to an agreement on a specific time line, until when -- or when does U.S. want to come to that agreement?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: No, they didn't come -- they didn't discuss an exact time line. But I would say that their discussion was very forward leaning and that the Prime Minister wanted to accelerate our talks, and that they reached an agreement on the philosophy that should govern these discussions, and that now it's up to the experts at Defense and State, JDA and MOFA to start hammering out different ideas and come up with specific proposals.

Q What is that philosophy?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: It's what I mentioned earlier, that we need to move forward and will and can move forward in a way where we are shaping our presence in Japan so that it's --

deterrence is enhanced. We did this in Korea, and we, with our force structure changes in Korea, I think we have a much more -- will have a much more capable, mobile, flexible force that's much less of a burden on the communities. So in the case of **Japan**, the philosophy they agreed on was that we needed to move forward in the same way to have effective -- a more effective deterrent, at the same time taking advantage of technology and so forth to do what we can to reduce the burden on local communities.

A lot of the bases in Japan, Korea, Germany have been there for decades and decades. And so the specific is still to be worked out, but there are opportunities to do both those goals.

Q Follow-up on North Korea. Did they talk at all -- there are supposed to be talks this month, the six-party talks are supposed to be happening this month. It doesn't look like they're going to happen. Did they talk about what the impact that the cancellation of those talks would have, or what might happen in the future in terms of next round of talks?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: No, they didn't, they didn't.

Q Could I just follow up one more time? You used a phrase, "reduce the burden," several times. Was part of the agreement that it would be a goal to reduce the numbers of troops, or to reduce the physical footprint on Okinawa, or both?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: No. They didn't agree to any numbers or numbers reduction. That's always a possibility. In the case of the Republic of Korea, we agreed with the Korean government to reduce numbers, about 12,000 over several years. And it made sense to do that, because the force structure there was an army force structure, it was very heavy. And the army is transforming itself. We have modern striker brigades that are more compact, but much more -- have a lot more firepower, a lot more mobility.

In the case of Japan -- well, you lived there, Bob, you know that it's primarily an air and naval presence with the Marines in Okinawa. So it's not exactly the same as the case in Korea or the case in Germany. But they are going to -- the two governments are going to be exchanging ideas for ways that we can try to reduce the burden. That may be providing some consolidation of bases, it could be a change in numbers, but that's not yet determined. I would say that the situation in Japan is different enough from Germany and Korea that it's not likely that you'll have large changes in numbers. But there are perhaps opportunities to consolidate and do that. But this is just something that now the two governments, State, DOD, the Defense Agency and the Foreign Ministry are going to start exchanging ideas and plans.

Q What are our numbers there?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: In Japan?

Q Yes.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Forty-seven thousand.

Q In Okinawa?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Okinawa is about 18,000 Marines, and -- I should know this, but I can't remember.

Q A proliferation question, or two proliferation questions. Did the Arrow come up, the issue of the Arrow, with India?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: No.

Q And secondly, did the President discuss **Iran**?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Iran? I'd have to check my notes. It was not a major topic.

MR. McCORMACK: One more question.

Q If I'm allowed, I just follow up on the Iraqi. Prime Minister Koizumi made it clear yesterday Japanese government is going to extend one more year deployment for self-defense troops in Iraq and Samaraa area. But the Dutch government didn't -- they might withdraw the troops from Samaraa region. Today it's in the security arrangement after the Dutch troops redeployment from the Samaraa area. Did they talk about any --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: No, that didn't come up at all.

Thank you.

END 7:04 P.M. EDT

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