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**State Department Briefing, July 15, 2003****Department, North Korea, Iran, Syria, Palestinian Authority, Near Eastern Affairs Region, Iraq, Liberia, Venezuela, Azerbaijan, Turkey, Israel, Ukraine**

State Department Spokesman Richard Boucher briefed.

Following is a transcript of the briefing:

(begin transcript)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE  
DAILY PRESS BRIEFING  
TUESDAY, JULY 15, 2003 (ON THE RECORD UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED)  
1:25 p.m. EDT  
BRIEFER: Richard Boucher, Spokesman

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MR. BOUCHER: Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. If I might, before we go on to other questions, I want to take up a matter with you all. One of our nation's capital's newspapers, which for the moment will remain nameless -- (laughter). No, in the Washington Times today there is a letter that purports to be from our Ambassador to the Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe Stephan Minikes. It's not his letter. He didn't write this. It's a fake, it's a hoax, it's a put-up job, it's a forgery, it's fraudulent, it's a total invention and falsehood, it's bogus, it's a sham, et cetera. This is phony. It's totally fictitious. It's beyond dodgy.

I have talked to the Ambassador. A number of us have. He described it as a complete Alice in Wonderland fairy tale. He hasn't written a letter. He, at that point, had not written a letter to the Washington Times. He has now written a letter to the Washington Times that says that he makes -- he has made clear to us that it doesn't correspond in any way, in the minutest way, what was he told me, to his views of the Foreign Service. One would not expect an ambassador, and since we know this ambassador we would never expect him to go after his staff in the manner of this letter that purports to come from him. He says that the text is nothing -- "There is nothing further from my beliefs than this text that appears in the newspaper here."

He, himself, has written a letter, as I said, to the Washington Times, and once we have confirmed that they have received it we will provide you with copies of that. But he says "it's a complete and utter fabrication and an impersonation by whoever wrote and signed my name to it." He says, "Never in my long career have I worked with a more dedicated group of professionals" than those he has encountered at the embassy. And I think those who have known this ambassador over time have heard him again and again extol the virtues and the dedication and the commitment of the people he works with at the U.S. Mission to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe in Vienna.

We have been in touch with the Washington Times' editors today. They have said they will look into this matter thoroughly. We have told them that we would expect, at a minimum, to see a proper correction, an explanation of what procedures might be used -- are supposed to be used to verify whether a letter, in fact, comes from the purported point of origin, and whether or not those procedures were followed in any way in this case. We would look to see it provide a -- we would look to see a full explanation for all the readers of the Washington Times, including ourselves, who saw this letter today. And we hope they will work with us, and we will work with them, to determine how this happened.

QUESTION: Are you going to ask that this letter be reprinted.

MR. BOUCHER: His new letter?

QUESTION: Yes, his new letter.

MR. BOUCHER: Yes, certainly, we would expect it to be printed.

QUESTION: So you're saying that the old letter wasn't his, though. So "his letter."

MR. BOUCHER: His letter. Yeah, that's right. There is only one letter authentically from our Ambassador that we would like to see them print.

Terri.

QUESTION: As I understand it, this came by e-mail, though, from a state.gov e-mail address. So isn't that -- I mean, if he's saying that it's not his, somebody got into his e-mail, then.

MR. BOUCHER: There are a variety of electronic possibilities. You can fake people's e-mails address. You'll see it in your spam every day. So there's a variety of ways this could have happened. That's why we need to work with them to determine how it did.

Tell us what you think about this article.

QUESTION: Is there an investigation in the Department, then, as well?

MR. BOUCHER: Well, we'll be looking into it. Whether it becomes a formal investigation or not will depend on what we start finding. But we want to be able to work with them, and I think they will work with us, so that we can both determine as best we can how this -- how somebody might have pulled this off or done this.

QUESTION: Can you say -- give us some idea of what the Secretary's involvement was, if any?

MR. BOUCHER: The Secretary talked to the Ambassador. He has talked to the editors at the Washington Times, as others of us have, to make sure that they understood how seriously we took this matter, and how important it is to provide a full explanation.

Elise.

QUESTION: Do you have any indication at this point that it might be someone in the embassy that might be holding a grudge against --

MR. BOUCHER: I have no idea who it might be. Certainly, as I said before, this is a fake and it does not represent in any way our Ambassador's views. In fact, his views are quite the contrary. He has expressed many times to us, as others around here, as well as to his staff, I assume, his high regard for their abilities, his high regard for their dedication.

QUESTION: So you have no -- you would not want to hazard a guess as to the motive of the --

MR. BOUCHER: I would not want to hazard a guess, but I would hope that the Washington Times would be able to tell us a little more about how this happened, how it was not verified over there, how they received it, whether they made any attempt to verify it, and to provide us and other readers with a full explanation. That may help all of us decide to, at least in some way, look into the matter of how this might have happened, of who might have faked this.

QUESTION: Well, are you saying -- have they said that they would?

MR. BOUCHER: They have said they will work with us, and they have said that they will provide an explanation.

QUESTION: And you're -- you're happy with that, as far as that goes right now?

MR. BOUCHER: Well, at a minimum, we think that's necessary. We will look at it when it comes out and see what happens next. There obviously, you know, can be consequences for this sort of thing.

QUESTION: Oh, such as?

QUESTION: Have they said that they will publish the letter, the letter that the ambassador has now written?

MR. BOUCHER: You know, we just got it in the last half hour, and I have talked to them about getting it to them so that they could publish it. I can't say that they said explicitly, "Yes, we will publish," but the conversation was on the understanding that they would publish the letter from our ambassador.

QUESTION: What kind of consequences are you talking about?

MR. BOUCHER: No, I am just -- I am just saying, you know, if somebody is faking somebody else's name, address, letters --

QUESTION: Oh, not consequences for the newspaper, consequences for whoever wrote it?

MR. BOUCHER: Yeah. And I would hope that the newspaper would do whatever is necessary to ensure this can never happen again.

Okay. Any other questions?

I would hope, actually, that other newspapers would also make sure it could never happen again.

Betsy.

QUESTION: Can you tell us what you can on the North Korea talks that took place last week, and whether you were, in fact, told that some of these rods had been reprocessed?

MR. BOUCHER: The -- I think -- yes, I will -- and but let me put this in some kind of context. I think all of you know that since April, North Korea has made a variety of statements in public and private about the status of its reprocessing. They -- several occasions since April, they have publicly stated that they were reprocessing spent fuel rods.

Recently, North Korean officials at the UN indicated to us, in their words, that North Korea had completed reprocessing of the spent fuel rods. We are now in the process of evaluating this most recent statement, as we have looked very carefully at all of their other previous statements. I think all of you know that there are questions that have arisen about some of their previous statements, as questions arise about this statement as well. So at this time we cannot confirm the accuracy of their claim, nor share with you what we may know about the status of their nuclear facilities.

I would point out, however, that reprocessing is a particular concern for us and for many other countries in the international community. Reprocessing is only for the purpose of harvesting plutonium to make weapons. There is no other legitimate use that North Korea has for plutonium that they would get in this manner, and it's a clear -- reprocessing in itself would be a clear indication of -- that North Korea is bent on enlarging its nuclear arsenal.

So we have continued to consult closely with our friends and allies on the matter of North Korea. We have continued to pursue a path to secure the verifiable and irreversible end to North Korea's nuclear weapons programs. And we will make clear once again that we will not submit to blackmail, we will not offer any incentives or inducements for North Korea to stop something they never should have started to begin with.

North Korea faces a choice of two paths. It can offend the entire international community by continuing to pursue its nuclear ambitions. That will only lead them to isolation and to a deteriorating situation for the regime in Pyongyang. Or they can end these programs verifiably and irreversibly. And we have made clear that we are prepared to talk to North Korea about a better path that could be followed if it were prepared to do that.

Adi.

QUESTION: The statement they said last week, they've said that in some form or another, since, as you pointed out, since April. But are you more concerned by this most recent statement than you have been by other sort of similar statements, or is -- how can you gauge that?

MR. BOUCHER: I can't give you a level on this one. We follow very closely what is actually happening. What they say is obviously part of the picture, but what actually happens is also a more important part of the picture. So we do follow this very carefully and we will analyze their statements against what we know is happening on the ground. At this point I can't characterize it for you.

QUESTION: Richard, diplomats in Beijing are telling us that a Chinese Foreign Ministry official has briefed them, saying that the Chinese are putting forward a sort of new idea in terms of a format for talks. And the idea as it's described to us is multilateral talks with bilateral talks on the sidelines of them.

Are you any more disposed to that kind of a format?

MR. BOUCHER: I think we made clear when we were in Beijing -- there were rumors of these kinds of ideas. We made clear that we were seeking multilateral talks because we felt that these issues need to be dealt with and handled in a multilateral context. That has been the proposal. That had been the format that we met within before. Our proposal, our desire, has been to expand those talks to include Japan and South Korea because we believe these are multilateral issues that need to be dealt with in an multilateral setting. That's what we have accepted on and that's what we have looked for.

QUESTION: And so you are not interested, then, in this kind of a formula?

MR. BOUCHER: That's not in any -- that's not a new idea. That's a formula that people have, you know, played around with for some time. It doesn't deal with the

serious issues that are involved in North Korea's affronts to the entire international community.

QUESTION: I know it's not new, but my question is whether you have any interest in it at all, and you're not saying no.

MR. BOUCHER: I've made clear our interest is in multilateral discussions and an expanded multilateral setting, period. I'm not entertaining any other proposals at this point.

QUESTION: Thank you. Last one. Are there any plans underway now for any such multilateral talks?

MR. BOUCHER: I think that, again, depends on the North Koreans being willing to go forward with multilateral discussions of the kind that we have proposed.

QUESTION: Richard, very briefly, can you say what changed between yesterday, or in the last 24 hours, in your guys' minds as to why you want to confirm this now and you didn't want to do it yesterday?

And number two, since language has been --

MR. BOUCHER: You really want to know?

QUESTION: Yeah.

MR. BOUCHER: The fact that it was all over the place and it seemed better to explain the context of it, rather than to try to hold back on the information.

QUESTION: Okay. So you were bludgeoned into it?

MR. BOUCHER: It's not -- I don't think we can get into a routine practice of briefing North Korean statements and private meetings, and I don't want this to be a precedent for that. On the other hand, if you're going to understand the fact and the context, we have to confirm the fact to give you the context.

QUESTION: Well, then, on that, in a similar vein, then, since language has always been -- particularly North Koreans' language has always been a question about their statements, past similar statements, can you tell us exactly what it was that the North Koreans told Ambassador Pritchard, whether it was in English, whether it was in Korean, and --

MR. BOUCHER: I'd have to check on the language, actually. They told us -- they told him that they had completed reprocessing of the spent fuel rods. But whether it was in Korean or English, I'd have to check.

QUESTION: And you take them to mean -- "completed" -- that means all, that your understanding is when they said that, they were referring to all of them?

MR. BOUCHER: That's their claim.

QUESTION: Yeah, I know.

MR. BOUCHER: Now, they've made a lot of different claims at different times, some of which may have been true and some of which are not.

QUESTION: But the --

MR. BOUCHER: I think if you want the exact clarification of the language, you have to ask the North Koreans. But if I can help you on that, I'll try.

QUESTION: Well, if you remember, the last time there was that radio broadcast or whatever, there was like five different translations of what they said, and it was quite -- you know, there was a quite a difference in the different interpretations.

MR. BOUCHER: No, I do. I recognize the question --

QUESTION: But as far as you know, there isn't any -- that kind of ambiguity?

MR. BOUCHER: I'm not aware of any ambiguity like that. I think we know what they said. The question is what are the facts.

Elise.

QUESTION: Richard, you keep saying the U.S. will not submit to blackmail and that's

your firm position, and the North Koreans keep saying that they want bilateral talks or they're going to keep reprocessing and they're going to move -- at what point does North Korea -- are you in a position where you are being blackmailed if North Korea reprocesses, builds a nuclear weapon and tests it? Are you -- you're still going to stick to your guns that you won't submit to being blackmailed? I mean, what happens when North Korea declares itself a nuclear power?

MR. BOUCHER: I think, first of all, you're driving 60 miles an hour down a road that we haven't gone down yet.

QUESTION: It sounds like --

MR. BOUCHER: The -- well, no, I mean, it sounds like, yeah. But sounds like is not the same as reality. They've made a lot of claims. We're evaluating these claims. And we will base our policy, first of all, on what's right for the United States, what's right for the international community on this, and, second of all, what the reality is. We're not going to be jumping around just because they made a different statement today or tomorrow.

Second of all, I think what we have seen is that North Korea has become increasingly isolated. The consequences for North Korea are appearing in terms of their economic prospects, their prospects of, unfortunately, of the people of North Korea to get the kind of interaction with the outside world, to get the kind of openings to the outside world that could actually benefit the people of North Korea.

And so as North Korea has proceeded down this road, it has found itself further and further isolated. And for it to undertake further steps in terms of developing this nuclear program could only lead to more isolation.

Betsy.

QUESTION: Sort of a different twist on that. What levers does the international community -- the U.S. and/or the international community -- have against them? There is very little aid that goes there any more, correct?

MR. BOUCHER: Well, I mean, first of all, this is not a very successful regime. They have failed to provide for their people. They have failed to provide for their nation. And they had for some time, it seemed, pinned some hopes on the idea of interaction with the outside world as a way to change, as a way to provide stability, as a way to provide a future.

They're losing out on that. They're losing out on all the prospects that were evident last summer in terms of relations with Japan and South Korea. And they'll continue to lose out, as long as they persist in this course.

The international isolation of North Korea has been growing. It's not just the United States. It's not just the United States and Japan and South Korea. It's not just the United States, Japan, South Korea and China. It's not just the United States, Japan, South Korea, China, Russia, Australia, the European Union. The entire world has said it's unacceptable for North Korea to develop nuclear weapons, and the consequences of that for their relationships with these groups and with these individual countries are evident every day.

Sir.

QUESTION: I just want to make sure of the United States' present position. You say that we need an expanded dialogue including with Japan and South Korea. That means a three-party meeting. That's the same format as the Beijing talks. It's not a nonstarter?

MR. BOUCHER: Our proposal, we have said that we think it's time for expanded dialogue for five parties, okay. That's our proposal.

QUESTION: So no flexibility on --

MR. BOUCHER: We have not seen a reaction on that from the North Koreans, an acceptance of that.

QUESTION: Also I want to ask you one more question about there. You say that -- you can't say the level of the danger, but the today's Washington Post, former Defense Secretary, Mr. Perry, say that this is the kind of imminent threat. You can't say it's not imminent threat?

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MR. BOUCHER: I am not going to try to characterize the level of danger. I think I want to characterize the fact that there is no confirmation yet that these statements are true. And to that extent, it's not time to start characterizing levels of danger about things that may or may not have occurred. And it's for that reason I am not about to enter into that discussion.

QUESTION: On the KEDO, is the United States considering a withdrawal from KEDO if the situation doesn't improve?

MR. BOUCHER: At this point, we're certainly looking at the situation with regard to KEDO and the light water reactor project. There are meetings -- I think yesterday and today, or today and tomorrow -- I can't remember the exact dates. There are meetings this week at a working level, experts meetings to consider some of the legal and technical and contractual issues involved. And the larger issues of how to proceed will be addressed by the board at some time in the near -- in the future, but there is no timing yet set for that meeting.

QUESTION: Can you say where those meetings are taking place?

MR. BOUCHER: I believe -- somebody look at me and say New York.

Julie is looking it up. I think it's New York. We'll check.

QUESTION: Can you clarify something, Richard? When you say the legal, technical and contractual issues, you're referring to the legal, technical and contractual issues with regard to?

MR. BOUCHER: The light water reactor.

QUESTION: With regard to closing it down?

MR. BOUCHER: With regard to the light water reactor.

QUESTION: So you are not saying closing it down?

MR. BOUCHER: I am not making a policy decision yet on what's to happen to it.

QUESTION: No, no, I am not asking you to make a policy decision on what's going to happen to it. I am asking whether the working level people are talking about the legal, technical and contractual issues with regard to the possibility closing it down.

MR. BOUCHER: I am sure they are talking about all of the legal, technical and contractual issues of any course of action that could be considered or contemplated.

A PARTICIPANT: New York.

MR. BOUCHER: New York. We have it.

Sir.

QUESTION: There have been recent reports from Beijing that during the bilateral talks, the recent bilateral talks between China and North Korea, North Korea has expressed flexibility to multilateral talks. And some of those reports even say that North Korea has sent that message directly to the United States through New York channel. Are you getting that message from North Korea?

MR. BOUCHER: You'd have to ask the North Koreans what their position is. I have not seen them say anything new on that.

Do you have one down here? No.

Betsy.

QUESTION: Could --

QUESTION: Still on North Korea?

MR. BOUCHER: Okay, still on North Korea, go.

QUESTION: The U.S. is only providing humanitarian food aid right now to North Korea; is that correct?

MR. BOUCHER: That's correct, humanitarian aid. I have to double-check it's all food.

Sir.

QUESTION: Did Iran approach the United States at the United Nations and offer to engage in dialogue on their nuclear program, and was this approach rebuffed?

MR. BOUCHER: I think, at this point, all I can tell you is we are not engaged in, are not seeking talks with Iran regarding its nuclear program. Our policy has been to support the International Atomic Energy Agency's ongoing efforts to investigate the nuclear program. Once again, Iran's program is of concern to the international community, not just the United States. And we look to Iran to respond to the request from the International Atomic Energy Agency, for them to rectify the outstanding problems and answer unresolved questions.

QUESTION: But is that why you're -- you are not seeking talks with Iran, if Iran were to, for instance, sign this protocol?

MR. BOUCHER: There are too many ifs in some of these questions. I can't -- I can't deal with it.

QUESTION: But is it about --

MR. BOUCHER: Iran is --

QUESTION: Is it about Iran's lack of cooperation with the IAEA and failure to sign this additional protocol, or is it the totality of the problems that the U.S. has with Iran?

MR. BOUCHER: We have a lot of problems with Iran. We -- our policy has not changed. We have significant issues with Iran regarding human rights, regarding their support for violent groups that are opposed to the peace process, their support for terrorism, as well as their programs for weapons of mass destruction.

But, as we have pointed out, there have been some conversations in the past between the United States and Iran. And I think the -- but the issues right now relate to the International Atomic Energy Agency, and they need to respond to that. So that's exactly where we are. There is no -- we are not engaged in, we are not seeking talks with Iran on the nuclear program. That's where we are today. I can't speculate for you, if this and that, then what, maybe. I can't do that. I'm sorry.

Okay, over there.

QUESTION: Change the subject.

MR. BOUCHER: Change the subject.

QUESTION: Syria appears to be withdrawing troops from Lebanon. And also in regard to this, the talks that Prime Minister Sharon are holding in England at the present, he is giving roughly two to three weeks leeway to the Palestinian Authority to rein in those militants. How is all of this?

MR. BOUCHER: I'm going to take these two issues separately.

QUESTION: All right.

MR. BOUCHER: First, we have seen the reports of Syrian troop adjustments, perhaps withdrawals, from Lebanon. I don't have any specifics for you at this point. I think, as you know, we have always supported the goal of Lebanon free of foreign forces, and we have always looked to all of the parties to exercise their responsibilities in that regard.

As far as the question of the Palestinians and dismantling the terrorist networks, we have made very clear we believe that all of the parties need to cooperate on security; all the parties need to make sure that Israelis and Palestinians get the opportunity to lead normal, safe lives; and that involves not just stopping the violence, but dismantling the terrorists apparatus that creates the violence. And that is the end goal that needs to be sought by all of the parties.

But we have seen progress in that regard, and we look for further cooperation. We look for further steps, particularly by the Palestinian Authority, when it comes to establishing security.

Can we move on?

QUESTION: And a quick follow-up. In those talks in England, it appears that Tony Blair will not cut talks with Chairman Arafat. What is your thinking concerning that?

 Delicious



MR. BOUCHER: I think we have expressed our view on that before, but I don't have anything new on that today.

Jonathan.

QUESTION: Yeah, there have been some attacks on Jim Zogby, who is one of your protégés, or one of your speakers. Do you have anything to say about these attacks? Apparently, he spoke to some people in Saudi Arabia, that are considered to be hostile to the United States.

MR. BOUCHER: I think --

QUESTION: Is that something that the State Department sponsored?

MR. BOUCHER: Yeah, I can make this clear to you. One of the goals of the Middle East Partnership Initiative that this administration has promoted -- initiated -- is to engage in vigorous outreach to the Arab and Islamic world in order to educate Middle Eastern listeners on U.S. policy and to promote positive reform. To ensure success, these efforts must include engaging people and groups that do not share our views.

We find it disturbing that Mr. Zogby is being criticized in some quarters for participating in these efforts. He participated at the request of the U.S. Government and we see as unfair the recent characterizations of his outreach efforts.

In each of these outreach events, Mr. Zogby has consistently reiterated the need to reject violence and terrorism and stressed the need for positive societal change in the Near East. We find his commitment to advancing the interests of the U.S. Government and the American people has been exemplary.

Betsy.

QUESTION: Following on this, sort of, there have been reports that private Iranian broadcasts from here, as well as some U.S. broadcasts going to Iran, have been blocked or scrambled. There is a report that some of this is being done by the Cuban Government.

MR. BOUCHER: Basically, I don't have any details on that. We've seen these reports. We're looking into them. I think this is occurring on commercial satellite channels, but at this point we're still looking into them. I don't have anything definitive for you.

QUESTION: I'm Iraq, so maybe he can go with Iran.

QUESTION: Iraq? Can I finish up on Iran?

MR. BOUCHER: Sure.

QUESTION: The letter from 350-odd reformers to Khomeini, do you support that? Do you think you can see that as part of the reform movement which you --

MR. BOUCHER: I don't have anything specifically on that letter. Obviously, we're not signatories. But I just have to go back to what we've always said. We support the prospects of reform. We support the cause of reform and democracy everywhere, including in Iran, and we side with those who are seeking more reform and more democracy.

QUESTION: Do you consider these signatories to be --

MR. BOUCHER: I'm not going to start commenting on every twist and turn, every statement, every letter. We've avoided that in the past. I won't do it today.

QUESTION: Very briefly, just back on North Korea for a second. Did you get an answer to the question that was asked yesterday about some diplomats asking for permission to come to --

MR. BOUCHER: I got the answer, and that's no.

QUESTION: No, they didn't apply?

MR. BOUCHER: The North Korean Mission in New York has not submitted any request for approval of travel. Such travel to meet with Members of Congress, I think was the way it was described.



Nicholas.

QUESTION: Richard, the new Iraqi council has said that they will send a delegation to the UN next week to seek the seat that was held by the Saddam regime before. Does the United States support that desire on behalf of the new council, and are you going to work with your colleagues on the Council to make that happen?

MR. BOUCHER: The Iraqi Governing Council voted to send a delegation to the UN Security Council, and the way they describe it was to assert and emphasize the role of the Governing Council as a legitimate Iraqi body during this transitional period.

We certainly support them in that effort. We understand that they will be traveling with the UN Special Envoy Sergio de Mello and be coming to the Security Council for his briefing on July 22nd of the Council. We think the formation of the council is a very important step in a process that leads to the return of Iraq to its people and leads to the return of a government in Iraq that is fully representative of the people of Iraq and therefore -- and gains international recognition.

So we look forward to the visit. We urge Security Council members to accept this delegation, to listen to this delegation and to welcome this delegation as they -- as we hope they will welcome the council's creation and its assumption of responsibilities and authorities, as called for in Resolution 1483.

QUESTION: Are you aware of anyone, at this point, objecting to giving them the seat?

MR. BOUCHER: I don't know if it's actually we're at the moment of giving them the seat. The UN has to look at the questions of accreditation. I think these people are coming to brief the Council, and we would hope that they will be accepted by the Council and that their briefing would be welcomed.

QUESTION: Richard, the issue of this council, in the U.S. view, and I think in their own view, is not actually representing a sovereign state, and therefore they couldn't get the seat?

MR. BOUCHER: No, I don't think that's the issue. I think, as you've seen from the announcements in Baghdad, this Council has considerable authority and will be acting on behalf of the Iraqi people right from the start, including by appointing ministers and supervising ministries, and therefore in terms of the work that they would with the foreign ministry, they would decide on who would represent Iraq overseas. And that would be a matter of deciding whether the diplomats that were previously accredited remain or whether new ones be sent. It's just I think we're not quite at that point in the whole process. These people are going out first to come to the United Nations with the Secretary General's representative, and to brief the Security Council on the state of affairs and how they intend to proceed.

QUESTION: So it's not your understanding that they are coming to seek the seat?

MR. BOUCHER: That's not my understanding.

Okay, Terri.

QUESTION: On Iraq. I understand that passport restrictions are lifted, going to be lifted.

MR. BOUCHER: Lifted, right? The Department of State has revoked the restriction on the use of U.S. passports for travel to, in and through Iraq, that was set forth in earlier public notices. At the same time, we're putting out a Travel Warning for Iraq that strongly warns U.S. citizens against travel to Iraq.

Although the restrictions on the U.S. passport have been lifted, travel to Iraq remains dangerous. I think you're all aware of the various attacks that have occurred almost on a daily basis from remnants of the Baathist regime, terrorists or criminal elements, that remain active in Iraq.

We have limited, very limited consular services. The situation is generally dangerous and therefore we strongly warn against such travel. But we have lifted the restrictions on the use of U.S. passports for travel to Iraq.

QUESTION: Are visas not needed to get into the country?

MR. BOUCHER: The entry and exit procedures are available on the Coalition Provisional Authority's website at [www.cpa-iraq.org](http://www.cpa-iraq.org).

QUESTION: This is effective today?

MR. BOUCHER: Effective July 14th, as of yesterday.

Matt.

QUESTION: Richard, I am going to ask this --

QUESTION: You mean the CPA is issuing visas to Iraq?

MR. BOUCHER: I think you'd best check out their website and find out what the procedures are.

QUESTION: I asked this question before, and I am still a little confused. The situation in Iraq right -- this restriction has been in place because it's been dangerous -- well, it's been in place since the Gulf -- first Gulf War began in 1991, because of the dangerous situation, particularly, specifically for Americans in Iraq.

And what you're saying now is even though the restriction has been revoked, it remains dangerous. So I am not exactly sure: (a) why you're doing it; and (b) why this, the only other country for this that has this restriction attached to it is Libya, where the situation is demonstrably more safe for people of any nationality including Americans, than it is -- than it is in Iraq right now, which is, as you said, all subject, Americans are subject to almost daily attacks.

MR. BOUCHER: First of all, I can't do comparisons between countries. I don't think that's quite fair. There are different situations sometimes that lead us to different conclusions, and the restrictions remain with regard to Libya. And if there is anything new on that, I'll check and I'll tell you.

But with regard to this situation in Iraq, I think we all agree that it has changed demonstrably. There was a hostile regime, which sought to sometimes use Americans, has used in the past Americans as human shields and intentionally put them in harm's way.

Now there is a governing structure in Iraq that seeks to protect all people, Iraqis and foreigners. And yes, there is violence and danger around, but I don't think the situations are in any way comparable. And I think it's fairly clear on the surface that those who need to go to Iraq for one reason or another, whether it's assistance or journalism or business or healthcare or whatever other their purposes, or even eventually tourism, should be able to do so, because they are not -- at least by the governing structures -- are not going to be put in a hostile -- in harm's way.

QUESTION: Okay. Well, leaving the Libya comparison aside then, let's just talk about pre-war Iraq versus post-war Iraq. Isn't it demonstrably more dangerous in Iraq now for Americans than it was before the war?

MR. BOUCHER: I think the danger is --

QUESTION: You would have to go back quite a many years to find an incident where there was an American attacked or otherwise in an insecure situation.

MR. BOUCHER: Well --

QUESTION: Right?

MR. BOUCHER: I don't know. On the airplane back, I read the entire Newsday account of how some of those reporters were put in jail by the Iraqi regime and didn't think they'd escape with their lives.

QUESTION: True.

MR. BOUCHER: So that's not many years ago. That's weeks ago.

QUESTION: No, but there is a big difference. But, certainly, there is a big difference.

MR. BOUCHER: You know, in the waning days of the old regime.

QUESTION: But, certainly, there is a big difference between being thrown in jail and being killed. And we're talking about a handful of reporters now. And how many is it, several dozen soldiers, 81 almost, almost 100 people being killed just in the last --

MR. BOUCHER: I don't -- I really -- you know, you can argue this as long as you want. I don't think anybody who looks at the situation is going to think that it was

safer to go to Iraq under Saddam Hussein than it is to go now, certainly not for Americans. There is danger. There are many countries in the world where it's dangerous. There are a lot of dangers in the world. We all travel. We all know there are places you can get mugged, you can get robbed, you can get attacked, you can get blown up, you can get leaches, you can get everything.

But the fact is there is not -- no longer in Iraq are you going to be picked up by the government, tortured, killed, are you going to be picked up by the government and used as a human shield in some political confrontation; and that those dangers did exist in Saddam Hussein's Iraq, and maybe more -- probably more for the Iraqi people than they exist for foreigners. But, nonetheless, those dangers did exist in Saddam Hussein's Iraq.

QUESTION: Okay. Well, I'll drop it after this. But do you have -- is this decision -- was this decision made strictly on safety and security concerns, or is there a political element to it as well?

MR. BOUCHER: There is certainly a political element because the political circumstances change, and the political antipathy to Americans, the desire to hold Americans hostage or use them politically is gone; and the environment overall, the governing structure is a welcoming of freedom, of freedom for the Iraqi people, but also a freedom of travel.

And Americans and other foreigners have something to contribute to Iraq's reconstruction. We want them to be able to do that, to the extent that safety and security allow. And so yes, this reflects the fact that we want people to be able to go to Iraq, the Iraqis want people to be able to go to Iraq, and they should do so to the extent that safety and security allow.

QUESTION: When you say limited consular services have been resumed, does that mean that U.S. diplomats have returned to Baghdad, and that there are moves afoot to reopen the embassy?

MR. BOUCHER: We have certainly talked about operating in interim capacity in the form of an embassy. But I'd have to get -- see if I can get you any more information on whether we have actually opened something yet.

There is a U.S. consular officer in Baghdad who can provide limited emergency services to U.S. citizens in Iraq, and is located at the Iraq Forum, the convention center that's across from the Al-Rashid Hotel. And the consular officer can't issue U.S. passports or provide visa services, but people who are there, choose to remain in Iraq, are urged to keep in touch.

QUESTION: Richard, on that question of the embassy, it was my understanding, actually, that the money that you guys had asked for to open the temporary embassy had been shifted to pay for Ambassador Wolf's mission.

MR. BOUCHER: I'll have to check and see what we -- what we have in Baghdad, and what we have done with the money.

QUESTION: Okay. I just want to see if that's still the same -- still the case.

MR. BOUCHER: I don't know if it was the case, but I'll find out if it's still the case.

QUESTION: I'm pretty sure it was.

MR. BOUCHER: Okay, maybe.

QUESTION: And can you also -- the decision was made that they wouldn't have a -- that Iraq would not likely have a government that you would want diplomats to be accredited to before October -- the end of the fiscal year.

MR. BOUCHER: Yeah, the fiscal year is two months away or three months away so.

QUESTION: Exactly. So the decision was made to postpone that?

MR. BOUCHER: I appreciate the information and I'll --

QUESTION: No, I am wondering if --

MR. BOUCHER: I just don't -- I just don't know, Matt. I'll try to check it out for you and make sure.

QUESTION: Richard, while we're on the subject, do you remember -- you may

remember our debate about the status of other countries' diplomats in Baghdad. Have you come to any conclusions about that? There was --

MR. BOUCHER: I don't think there were any questions left hanging. I think we answered the question about buildings.

QUESTION: No.

MR. BOUCHER: I mean, the bottom line for us is that we are not able to guarantee security of other countries' diplomats or officials in Baghdad. We are not able to, at this point, promise that they can -- that their privileges and immunities can all be respected. People have to take that into account in deciding whether to have somebody in Baghdad or not.

QUESTION: What about the question of buildings, though? I don't recall the --

MR. BOUCHER: We answered the question. I'll get out a copy.

QUESTION: I have two questions. Is the United States discussing, perhaps, altering 1483 or doing something to allow a broader role for the UN in Iraq in order to persuade other countries to participate by sending troops?

MR. BOUCHER: That is a subject that I think has been raised by other countries, that you've seen, I think, in the Indian statement, in the French statement. I think there was a German statement as well that referred to the possibility, or just saying that they wouldn't send troops without a stronger UN mandate.

That discussion has arisen. The Secretary General talked a little bit about it yesterday when he was here outside the building. We'll just see where it goes at this point.

QUESTION: But have you --

MR. BOUCHER: We have not made any kind of proposals in that regard at this point.

QUESTION: My second question. Do you expect Secretary Powell to ask Joschka Fischer when he meets with him tomorrow to help out with German troops?

MR. BOUCHER: Let's wait till the meeting happens, but I think I've seen the Germans already say that they were not interested.

Sir.

QUESTION: On the subject of reconstruction, how does the administration feel about a European offer to set up a trust fund of donors to pay for reconstruction costs?

MR. BOUCHER: We certainly welcome everybody's involvement in the process of reconstruction in Iraq. We certainly have been working very closely with the Europeans. European Union Commissioner Chris Patten was in the building today, had a meeting with the Secretary, as well as other meetings with our economic officials. And so we're working very closely with the European Union to try to ensure the proper channeling, the proper structures, so that people can contribute to Iraq's reconstruction.

On that specific idea, I don't have any particular response at this point. We're working on the various ways to do this with the European Union.

QUESTION: Is there a determination whether it's acceptable to do it under the aegis of the World Bank or the UN --

MR. BOUCHER: As I said, we're talking to the European Union about how they want to give money. We'll work out the appropriate structures with them. There is already the international fund which is supervised, audited by the international community, and which already offers to many countries an acceptable vehicle for contributing to the future of the Iraqi people.

Elise.

QUESTION: This is not in Iraq, so if anyone --

MR. BOUCHER: Okay. We'll come back.

QUESTION: This is a little bit of an obscure question. Recently, you announced these sanctions against the Chinese and North Korean entities for proliferation activities

under the Nonproliferation Act. Some businesses which have had shipments on vessels of these companies which are not related to proliferation like, I don't know, carpets and other type of just commercial goods have had their goods seized because of these sanctions, and the Treasury Department says that they're taking their cues from the State Department.

And is there anything that the U.S. Government can do to help businessmen who have inadvertently gotten caught up in this?

MR. BOUCHER: I think that's more than a little obscure. I really don't think it's something that the State Department is accountable for or that we have the regulations or the explanations of. It strikes me as a Treasury and Customs matter. But let me just double-check and make sure. If we have anything to share, I'll be glad to provide it. Okay?

Adi.

QUESTION: Can you give us an update on the assessment team in Liberia now? I think yesterday you said they were wrapping up. If you have any more update on that, that'd be great.

MR. BOUCHER: Yeah, I'm not really sure I have any precise update. Basically, I think the situation remains where we described it yesterday. We are actively considering how we can best support international efforts to help Liberia. Monrovia is presently calm. But I don't have anything new on the assessment teams or the meetings in Ghana.

Sir.

QUESTION: As a member of the Group of Friends, is the United States satisfied with the process that's going on in Venezuela regarding a referendum of recall?

MR. BOUCHER: I haven't really checked in on it recently. I know there have been some twists and turns and visits and discussions, so let me get an update for you.

QUESTION: Can you find out if they are going to meet anytime soon?

MR. BOUCHER: I'll try to find out for you, yeah.

QUESTION: Thank you.

MR. BOUCHER: Okay.

QUESTION: Richard, there have been complaints from opposition figures in Azerbaijan that the authorities are refusing to register candidates for the election in October. I wonder if you have anything on that.

MR. BOUCHER: There is an election coming up, as you say, in October. We see this as a very important election. Our concern in the United States is for the electoral process itself. We don't take a position or support any particular candidate, but our interest is in seeing that the election is conducted in accordance with a recently adopted unified election code, Azerbaijan's constitution international standard.

So we hope and expect that the conduct of the registration process and the election itself is carried out in a manner that is consistent with the provisions of the Azerbaijan code and OSCE standards. This includes registering all qualified candidates, permitting public debate, providing equal access to the media, and ensuring that the balloting is free and fair. And those are the views that we convey to the government and other in the political life there.

QUESTION: The upcoming election that you do take a position on the candidate, in Guatemala, several months ago you said that you cast a dim view, or cast aspersions on the Rios Montt candidacy, and the Constitutional Court is allowing him to stand in the November election. What do you have to say about that?

MR. BOUCHER: I don't think our view has changed. I think we expressed it quite well, but I'll be glad to pull it out and express it again for you.

QUESTION: Right now, or we'll have to wait until later?

MR. BOUCHER: No, not right now. It's somewhere too far down in the brain.

Nicholas.

 reddit

QUESTION: Richard, the Turkish military has issued what they call a joint statement on that investigation. Can you tell us whether there is such a thing?

MR. BOUCHER: Well, there is such a thing, and it was signed by U.S. and Turkish generals who headed the joint fact-finding team, but on the understanding that subject -- that the statement was subject to review and approval in Washington and Ankara. So Ankara may have done their part of that already. But in terms of Washington, the review is taking place now. We expect it to be completed shortly.

QUESTION: Is there a problem?

MR. BOUCHER: No, I think it's just we're farther away.

QUESTION: There is a time issue?

MR. BOUCHER: Yeah.

QUESTION: You don't expect -- you don't expect there to be any changes?

MR. BOUCHER: Again, it's being reviewed in Washington. We expect that approval to come shortly.

QUESTION: Do you know who is doing the reviewing?

MR. BOUCHER: It's being looked at, I'm sure, by all of the various agencies that have something to do with this. But we, in the embassy, are the channel.

QUESTION: Today? Later today?

MR. BOUCHER: I don't know exactly when.

Ma'am.

QUESTION: Are you upset that it's been already announced in Turkey?

MR. BOUCHER: It's no big deal. These things happen. (Laughter.)

QUESTION: Our Foreign Minister, Turkish Foreign Minister, will be visiting Washington next week. Anything on that?

MR. BOUCHER: I have to double-check. I haven't looked at next week's schedule yet.

Sir.

QUESTION: Well, were you able to get an answer or an elaboration on the Secretary's decision on the ICRC and the Magen David Adom?

MR. BOUCHER: Sure.

QUESTION: You were? Excellent.

MR. BOUCHER: All right. Here is all of the details: Pursuant to the Foreign Operations Export Financing and Related Appropriations Division E, Title 2, of the Consolidated Appropriations Resolution, P.L. 108-7, "The United States may provide a headquarters contribution to the International Committee of the Red Cross if the Secretary of State determined and reports to the appropriate committees that the Magen David Adom Society of Israel is not being denied participation in the activities of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent movement."

On June 27th of this year, the Secretary made that required determination and the appropriate congressional committees were notified.

Following notification, we can make a contribution to the headquarters budget of the International Committee of the Red Cross. I point out that's not the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

Even though Magen David Adom has not achieved full membership, it has long participated in the activities of the movement. The U.S. Government continues to strongly support the efforts that will lead to full membership of the Magen David Adom Society of Israel. Israel has been a party to the Geneva Convention since 1951. We believe its national society should be recognized and be a full-fledged member of and participant in the movement of national societies. So we have long called for Israel's prompt admission -- prompt admission of Israel's national society, the Red Shield of David, the Magen David Adom.

In terms of our support, we contributed to the International Committee of the Red Cross to date \$77 million. In this fiscal year, we also understand that they have channeled money from there to the Magen David Adom Society, something like \$1.5 million this year.

QUESTION: Richard, on that, this certification is an annual procedure, is it?

MR. BOUCHER: I don't know how long it's been in the law. This was law that applied to this fiscal year. I don't remember when before.

QUESTION: But this isn't the first, as far as you recall, or?

QUESTION: No, I don't think so.

MR. BOUCHER: Does anybody know for sure? No?

QUESTION: Yes, I do.

MR. BOUCHER: Thank you, appreciate the help.

QUESTION: It was put in the -- it was first put into law in 2001.

QUESTION: Richard, you have had troubles with election -- elected presidents, prime ministers, and so forth, attempting to then go on and become dictators. Apparently, this is also occurring in the Ukraine with an upsetting of the constitution by the Kuchma government. Do you have any --

MR. BOUCHER: I don't have anything new to say about Ukraine right now. I think you can look back at our record. We have expressed quite a few times our concern about democracy in Ukraine and the need for greater freedom and more accountability from the government.

QUESTION: Thank you.

MR. BOUCHER: Thank you.

(The briefing was concluded at 2:25 p.m.)

(end transcript)

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