



Daily Press Briefing
Richard Boucher, Spokesman
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TRANSCRIPT:

12:40 p.m. EST

MR. BOUCHER: Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. It's a pleasure to be here. I have two things I'd like to talk about right off the top. One is a media note that we put out last Friday that I want to call your attention to, in case you didn't give it sufficient attention but it is really important, that we have revised our Visa Mantis clearance procedures. I know it sounds very obscure, but what it basically means is that scientists and scholars who come to study in the United States -- students, exchange visitors, temporary workers, certain tourist and business categories of visas -- that these people with scientific expertise can have more freedom of travel and come to the States, they can leave, they can come back, without too complicated visa procedures.

And over the last few years, as we tightened up our visa procedures, this was one area that not only foreign scholars were very concerned about, foreign students were very concerned about, but also American universities, businesses and others were quite concerned about.

So we think we've broken through a logjam there by working with our counterparts in other government departments. And as I said, while it may look obscure, it's pretty important for the students and others who come to the United States.

I'll just leave it at that, unless there are questions on that, and go on to the next item.

(No response.)

Second is the statement on the recall of our Ambassador to Syria. The Secretary has decided to recall the U.S. Ambassador to Syria, Margaret Scobey, for urgent consultations following the brutal murder of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri on February 14th. Ambassador Scobey will be returning imminently to Washington from Damascus.

Following the murder of former Prime Minister Hariri, Ambassador Scobey delivered a message to the Syrian Government expressing our deep concern, as well as our profound outrage, over this heinous act of terrorism.

Syria maintains a sizeable presence of military and intelligence officials in Lebanon, in contravention of the UN Security Council Resolution 1559. Yesterday's bombing calls into question the stated reason behind this presence of Syrian forces; that is, Lebanon's internal security. We believe the Lebanese people must be free to express their political preferences and choose their own representatives without intimidation or the threat of violence.

In recent months, we have raised repeatedly with senior officials of the Syrian Government a number of issues, including the Syrian presence in Lebanon, the continued presence and operational activities of international terrorist groups and of the Iranian regime on and through Syrian territory, and the use of Syrian territory by the Iraqi insurgency. To date, these concerns have not been adequately addressed and we again call upon the Syrian Government to take positive action on all these matters.

QUESTION: Two quick things?

MR. BOUCHER: Sure.

QUESTION: Yesterday, on the recall of the U.S. Ambassador to Nepal, you said that Mr. Moriarty would go back after a week. Are there any plans for Ambassador Scobey to return to Damascus at any particular time, or could this be indefinite?

MR. BOUCHER: I wouldn't speculate on how long. There's no particular time period set for it right now and I'm not in a position to speculate on how long it might be. She'll come back; we're going to talk to her about all these different things, all these issues that have come up in our relationship with Syria.

QUESTION: Secondly is that administration officials from various departments have talked about the possibility of imposing additional sanctions on Syria, either under the Syria Accountability Act or, I think, provisions to the Patriot Act that may now fall under that Act as well. Do the events in Lebanon yesterday that led to your decision to recall the Ambassador move you further down the road toward imposing sanctions?

MR. BOUCHER: I think if you look, for example, at what Secretary Rice said during the course of her travel in the region, that we are, indeed, concerned about many aspects of Syrian behavior, and the longer we go on without seeing some significant progress in these areas, the more likely it becomes that we'll look to the various tools that we have, including the Syrian Accountability Act, to impose further measures. So that's a matter I'm sure we'll be discussing as we go forward, but I don't have anything for you now.

QUESTION: With the Ambassador, on her return?

MR. BOUCHER: Certainly she'll be involved in all those discussions, yes.

Okay.

QUESTION: But, Richard, just to be clear, I mean, this recall of the Ambassador is not a withdrawal of the Ambassador in terms of any kind of downgrade of relations for the time being?

MR. BOUCHER: No, she is returning to Washington for consultations with us about the full range of problems that we've seen -- had in the relationship with Syria, about the lack of progress in many of these areas, and about what we can do to move forward and hopefully to see the kind of progress that we would like to see.

QUESTION: Are you considering downgrading the relationship?

MR. BOUCHER: At this point, I'll just stick to this particular step.

QUESTION: Has there been any reaction from Syria or any reciprocal diplomatic response?

MR. BOUCHER: They would have to decide any measures or anything related to their Ambassador. Our Ambassador delivered the points that I'm talking about, the message to the Syrian Government last night and again this morning, two different places in the foreign ministry, and I'm not going to try to characterize their reaction at this point.

QUESTION: At all?

MR. BOUCHER: No.

QUESTION: I mean, did they have a reaction?

MR. BOUCHER: I'm not going to try to characterize it. Certainly, they reacted, yeah.

QUESTION: Richard, has the Secretary, has the Department called in the Syrian Ambassador here to protest?

MR. BOUCHER: We have talked several times to the Syrian Ambassador here. Remember, these -- many of these problems go back months, they go back to Ambassador Burns' trip in September; they go back to Deputy Secretary Armitage's trip to Damascus in January. Deputy Assistant Secretary Satterfield met with the Syrian Ambassador here last Monday, February 7th, and I suspect we may talk to the Ambassador here again, but I don't have

anything particular scheduled at this point.

QUESTION: You suspect you might?

MR. BOUCHER: I don't have anything particular scheduled at this point.

QUESTION: When Assistant Secretary Burns goes to Lebanon to attend Hariri's funeral, does he have any plans to meet with Syrian officials to lodge any other concerns, protests?

MR. BOUCHER: At this point, I think what I can tell you is Assistant Secretary Burns is planning on going to Lebanon for the funeral. My understanding is that he will have some courtesy meetings with members of the Lebanese Government. I'm not aware of anything scheduled with the Syrians.

Nicholas.

QUESTION: Richard, you said that the Ambassador is being recalled after the incident yesterday. Does that mean that now you believe that Syria has something to do with the incident?

MR. BOUCHER: We have not made any determination of responsibility in this particular incident, in this assassination. It was horrible, and we certainly condemn it again and offer our condolences, but we don't have a determination of responsibility yet. We and others in the international community will be following very carefully to see whether there's a thorough investigation to see what information can be found to indicate responsibility.

I think the reason that this particular incident is related to the sort of -- the step of recalling our Ambassador is that the incident is a horrible thing that happened that shows the distortions of Lebanese politics that are created by the Syrian presence that shows that the excuse, the reason, the rationale, that's given for the security -- for the Syrian presence really doesn't work. It has not provided internal security for Lebanon, and therefore, in light of that kind of event, we need to look at the whole range of issues that we've had, including Syrian presence in Lebanon. And that's what we're going to do with our Ambassador when she comes back.

QUESTION: Can I follow up on --

MR. BOUCHER: Let's --

QUESTION: Just, can I just --

MR. BOUCHER: There's so many, we'll come back around.

QUESTION: If you know, how long is the Ambassador coming? Do you know when she will go back?

MR. BOUCHER: As I just told your colleagues a moment ago, I don't have any specific timeframe for that.

Okay. Nadia.

QUESTION: So you're really not accusing them but you're implicating them by yesterday linking the withdrawal of Syrian forces from Lebanon in the statement from the White House and from here, and today by withdrawing the Ambassador. I mean, that's clear indication that obviously you think that Syria is behind the assassination.

MR. BOUCHER: I wouldn't say that. We have not reached a determination on who's behind the assassination. We do think it needs to be looked into thoroughly. But the Syrian presence in Lebanon has been something that's been disturbing to us for a long time. And as you know, we and the French have sponsored UN resolutions, we have made this an issue in our relationship again and again; and the horrible assassination that took place reminds us that this presence is not good and that it has affected the situation and doesn't even provide what the rationale says, which is internal security for the Lebanese. We need to look at all those issues again.

QUESTION: Have you informed the Syrians prior to this step? And the second question, since the French called for the international investigation and you don't know who was responsible for this incident, the assassination of Hariri, are you willing to go along with the international investigation?

MR. BOUCHER: First, on telling the Syrians, yes, our Ambassador, in delivering the message about the series of our concerns, all the different concerns we have about Syrian practices at this point, she said that she was going to be returning to Washington, and so she's done that, as I said, last night and again this morning with the Syrian foreign ministry.

And as far as the French idea on an international investigation, certainly we and others in the international community will be following very closely the investigation. We do think it needs -- the event, the bombing, needs to be thoroughly investigated and we'll be following it closely. There is, first of all, the responsibility of people, Lebanese and Syrians, to reveal whatever information they have about it. I'm not sure the French have put forward any kind of concrete proposal yet, but should they do that, we'll look at it, of course.

QUESTION: But who do you think should investigate it?

MR. BOUCHER: As we said, it needs, first, to be investigated by the people there, but we will be following this closely and we'll see if the French or others have other proposals on how the facts of this matter can be brought completely to light.

QUESTION: Can you update us on the consultations in the Security Council regarding Lebanon?

MR. BOUCHER: We are working with other members of the UN Security Council on a Presidential Statement condemning the assassination. UN Under Secretary General for Political Affairs Kieran Prendergast and Secretary General's Special Envoy for Implementation of Security Council Resolution 1559 Terje Roed-Larsen are briefing the Council at noon today, and then after that I'm sure the Council will consider further what kind of statement they can issue.

QUESTION: I have two questions. Until you're through with your consultations with the Ambassador, are you going to have further consultations with the Syrians through other channels?

And also, you said that the murder of Hariri shows the distortion of Lebanese politics created by the Syrian presence. So while you're not making a determination whether Syria was directly involved, are you saying that the Syrian presence led to the climate and conditions where somebody wanted to kill Prime Minister Hariri?

MR. BOUCHER: I'm not -- no, I'm not saying that.

QUESTION: So how --

MR. BOUCHER: The point that we've tried to make, and I made it in the statement, is that the Syrian presence in Lebanon is not right. It's been -- the Security Council has said repeatedly that they should withdraw, they should leave the Lebanese to run their own politics and handle their own affairs. The only excuse for that presence has been that it somehow provided internal security for Lebanon. Unfortunately, the very tragic bombing yesterday shows that that's just plain not true, and therefore we believe that there is no reason for them to remain there. We have believed that, but this shows once again that there is no reason for them to remain there.

QUESTION: What about the consultations?

MR. BOUCHER: I'm sure we maintain channels. We certainly have the ability to talk to the Syrian Government. I don't know if anything particular is scheduled at this point, but we'll maintain channels to talk to them as necessary.

Charlie.

QUESTION: Well, Richard, I'm a little confused by the reason -- by Ambassador Scobey's visit to the foreign ministry last night and again this morning. Why were two visits necessary?

MR. BOUCHER: Two different levels.

QUESTION: Two different levels?

MR. BOUCHER: Yes.

QUESTION: And so, she saw the Foreign Minister this morning, I assume?

MR. BOUCHER: I'll have to get confirmation on who she saw this morning.

QUESTION: They were supposed to meet, but I'm not sure.

MR. BOUCHER: Yeah, that's what I'm not sure. Let me make sure she did see the --

QUESTION: If you can touch on it, if you feel like it, whether there is any concern here that in this period of trying -- and doing pretty well -- in promoting Mideast peace, which Syria, you know, is an important -- and Syria is an important player in the area, do you think the U.S. is running any risk with this dramatic move of turning Syria off a little bit?

Just this morning, I heard the Egyptian Foreign Minister say that Egypt's making headway with Syria in that they're trying to rein in, you know, militant groups. Do you think you're going to pay a price for this, so far as whatever cooperation Syria is giving you?

MR. BOUCHER: Well, as we've said before, the cooperation of Syria on many of these issues has been limited and somewhat sporadic, that we have not seen the kind of determined effort to deal with these problems, despite frequent statements from Syria that they were aware of the problems and were going to deal with them.

So we will continue to pursue those. We certainly welcome anything that Syria had to do in that regard, but so far the results have been meager, I guess I would say.

And so I don't know that there's any terrible jeopardy that they will stop doing good things because they haven't done enough good things to begin with, if you want to reduce it to its essence.

Yeah.

QUESTION: But, Richard, we know that it's not a secret the relationship between the U.S. and Syria has been a bad one, and some people now accusing the Administration of trying to politicize this incident and use it to put further pressure on Damascus. The same question was asked of Annan today in his press conference. Do you think that has some ground?

MR. BOUCHER: We're not looking just to put pressure on Damascus. We're looking to resolve problems. We're looking to stop people operating from Syria, supporting insurgents in Iraq. We're looking to stop the flow of arms through Syria to groups that are violently opposed to the peace process, that are trying to kill the Palestinian leadership as well as the Israelis. We're looking to stop the interference in Lebanese politics that keeps the Lebanese from standing on their own two feet and running their own country. There's no reason to put pressure on Syria, other than to try to get Syria to do some of these things. And some of these things are things that Syria says it wants to do, but we really haven't seen enough action.

QUESTION: But this is different, because you implicated them in a terrible murder with no evidence.

MR. BOUCHER: I have been very careful to say we really don't know who committed this murder at this point, but we do know what effect the Syrian presence in Lebanon has and we do know that it doesn't bring security for the Lebanese.

QUESTION: Do you accuse them of failing to protect Hariri by being there for the same reason of providing security --

MR. BOUCHER: I'm not trying to make accusations today. I'm just describing the situation.

Nicholas.

QUESTION: Last September, Secretary Powell met with the Foreign Minister of Syria and he was very optimistic about what he had heard about the attitude that the Foreign Minister had about all sorts of things. The subsequent meeting in Sharm el-Sheikh in November wasn't as good, but do you think that you've been disappointed by the Syrians after the optimism that Secretary Powell had?

MR. BOUCHER: I don't know if I'd quite go as far as optimism, but certainly we have, on various occasions, heard from the Syrians that they intended to, for example, curb the activities of violent groups operating out of Syria. We have heard from the Syrians that they intended to stop any support for the insurgency that came across Syrian borders.

So, you know, and at times, we'd even seen some steps in that direction. We'd seen some return of money, financial assets that had -- to the Iraqi regime. We'd seen some cooperation along the border. But overall, the problems have persisted again and again. And so we haven't seen the kind of action on these elements that we think has been necessary.

We have repeatedly reminded Syria of the problems and their promises. We've repeatedly reminded Syria of the need to be more constructive in terms of its relationships in the region. But unfortunately, I think at this point, we need to bring our Ambassador back and look at all these questions and see what more we can do, because we haven't seen enough.

QUESTION: And on the Security Council, you said you're preparing a Presidential Statement. We've seen that Syria has basically been ignoring actions by the Security Council. Are you going to try to put in any text of a statement or future resolution any sort of a threat of use of force or anything close to it by the international community?

MR. BOUCHER: I think you'll see today a statement about the situation with the assassination of former Prime Minister Hariri and we'll try to describe our intentions or our views of that particular situation today.

Jonathan.

QUESTION: You're very careful not to level any accusations. As you know, the Syrians also condemned this assassination. Do you find their statements that they have -- they are not responsible for this credible?

MR. BOUCHER: Again, I don't -- I'm not able to say who is particularly responsible for this specific bombing, this specific horrible act. That needs to be found out, and those with influence in Lebanon, those with responsibility in Lebanon, need to find that out and make that information public.

But I think what we're pointing to today is the broader effect that Syrian influence, that Syrian presence in Lebanon, has had, as I said, in terms of sort of distorting the political environment in Lebanon, and also the broader effect that it has not had, and that is not bringing any kind of security to the Lebanese. And this tragic accident, this tragic action, the terrorist bombing, reminds us even more starkly that Syrian presence in Lebanon is not good; it's not brought anything for the Lebanese people and it reminds us once again that UN resolutions saying Syria foreign influence should be removed from Lebanon, that those need to be implemented.

QUESTION: A related issue? In Jerusalem, Prime Minister Sharon just held a news conference and I believe one of the things he said was that Russia was going to export missiles or sell missiles to Syria. Do you know about that? Do you have anything to say about that?

MR. BOUCHER: I don't have anything new on that. I'll have to look at the situation. We've expressed some concerns before at various reports, but at other instances the Russians have said they weren't selling any. So we'll have to look again at the facts, see where those things stand now.

QUESTION: It didn't come up in Secretary Rice's meetings in Ankara with the Russian Foreign Minister?

MR. BOUCHER: I'd have to go back and check my notes. I think that was a moment when the Russians were saying they weren't selling anything. But I do think -- I'd have to check for you.

QUESTION: On the Egyptian -- the Egyptian Foreign Minister?

MR. BOUCHER: Yep.

QUESTION: It's not exactly hot news, but he is speaking again of Egypt deploying border guards, some 750 along Gaza's border, and seeking an agreement with Israel to put guards further along the border. Is this something the U.S. thinks is helpful? Do you have some reaction to the various things Egypt's doing: training, et cetera?

MR. BOUCHER: Yeah. We have welcomed the Egyptian role in helping Israelis and Palestinians, helping the Palestinians take more responsibility for security, rebuild their security services, be able to operate and take control of Gaza when the time comes and the Israelis leave there and the four settlements on the West Bank. We have welcomed Egypt's role in taking more control at the border with Egypt so that Egypt could stop smuggling, tunneling, those kinds of activities. We think that lessens the pressure for Israel, it lessens the pressure on the Palestinian Authority, in terms of how those weapons often get used.

So we've certainly welcomed all these activities that the Egyptians have carried out and look forward to discussing with them even more how they and other people in the region can be of practical and specific help in terms of the rebuilding the Palestinian security services.

Sir.

QUESTION: There have been many incidents in the past where Israel committed certain acts like what happened, like the crime against Prime Minister Hariri in Lebanon. They killed several people in Lebanon. Even in Syria, in Damascus, they blew up cars, and there are accusations from the Syrian Defense Minister that indicate or points at Israel, the possibility of Israel committing this crime in Beirut.

Why you are so concerned about the whole situation in the Middle East? Are you willing to -- is the United States willing to put the whole thing in the context of bringing peace to the Middle East -- Lebanon, the Golan Heights, the Palestinian issues, all together, need to go forward side by side and not to be selective in dealing with one case and ignoring the other?

How do you see this situation progressing in the future with the concentration of the United States trying to only be selective in dealing with certain subjects?

MR. BOUCHER: I think the first thing to say is I know that Israel gets accused of everything that happens in this region. I don't see any basis to do that at this point.

Second of all, are we willing to look at this in the context of peace in the overall region? The answer is: Absolutely. We have been looking at this region now for several years and Syria's place in this region for several years in the context of our search for overall peace, comprehensive peace in the region, and it is an anomaly that Syria continues to allow arms to be shipped through its territory to militias, to Hezbollah and other groups that are violently opposed to the peace process and are blowing up, trying to literally bomb the peace, including thwarting the Palestinians' plan and aspirations. It is an anomaly that Syria supports -- allows operations on its territory or fails to stop operations on its territory by people who are supporting the insurgency in Iraq. It is an anomaly that Syria says it wants peace but allows rejectionist groups to operate on its territory.

So we definitely do look at this in that context. Look at what Secretary Rice said about comprehensive peace when she was on her most recent trip. She said it would be a lot easier to pursue comprehensive peace if Syria was not supporting Hezbollah and Hamas and other groups that are trying to attack the peace process with bombs. So we do look at it in the overall context and we find that this situation with Syria has made it more difficult to progress, despite the best efforts that we and others have, despite the efforts of Israelis and Palestinians to reach peace.

QUESTION: Do you have a comment on the Syrians' efforts with the Palestinian organizations trying to employ their cooperation in implementing the new agreements between the Mr. Abbas government and the Israeli Government recently, that Syria has invested a lot of efforts recently in doing that?

MR. BOUCHER: We have not seen Syria stop the activities of violent groups on its -- from its territory.

QUESTION: Speaking of the Middle East, there are reports that -- or there are Israeli officials quoted in Israel as saying that they are planning to build an additional new settlement in the West Bank, to which some of the people, some of the people who may be resettled from the Gaza settlement to Israel, indeed withdraws from them, might go. Do you have a comment on that, and do you not regard it as a violation of the roadmap's call for an end to all settlement activity?

MR. BOUCHER: At this point, there have been a number of reports. There are, in fact, conflicting reports about the Government of Israel's intentions or plans with regard to Gush Etzion settlement bloc that's east of the green line. And I think we'd have to look first for the Government of Israel to provide clarification on what plans there may or may not be in that regard.

QUESTION: Are you asking them for clarification?

MR. BOUCHER: We've been looking for clarification, yes.

QUESTION: And do you still hold to your --

MR. BOUCHER: I think there were actually clarifying statements issued yesterday.

QUESTION: And do you still hold to the view expressed in the roadmap that there should be a total end to settlement activity, including so-called "natural growth"?

MR. BOUCHER: We've not changed our view on settlement activity.

Nadia.

QUESTION: Perhaps since you talked to Sharon about his disengagement plan from Gaza, surely you discussed what you're going to do with the 7,000 settlers.

MR. BOUCHER: As we've said, we don't -- we don't support further settlement activity. We've called for an end of settlement activity and we have supported -- no, I'll just leave it at that. The withdrawal needs to take that into account.

QUESTION: But did they tell you what they're going to do with it?

MR. BOUCHER: That's been a subject of some discussion with various parties, but the Israelis will have to formulate their plans.

QUESTION: Can I just dot an "I" on this? I think you've just repeated a view that you don't support further settlement activity, but I want to make sure that that includes so-called "natural growth."

MR. BOUCHER: We have not changed our view of settlement activity. I'll leave it at that.

QUESTION: But so you may have changed your view on so-called "natural growth"?

MR. BOUCHER: Our views on settlement activity I think are very well known. I'm not going to repeat them now, but they're known and we haven't changed them.

QUESTION: Mr. Boucher, there has been at least one report that the FBI has been conducting intelligence operations overseas, apparently based at embassies without the knowledge of the State Department or the CIA. Do you have anything to say on that?

MR. BOUCHER: I don't think that's a topic I can say anything about. I'll see if there is anything we have to say on the subject.

Yeah.

QUESTION: Has the Iranian Government lodged any sort of protest with the U.S. regarding these allegations that U.S. drones have been flying over Iran?

MR. BOUCHER: You'd have to ask the Iranian Government about that.

QUESTION: Have you heard anything from the Swiss Government from the Iranians on this?

MR. BOUCHER: You would have to ask the Swiss Government about that.

(Laughter.)

QUESTION: Ambassador Zoellick this morning in his confirmation hearing commented on China's anti-secession law by saying that the U.S. certainly discouraged China to enact such a law because it moves to the other direction from the U.S. policy, which is to promote dialogue and peaceful solution. Can you tell us how the U.S. has tried to discourage China to do so? Did Secretary -- when she talked to Chinese Foreign Minister Li over the weekend, did she express the U.S. concerns?

MR. BOUCHER: I don't think it came up over the weekend, but certainly the U.S. Government has been quite clear that we don't think either side should take unilateral steps that try to define the situation further or push it in one direction or another. And we've made that clear, I think, right from the beginning when this law was discussed.

So I've said it, Secretary Powell raised it, our Embassy has been raising it. The Chinese know quite clearly what our views are.

Yeah, sir.

QUESTION: Mr. Boucher, any readout of yesterday's talks between Madame Secretary Condoleezza Rice and the Supreme Allied Commander Euro General Jim Jones?

MR. BOUCHER: No, we don't do readouts on internal U.S. Government meetings. It's always a pleasure to talk to him, but I'll leave it at that.

QUESTION: On Cyprus, any update on the U.S. commercial invasion and occupation of northern Cyprus in the name to ease the isolation of the Turkish Cypriot community?

MR. BOUCHER: I don't think I have an update for you today on steps to ease the isolation of the Turkish Cypriot community, no.

QUESTION: But how do you explain the fact that more than 28 U.S. companies are planning to settle in the Turkish occupied territory of Cyprus to conduct business? Do you know if they are doing that via the services of the legitimate government of the Republic of Cyprus or direct?

MR. BOUCHER: I explained it the other day, and if you want me to explain it again today, I'd explain it exactly the same way as I did the other day.

QUESTION: Which is --

MR. BOUCHER: Which is there's a team of businesspeople that are going down to northern Cyprus to look at opportunities for cooperation. We are sending somebody from our commercial section, as we often do with business groups.

QUESTION: Via the Republic of Cyprus or just direct?

MR. BOUCHER: They're coming down from Turkey, as we have permitted --

QUESTION: And what about via Brussels, since Cyprus is a member of the European Union?

MR. BOUCHER: Why don't they go through Brussels?

QUESTION: Excuse me?

MR. BOUCHER: Brussels is out of the way.

QUESTION: Okay. And also, according to your Ambassador Michael Klosson in Nicosia, U.S. AID senior official of the Department of State, Thomas Mefford, is in Cyprus to promote, as he said, U.S.-Turkish Cypriot partners for growth. I'm wondering if your official is doing that with the permission of the Republic of Cyprus, or illegally direct with the Turkish Cypriots and the Turkish military, recognizing the de facto status created by the Turkish invasion and occupation of forces.

MR. BOUCHER: I don't know how he traveled there, but in any case, our activities to ease the isolation of the Turkish Cypriots do not change our recognition policy in any way, shape or form.

QUESTION: On Albania?

MR. BOUCHER: On Albania? We're on a roll, keep going.

QUESTION: May I?

MR. BOUCHER: Please.

QUESTION: Do you know when Usama bin Laden and his operatives stationed ever in Albania since your government is looking for them all over the world?

MR. BOUCHER: I don't know where he is so I don't know where he has been or where he might be. I wouldn't speculate on any given location.

QUESTION: But do you know if he ever was in Albania?

MR. BOUCHER: I'm not in a position to talk about that. I don't know personally, and I don't think we'd be in a position to talk about it anyway.

QUESTION: But according to the great Department of Treasury Document JS-1703, dated June 2000, "In late 2000, a close associate of Usama bin Laden operatives moved to Albania and was running in the main AHF, Al-Haramain Foundation entity." How do you comment on that?

MR. BOUCHER: I don't have the document in front of me, but I'm sure it's accurate.

QUESTION: This is also on bin Laden. Two things. First of all, where does the Department stand on possibly raising the reward for his capture? I know it was being considered --

MR. BOUCHER: I don't think there's anything new on it. We are -- we do have an active Rewards for Justice Campaign and I think we put out a note to you on January 10th about that. But at that point, the rewards were up to 25 million for information on Usama bin Laden or al-Zawahiri.

QUESTION: On this campaign in Pakistan that you launched, it started with the print, but now the radio and TV ads are on. Do you think that this is the appropriate kind of platform for people that are living in these remote areas of Waziristan or, you know, these remote mountainous regions where, you know, they're not really kind of glued to their television?

MR. BOUCHER: Well, the simple answer is yes. You have to try in a variety of ways to reach people, and part of it is the expansion of word of mouth. People see it in one place and travel and talk to others in other places.

We started on January 7th with an ad in *Jang* an Urdu language daily. Embassy Islamabad developed the media plan. They know the country best and they're able to tell us how to reach the intended audience. So we're now focusing on 30-second radio advertisements in Urdu, Sindhi, Pashto and Balochi. Television ads and quarter-page newspaper ads have been run as well, featuring the 14 most wanted terrorists. So that's where we're going. We've got radio ads on Radio Pakistan's three language stations.

Yeah.

QUESTION: Sorry if this was asked earlier when I was out, but can you give a look ahead to the Secretary's testimony on the Hill this week, tomorrow on budget matters and --

MR. BOUCHER: No. She'll be talking about the budget. The foreign affairs budget, as you know, is a very important part of our foreign policy and she'll be talking about it in great detail.

QUESTION: Thank you.

MR. BOUCHER: Thank you.

QUESTION: Can I do one quick one?

MR. BOUCHER: Sure.

QUESTION: The Iraq -- the Iraq story about Secretary Rice having sent a team to assess the Iraqi transition headed by Dick Jones. Did that team go out, who was on it, why did it go?

MR. BOUCHER: Secretary Rice sent a team out while she was in Europe to go to Iraq and look at key sectors and areas where we will need to work with the new Iraqi Government. This recognizes, first of all, that there's going to be a new government after the election in Iraq, and that we need to look at how we can support them and how we can work with our Embassy to support the new Iraqi Government in these new circumstances.

So she sent a team that consisted of Ambassador Dick Jones, our Ambassador to Kuwait, but who has extensive experience in Iraq; Philip Zelikow -- I'm starting to blank out here.

QUESTION: Odierno.

MR. BOUCHER: General Odierno, the JCS advisor; Jim Kunder, from the U.S. Agency for International Development; Robin Raphel from our Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs; and Mr. Martinez from the White House.

QUESTION: This was not -- was this an effort to -- was this purely timed to the elections and the prospect of a new government, or did it have to do with any kind of an overall review of U.S. policy on Iraq?

MR. BOUCHER: I wouldn't call it a review. It's somewhat comparable to the mission of General Luck that the Pentagon sent out to look at the situation, see what more we can do in the new post-election circumstances. I would say, for our part, Secretary Rice wanted to have these people take a good look for her, working with the Embassy -- they went out, they met with Ambassador Negroponte, they talked to others -- and to really look at how we can cooperate with the new Iraqi Government in the post-election period and how we can cooperate with a new Iraqi Government as they set about their task of transition through constitutional government to further elections this year.

QUESTION: And lastly, it mentions in the article that Ambassador Jones is to become the new special coordinator working out of the Secretary's office and reporting directly to her. Is that planned?

MR. BOUCHER: She expects to appoint Ambassador Jones to help coordinate our policy on Iraq and advise her on our policy in Iraq. We've done similar things in the past with relation to other high-priority areas. This is her way of helping organize the work, recognizing, of course, that Iraq policy and implementation of Iraq policy is a matter that remains, let's say, grounded in our Near Eastern Bureau and the Embassy, so they'll all work very closely together.

QUESTION: So -- but he will be in NEA or he will be somewhere --

MR. BOUCHER: No, he'll be sort of in her office as part of her staff. Once the details are worked out, we'll make the appropriate formal announcement.

Okay?

(The briefing was concluded at 1:20 p.m.)

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