



# THE WHITE HOUSE

PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH

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## Press Briefing by Scott McClellan

The James S. Brady Briefing Room

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1:15 P.M. EDT

MR. McCLELLAN: Good afternoon. I have no opening statements or remarks, so I'll jump right into questions.

Q Scott, the Israeli raid into Syria, does that -- is that consistent with the U.S. doctrine of preemptive strikes to attack terrorists in countries that harbor them? And will the U.S. veto the U.N.'s resolution that Syria is seeking?

MR. McCLELLAN: **On the first part** of your question, one, the President talked a little bit about this earlier today, but we've always said that Israel has the right to defend herself, but that Israel should also take into account the consequences of any actions they may take. We've also made it clear to Syria and Israel that they should avoid doing anything that would escalate the situation or heighten tensions in the region.

The terrorist attack that took place over the weekend is just another reminder of the need for a Palestinian Authority that will work to dismantle terrorist organizations. That is the way forward on the President's two state vision that he outlined on June 24th.

Q On the U.N. resolution, will the U.S. veto that?

MR. McCLELLAN: **Well, I think** that it's important that if you're talking about anything at the U.N. -- one, those discussions are ongoing. So I'll let those discussions take place there. But it's important for the international community to stand together in condemning terrorist attacks that are carried out against

innocent men, women and children. And that's exactly what took place in Haifa over the weekend. This vicious attack led to the death of innocent men, women, and even children. And it was a horrific attack, and those attacks must be stopped. And everybody has a responsibility to fight terrorism. And I think it's important that the international community speak out against such attacks, as well.

Q Does the United States think that these attacks stem from an occupation that is intolerable, unbearable for the Palestinians, the building of a wall, the settlements and so forth, that they reached a point to lead to this horrible violence?

MR. McCLELLAN: Actually, the President has made his views known, that all parties --

Q No. Scott, he never says it enough.

MR. McCLELLAN: All parties have responsibilities to move forward on the two-state vision --

Q Does he think that the Israeli should --

MR. McCLELLAN: -- **to move forward** on the road map.

Q -- end its occupation? Does he think --

MR. McCLELLAN: The President has made it clear that as we move forward on the road map, that the settlement activity needs to end. He's spoken out on that.

Q How about the total occupation of Palestinian land?

MR. McCLELLAN: But let me remind you that all parties have responsibilities when it comes to implementing the road map. We have certainly gone through a difficult period here. And the way to move forward toward this two-state vision is for all parties to crack down on terrorism, for the Palestinian Authority to be empowered -- a Cabinet and a prime minister that is empowered to crack down on terrorism, to dismantle terrorist organizations.

Q Scott, does the United States share the assessment that the target in Syria was a terrorist camp?

MR. McCLELLAN: Well, that's our understanding from the Israeli government. They've said that publicly, that this was a terrorist camp that they struck in Syria. And that's what we know.

Q So we agree with that, then? I mean, we accept that as --

MR. McCLELLAN: Again, I think the point we're at now it's important to urge Israel to urge Syria not to do anything that would escalate the situation, not to do anything that would heighten tensions in the region. And that's what we're doing. That's where we are.

Q Turning to the domestic front, and something in the news here, you and the President both said before the President left for Texas that the decision in California was up to the voters --

MR. McCLELLAN: **I knew you** were going to ask about California. (Laughter.)

Q Given the fact that the official Republican State Committee has endorsed Mr. Schwarzenegger, has that position changed? And does the White House have any opinion on the charges leveled against Mr.

Schwarzenegger in the past week?

MR. McCLELLAN: We recognize there is an election going on in California. We continue to believe that that is a matter for the people of California to decide. And we have confidence in their judgment.

Q How about the second part of my question?

MR. McCLELLAN: We recognize there is a campaign going on, and those are issues being discussed in the campaign and that's in the context of the campaign. It's a nice way to try to draw us into an election that's going on right now, but we believe it's a matter for the people of California to decide.

Q Back on Syria. The White House has said that they harbor terrorists and Islamic Jihad, Hezbollah, Hamas, and that they allow terrorists or militants to cross the border into Iraq. What is the administration doing about that? I mean, they've said they're problems, but does the White House have any follow through?

MR. McCLELLAN: Syria knows our concerns. We've made it very clear, and we've made it very clear that they will be held accountable for those actions. We continue to urge Syria to change course and stop harboring terrorists, stop pursuit of weapons of mass destruction, and a number of other areas, as well, that we have concerns with Syria about. But we've made those views very well known.

Q Is there any plans for the administration to follow up and talk to Syrian officials or even the leadership about what has occurred?

MR. McCLELLAN: Again, we continue to make our views known. And they know that we take these issues very seriously, and they know what they need to do.

Q Scott, the President just expressed his desire to get to the bottom of this CIA leak issue. And he said he wanted to hold accountable whoever was responsible --

MR. McCLELLAN: **Absolutely.**

Q -- responsible for this. But can you confirm that the President would fire anyone on his staff found to have leaked classified information?

MR. McCLELLAN: I think I made that very clear last week. The topic came up, and I said that if anyone in this administration was responsible for the leaking of classified information, they would no longer work in this administration. This is a very serious matter. The President made it very clear just a short time ago in the East Room, and he has always said that leaking of classified information is a serious matter. And that's why he wants to get to the bottom of this. And the sooner we get to the bottom of it, the better.

Q Scott, can I ask you a separate question?

MR. McCLELLAN: You may ask me a separate question.

Q On Kibaki. Did he specifically ask the President for help in resuming IMF loans, and what was the President's response?

MR. McCLELLAN: **Yes, I think** that I will leave it with the -- they addressed that in the press

availability. The two leaders both addressed that very issue there. But they talked about a number of issues, from fighting terrorism to expanding trade opportunities to fighting the scourge of AIDS. There are a number of important areas they covered. And the two leaders discussed that very issue out there. I don't have anything to add to what the President said.

Q Scott, two quick questions. One, HB1 visa is under attack in the U.S. Congress. Where does the President stand on this issue, because many countries have concerns.

MR. McCLELLAN: **I'm sorry**, what was the --

Q H-1B visas.

MR. McCLELLAN: Yes.

Q They are under attack in the U.S. Congress. They want to limit or eliminate the visa. So where does the President stand on the visas?

MR. McCLELLAN: The President continues to believe what he said previously, that we should be a welcoming society. Obviously, September 11th came, and there is need to strengthen our border security and take some additional steps there. But we also -- as we do that, we want to continue to be a welcoming society. We are a nation of immigrants, and the President's position remains the same on that issue.

Q I'd like to go back to Randy's original question about the applicability of the Bush doctrine to Israel and the Middle East. Could you elaborate a little bit on what the President's thinking is about whether Israel should feel that it is getting an okay from the United States to conduct raids into other countries in the pursuit of terrorists?

MR. McCLELLAN: They don't ask for it and we don't give those -- that we've made it clear that Israel -- the President made very clear in the East Room that Israel has the right to defend herself. But as they do, they should take into account the consequences of the actions that they may take. And we've made that very clear.

Q But, obviously, they've taken a step beyond what they have done before in doing that here. Do you have any sense of whether they are now stepping over a line that you are comfortable with, or is this okay?

MR. McCLELLAN: You heard the remarks from the President. We continue to urge parties not to take steps that would heighten tensions in the region. That's what we will continue to emphasize, particularly at this point in time. But, again, let's not lose sight of what happened over the weekend in Haifa. That was a horrific attack on innocent men, women and children, and terrorism must not be allowed to stand. There needs to be action taken to dismantle terrorist organizations so that we can move forward on the road map, so that we can get back to the road map and move forward to the two-state vision that will be beneficial to both Israelis and the Palestinian people, there will be a brighter future for everyone.

Q Scott, did the United States have any advance knowledge of the attack --

MR. McCLELLAN: No.

Q -- either in specifics or in a broader sense of, Israel is prepared to go outside its borders?

MR. McCLELLAN: No.

Q Scott, you said at the beginning of this that Israel says that it was a terrorist camp that they hit. Do you have any independent confirmation of that from U.S. intelligence, or are you just taking their word for it?

MR. McCLELLAN: I don't have -- no, I don't have anything to share with you at this point.

Q The other question I had was, California is going to be a very important state for the President next year. Is Arnold Schwarzenegger the type of person that the President would like to have campaign for him in that state?

MR. McCLELLAN: There we go again, trying to draw me back into California. (Laughter.) We have great confidence in the people of California to decide this matter. And they will do that tomorrow.

Q But, Scott, hang on, let me -- the question I asked was, is Schwarzenegger the type of person that the President would like --

MR. McCLELLAN: No, no, John, this is a nice end around -- this is an end around to try to draw us into an election that is ongoing right now. You know that as well as I do -- by the smile on your face, I can tell. (Laughter.)

Go ahead, Jim.

Q On the U.N. resolution, I couldn't quite tell what you meant by your remark. Do you mean that it depends on what the language is whether or not the U.S. vetoes?

MR. McCLELLAN: **Well, there is discussion** going on at the United Nations. I would like to let those discussions continue. What I said was that it's important for the international community to speak out against terrorist attacks like the one that occurred in Haifa over the weekend. It's important to condemn those attacks in an unequivocal way, just as the President did on Saturday, after the attack occurred.

Q Scott, if I could, on a slightly different thing. On this -- on the support group that the President is talking about, from the NSC, for Mr. Rumsfeld and Bremer, I'm still a little fuzzy on this. (Laughter.) Could you explain in a little more detail what it is that they're doing and why, if there is a support group needed now, it wasn't needed before? I'm a little fuzzy.

MR. McCLELLAN: **Well, this will help** us focus efforts here in Washington, D.C. better. This is just an inter-agency coordinating group. It is common practice, the President noted, for the NSC to coordinate efforts of the Cabinet, and that's what this is about. This is set up to strengthen our assistance from Washington for the Coalition Provisional Authority's efforts in Iraq, and the Department of Defense's efforts in Iraq. This group can work to help cut through some of the bureaucracy and red tape here in Washington, D.C., so that we can make sure as our efforts accelerate in Iraq, that they're getting the full assistance from Washington, D.C.

Q So there was a sense that there had been a problem with cutting through the bureaucracy --

MR. McCLELLAN: No, I think, Jim, what you see happening now is we're entering a new phase. The Congress is considering the wartime supplemental now, this is a package that will provide a tremendous amount of resources to help us achieve our objectives in Iraq, and help to better secure the country and

help the country become a functioning society, so that Iraqis can assume full responsibility for their future.

And we're going to have a lot more resources going to that effort and we want to make sure that we're doing everything we can to support those efforts. You have four different areas that will be under this group. And keep in mind that this is at the under secretary level. There are often inter-agency groups that work on specific areas. And it will have a National Security Council member kind of overseeing each of the different subgroups within it. There's the counterterrorism, there's the economic issues, there's the political institutions, and then there's the communications side.

And within those, you're going to have some -- at the under secretary level -- Cabinet representatives. And they'll be looking at matters back here in Washington, D.C., looking at how can we cut through some of the bureaucratic red tape that goes on here in Washington, D.C. and make sure that the assistance is getting to the Coalition Provisional Authority. Nothing changes in terms of the Coalition Provisional Authority and the Department of Defense.

This is still being led by the Pentagon, and the Coalition Provisional Authority is carrying out their exact same duties they have been to help transfer responsibility to the Iraqi people as quickly as possible. There are often interagency groups that are formed for different matters like this.

Q Scott, on the same subject. Assuming that -- I would assume the President signed off on this and asked Dr. Rice to take charge and create this new group. Can you just illuminate what his thinking was? Why would the President want this group to form now? There was a group, but at a lower level, I understand, within NSC.

MR. McCLELLAN: Well, there are various levels. You have principals committee. You have the deputies committee. You have the policy coordinating committees. So that's all within this same kind of --

Q So why does the President now say --

MR. McCLELLAN: -- within this same kind of structure.

Q -- we need this group?

MR. McCLELLAN: Well, for the very reasons I said, because we've got this wartime supplemental that's being considered by Congress. There will be additional resources provided to our accelerated efforts in Iraq. And this will just help us focus in on those areas here in Washington, D.C. Again, this is what's happening here in Washington, D.C. to support the efforts over in Iraq, the efforts of the Coalition Provisional Authority.

Q There was a report, though, in the New York Times this morning that this decision emerged out of a meeting back in August, at the ranch. And I believe the supplemental wasn't even introduced at that point. So was there some other reason, too?

MR. McCLELLAN: No, there was -- we always have been looking at what the cost would be for moving forward in Iraq and transferring responsibility to the Iraqi people. When we came up with the exact cost, that's when we put those costs forward for the Congress to consider. But those discussions have been going on for some time.

Q If I can follow up, too. You just said, "this is still being led by the Pentagon." Could you just be a little bit more specific for what you mean by --

MR. McCLELLAN: Our efforts in Iraq. Our efforts in the reconstruction, the security system -- that's all being led -- and the Coalition Provisional Authority reports to Secretary Rumsfeld under that structure. That structure hasn't changed. This is just -- this is just back here in Washington, D.C., ways we can strengthen our assistance to what is going on in Iraq. There are often -- keep in mind, this is a common practice, there are often inter-agency groups formed for various issues, and this is one of them.

Q So how does the State Department have its input into this process now, under this structure? How does the State Department make its views known?

MR. McCLELLAN: Well, they make their views known through a variety of ways, through the principals committee, through the deputies committee. Again, this is an under secretary level that we're talking about on the Iraq stabilization group. And you need to keep in mind that various Cabinet departments will be part of that -- as you mentioned, State, Treasury, Transportation. There are going to be all sorts of Cabinet departments that will be part of this effort to help assist matters in Iraq. That's all it is.

Q So what you're actually saying is, there really is no change.

MR. McCLELLAN: In terms of the Pentagon and Coalition Provisional Authority, you're absolutely right.

Q So why are you having this group?

MR. McCLELLAN: They'll continue to do what they're doing. But this helps us focus in on those areas as we get more resources from the wartime supplemental.

Q Scott, the problem we're having, though, I think is, if this is the answer to a problem, then what was the problem?

MR. McCLELLAN: I didn't say it was.

Q But you wouldn't do it unless you needed it for some reason.

MR. McCLELLAN: Our efforts are accelerating in Iraq, and this is a way to focus in on those areas here in Washington, D.C., as more resources come in, so that we can do everything from Washington to support the efforts in Iraq.

Q So the problem was disorganization in Washington?

MR. McCLELLAN: No, I didn't say that. You're putting words in my mouth.

Q I'm trying to understand what you're saying.

MR. McCLELLAN: There are often inter-agency coordinating groups. I mean, I've walked through this; I think I've spelled it out pretty clearly. There will be four different areas involved in this group, and this is just a way to kind of strengthen our assistance to what's going on in Iraq.

Q Some analysts are reading this as a -- this new structuring as some kind of suggestion that the situation as it is was not being performed properly, or is some rebuke at the Pentagon --

MR. McCLELLAN: I think we're making great progress in Iraq. There's a lot of progress we're making on all fronts: the security front, the economic front, the democratic front; we're making a lot of progress in terms of opening schools, in terms of Iraqis graduating to form the first battalion of the their army over the weekend. So there's a lot of progress being made. But, again, there are a lot more resources coming in. And these are inter-agency working groups that are formed on a variety of issues. This is just another example of an inter-agency group to help with -- coordinate efforts here and provide some assistance and advice to the efforts in Iraq.

Q Is this also an effort to get some control on the communication of the information?

MR. McCLELLAN: Well, again, we'll provide assistance from this end to what is going on in Iraq. But those efforts are led by the Coalition Provisional Authority.

Q Did anyone in Congress say to the White House, we won't approve the \$20 billion until you've got better control on it here?

MR. McCLELLAN: I haven't heard that specifically.

Q And very narrowly on Syria, did Israel inform the Bush administration that it was going to hit --

MR. McCLELLAN: I already answered that. Randy asked that, and I said, no.

Q But just to be clear, if you can say declaratively --

MR. McCLELLAN: I can say it declaratively: no.

Q That?

MR. McCLELLAN: They did not.

Q Scott, when did Secretary Rumsfeld ask for this assistance from the National Security Council?

MR. McCLELLAN: I'm sorry? Well, this is something that's been discussed. I mean, as Kay pointed out, it was discussed back in August. Secretary Rumsfeld and Ambassador Bremer have been very involved in this process as we've moved forward. And, again, it's still in the early stages; the first meetings will begin soon.

But keep it all in perspective. This is an inter-agency working group, coordinating group. That's what it is.

Q So this is something that Secretary Rumsfeld asked for this kind of assistance and the White House responded?

MR. McCLELLAN: Secretary Rumsfeld and Ambassador Bremer were part of the process of forming this group. That's the way I would describe it.

Q And can I just go back to --



Q (Inaudible.)

MR. McCLELLAN: Well, it's often discussed throughout the Cabinet departments and throughout --

Q Was it one person's idea just to begin with?

MR. McCLELLAN: -- throughout the others. But there are a number of people that have input into it. Go ahead.

Q Getting back to the Middle East, the President reiterated today, as you have, the commitment to the road map. And, yet, across the Arab world there is great question about what that commitment actually means -- when Israel can continue with the settlement activity, can continue with the security fence and pay no price for it. Can you say what price Israel is paying for those activities?

MR. McCLELLAN: I've made it clear that we've made our views known on all those issues, on settlement activity, on the fence. We've made our concerns known. We continue to discuss those issues with the government of Israel as we move forward and remind everybody that they all have responsibilities.

But, again, let's not lose sight of what needs to happen. What needs to happen so that we can move forward on the two-state vision is for the Palestinian Authority to empower its cabinet to crack down on terrorism, to have a unified security force under its command, and then to go after the terrorist organizations and dismantle them. It's those terrorists that the enemies of a two-state vision, that are enemies of two states living side-by-side in peace. That's why we continue emphasize the need to dismantle those terrorist organizations.

Q I want to kind of follow up on Bob's question now on the Middle East. You've said several times now that Israel has the right to protect itself as long as it understands what the consequences are. If it feels it has a green light from the United States to move forward --

MR. McCLELLAN: We're not a traffic light.

Q Or that it's a --

MR. McCLELLAN: We're not a traffic light.

Q Well, whatever. You understand what I mean If they feel that they're -- what are the consequences of what their actions are, if they think they have the okay from the United States to do things like this? And they think they have the protection at the Security Council --

MR. McCLELLAN: Again, I just answered that, first part of that question. We've made it clear that to move forward on the road map, all parties have to accept their responsibilities and work to implement those responsibilities and keep in mind, the need not to escalate or heighten tensions in the region.

Q So the consequences, then, are that the road map will not proceed?

MR. McCLELLAN: Well, the consequences to what?

Q To Israel protecting itself.

MR. McCLELLAN: Well, when you take actions like this, you should keep in mind the consequences of what it means for the two-state vision, of what it means for Israel and the Palestinian Authority, and you have to keep in mind the consequences of the actions. Everybody needs to do that as they move forward.

Q That's what I was trying to find out -- what are those consequences?

MR. McCLELLAN: I think they know very well what the consequences are. And we are trying to work with all the parties to get back to the road map. We're in a difficult phase now, but the way to get back to that is for the Palestinian cabinet to crack down on terrorism, and that's the way forward.

Q How do you not heighten tensions and how do you move forward when attitudes are so hardened, so bitter, so stratified? And is it wise to push for a peace process at this time? Also, is the U.S. still concerned about --

MR. McCLELLAN: What we're pushing for at this time is an end to terrorism. What we're pushing for is for all parties to remember their responsibilities. And the first and foremost responsibility is the end to terrorism. Terrorists do not want to see two states living side-by-side in peace and security. They are trying to stop this process from moving forward. And we need to go after those terrorists and dismantle their infrastructure so that they can't continue to do that.

Q But what about a change in attitude, which takes years?

Q Are there any decisions or authority that will not -- that the working group will assume that -- from the State Department or the Defense Department? Are there any things that they once had the authority for, decision-making authority for, that will now --

MR. McCLELLAN: It's not -- it shouldn't be viewed as a decision-making body. It should be viewed as more of a coordinating and advisory body. That's what it should be viewed as.

Q So State and Defense will do exactly what they've been doing before? I'm just not clear on what --

MR. McCLELLAN: No, the roles haven't changed. It's exactly what I said. Let me try to be even more clear. As I said, we're going to have more resources from the wartime supplemental to help with our accelerated efforts that are going on now in Iraq, and we always want to make sure that here in Washington, D.C., that we're providing the best possible support for what is going on in Iraq. And that means when we have these resources, all these resources, that we want to cut through the bureaucracy, we want to cut through the red tape and make sure that we're getting the assistance there quickly so that they can carry out their priorities.

Q So it's the second supplemental that triggered -- that made this --

MR. McCLELLAN: Well, that's part of the new phase we're in, because we're accelerating our efforts, and part of accelerating our efforts is moving forward on the wartime supplemental so that we can prevail in the central front in the war on terrorism.

Q Scott, does the President believe that Ariel Sharon is still committed to moving the road map, the peace process forward?

MR. McCLELLAN: Yes, he does. But, again, there is terrorist --

Q -- conversation --

MR. McCLELLAN: Well, the purpose of the President's call was to express his condolences. They also talked about the need to avoid heightening tensions, the need to avoid escalation. And so that was discussed, as well. And we continue to urge all parties to avoid heightening tensions in the region -- that includes Israel, that includes Syria, that includes everyone.

Q Scott, on the energy deliberations. Over the weekend, as you know, the Washington Post published an account that one of the provisions under consideration would ease restrictions on the exports of bomb-grade uranium to several countries. And there's a possibility of this being subject to a Senate filibuster. Is the administration seeking the removal of this provision for national security --

MR. McCLELLAN: **Well, I think it's** something that we're reviewing at this point. It's not something that was part of our plan. The administration has had a long history of reducing the use of highly enriched uranium worldwide because of our concerns about nonproliferation. The President is strongly committed to fighting the spread of weapons of mass destruction. And so we have a long history there. But this is a provision that we're reviewing. We'll be working with members of Congress. That's where it stands at this point.

Q Will the President sign a bill that has that provision in it?

MR. McCLELLAN: Again, we're reviewing the provision. We haven't had an opportunity to fully review the provision. And we'll continue working with Congress, but I wanted to make our views very well known.

Q On the war supplemental, one issue under discussion is the possibility of attaching a child credit to that bill, because there are several military families that would benefit from a credit for that income that is not receiving a credit at this point. Would the administration support --

MR. McCLELLAN: Well, the President has made his views known on that

child credit -- tax provision, that Congress should pass it. But our view, when it comes to a wartime supplemental like this has always been that it should be clean and that it should be passed as quickly as possible, because the assistance is needed.

Q Turkey announced that it would contribute troops to Iraq. How many --

MR. McCLELLAN: **Well, actually they** -- I think their cabinet passed something, but their parliament still has to consider that action.

Q Okay. How many, what for --

MR. McCLELLAN: Again --

Q -- how significant is this?

MR. McCLELLAN: I think you need to let their parliament take its proper action. Their parliament has not acted on that. It's something that the cabinet did at this point. So it's continuing to move through the process there.

Q Scott, the Iraq survey group has spent something like \$300 million since the end of the war, attempting to verify and find caches of weapons of mass destruction, which they have not found yet -- so far, in terms of weapons caches. The supplemental is now --

MR. McCLELLAN: Let's point out what they have found, as well.

Q Let me finish my question.

MR. McCLELLAN: Okay.

Q The administration is now asking for an additional \$600 million. What exactly is the \$600 million for? And what will you say to the arguing from some that --

MR. McCLELLAN: We went through this --

Q -- you're throwing good money after bad?

MR. McCLELLAN: We went through this last week. In the wartime supplement, there is a classified section, just like there is any budget appropriation. And I'm not in a position to confirm or deny what's in there, or to get into a position of discussing what's in that classified section. And I'm sure no one in this room wants me to discuss classified information.

Q What about the argument, though, that it would appear to be throwing good money after bad?

MR. McCLELLAN: Well, let me mention that the Iraq survey group does continue to do its work. Dr. Kay pointed out over the weekend a lot of what they have found was not the focus of the initial coverage, and now I think it's important to look at what they have found, as well. Dr. Kay summarized in his report that was made public that -- and I quote that the report discovered what the report calls: dozens of WMD-related program activities and significant amounts of equipment that Iraq concealed from the United Nations during the inspections that began in late 2002.

He talked about the strain of botulinum toxin that were found. He talked about -- yesterday, about how a scientist was asked to keep a large amount of anthrax and turned that down. So there's a lot of work that continues. And it's important that the Iraq survey group continue to move forward on its work so that we can uncover the full extent of Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction programs.

He also talked a lot about their advanced design work on missiles, that there was a lot of activity in that report that was in clear violation of Security Council Resolution 1441. And it's important that they continue to do their work, and that's exactly what they're doing.

Q Could you say, then, that the attitude that you're looking for something to justify or back up the claims were -- the reasons for going to war is the wrong way of looking at the survey group?

MR. McCLELLAN: Well, I think if you look at the report and read the report, the summary of his report in full, you'll see justification for what we did. As Secretary Powell said, it made us even more convinced that what we did was the right thing. It shows that Saddam Hussein is a dangerous -- was a dangerous dictator. He is no longer in power. He has been removed from power. The world is better, and the world is safer, and America is more secure before of that action that we took in Iraq.

Q Scott, you mentioned earlier the White House doesn't want to get with a matter for the people of

California in the recall election. Yet, on Thursday, the President travels to Kentucky and will lend his support for the Republican candidate in that state. Why the --

MR. McCLELLAN: Well, this -- remember, this is an unusual situation that we're talking about in California. And you have -- I don't know how many candidates, but a lot -- and there is no -- there is not a primary -- a Democrat and Republican primary, per se, it's everybody running together at the same time. And the President has said from the beginning that this would be a matter for the people of California to decide and our position has not changed. But they are different circumstances.

Q Is it because there are two fairly prominent Republicans that are still in the race that the White House doesn't want to --

MR. McCLELLAN: It's for the unique situation that exists in California right now. First you have a recall that was initiated by the people of California, and a decision has to be made on that. And then there -- if they make a certain decision on that, then they proceed forward on the second ballot vote. But it's just a unique situation, and we are not involved in it.

Q Two things, Scott. One, House Republicans, led by Duncan Hunter, believe that the Defense Department has become too dependent on foreign suppliers who cut off needed material in a crisis. Hunter has introduced a buy American provision to the Defense Authorization Bill. The President opposes this. Why?

MR. McCLELLAN: Well, I think that you need to refer that question to Department of Defense. Those are decisions that the Department of Defense makes.

Q No, the President --

MR. McCLELLAN: We look to our military leaders to make those decisions.

Q The President has --

MR. McCLELLAN: I'll have to look at the specific provision you're talking about. But if it's in our statement of administration policy, then there you have it. But on matters like that, we will talk to the Department of Defense about it.

Q Second thing. Newsweek is reporting this week that Karl Rove told "Hardball" host Chris Matthews that Wilson's wife was, "fair game."

MR. McCLELLAN: I think there is a different response in that article, as well. But, look, the subject of this investigation --

Q Did he say that?

MR. McCLELLAN: Let's talk about this. The subject of this investigation is whether someone leaked classified information. That's what this is about. And there are some that are trying -- some that see this as a political opportunity to attack the White House, and so they're talking about all sorts of other issues. The issue here is a very serious matter, and it needs to be pursued to the fullest, and we want to get to the bottom of it. The President expects everyone in his administration to adhere to the highest standards of conduct. That is the tone he has set in his administration. That is the tone he has set here in Washington, D.C. And if someone leaked classified information, we want to know, and appropriate

action should be taken against that person.

Q Okay, but did Karl Rove tell Chris Matthews --

MR. McCLELLAN: Again, no --

Q -- it was fair game?

MR. McCLELLAN: Now we're trying to talk about other issues. The subject of this investigation --

Q Why can't we talk about --

MR. McCLELLAN: -- the subject of this investigation is, did someone leak classified information? And I addressed this very issue, it came up. If people differ with our views, that's fine, let's have a debate about that, let's have a good, honest debate about it. But the subject of this investigation -- no one wants to get to the bottom of it more than the President of the United States. And that's why we're pushing -- that's why we're making it very clear to the White House that we want to cooperate fully in this investigation. And the President --

Q On that subject, are investigators from the Department of Justice coming here to interview White House aides today, tomorrow?

MR. McCLELLAN: I think that -- I want to do everything I can to provide you with the information you need to do your job. But at the same time, let's recognize that this is an ongoing investigation. And I don't want to conduct that investigation from this podium. There are career prosecutors and investigators that are moving forward on this matter. And I want to make sure that we preserve the integrity of this --

Q But are --

MR. McCLELLAN: -- let me finish -- preserve the integrity of this investigation. I don't want to do anything that would hinder, slow down or harm their work. And if those investigators want information known, I'm sure that you can talk to them and they will provide you that information. But we may not know everything that they're doing. Obviously, they are pursuing the investigation, and they're doing it independently, as they should.

Q I'm not asking about the content of those conversations, by any means. I'm asking, do you know whether investigators are here this afternoon or tomorrow?

MR. McCLELLAN: But sometimes there are situations where investigators may want certain information to remain private as they move forward on the investigation. I'm not suggesting anything one way or the other, I'm just saying that I will provide you -- and I don't have anything to update you on with right now -- but if I can provide you that information in way that will help the investigation move forward, I will do so. But I think that those questions are properly directed to the career investigators at the Department of Justice. And if they want information known, I'm sure that they will share that information with you.

Q Scott, has the President asked his advisors how much or whether there was damage done to national security by this leak?

MR. McCLELLAN: I think that, one, there are certain things assumed in that question. The

investigation is ongoing at this point. And I think that the CIA is the one that will look at those matters. Where we are right now is, we want to move forward on this investigation and get to the bottom of this, and we want to do everything we can to cooperate in that investigation. If anyone has information, either inside or outside the administration, they should report it to the Department of Justice. But I think that, again, you should talk to the CIA about more specifics about that issue.

Q Did it first come to his attention in July?

Q You said a moment ago that the President expects all members of his staff to be held to the highest standards. Well, Ambassador Wilson yesterday, on "Meet the Press," said that even if Karl Rove did not actually originate this information, he condoned it by depicting Virginia Plame as "fair game."

MR. McCLELLAN: No, no, let's --

Q Do you believe that Karl Rove is upholding the highest ethical standards in doing that?

MR. McCLELLAN: Let's get something clear here about this investigation. Again, the subject of this investigation is whether someone leaked classified information. As I pointed out --

Q (Inaudible.)

MR. McCLELLAN: Can I finish, please? As I pointed out, there are some that are seeing this as a political opportunity to attack the White House, to try and bring down the White House. That's unfortunate. There is a difference between setting the record straight and doing something to punish someone for speaking out. We welcome a good, honest, straightforward debate. We welcome those who differ with our views. We welcome their views, those who differ with us. Freedom of speech is certainly a cornerstone of our democracy.

But there is a difference between setting the record straight when someone with differing views says something that is not backed up by the facts, as opposed to what some have suggested, that there was an effort to punish someone for speaking out against the administration. I think that's absurd.

Again, the subject of the investigation is whether or not someone leaked classified information. But if someone is talking about someone pointing out that a statement they made was not based on the facts and that it was wrong, that's simply setting the record state. And I think we should understand the differences there. But what you have now is some in this town -- and it all too often happens during an investigation like this -- some are now using this a political opportunity to seek partisan political gain.

Q Again, I'm sorry, I'm just following up on what the ambassador, himself, said, which was, there were two waves. The first wave was the original leak. The second wave was contacting six journalists and basically inviting them to go after --

MR. McCLELLAN: These are unsubstantiated accusations, let me remind you. But let me go back to the time period that we talked about. There were some statements made, and those statements were not based on facts. And we pointed out that it was not the Vice President's Office that sent Mr. Wilson to Niger. Director Tenet made it very clear in his statement that it was people in the counterproliferation area that made that decision on their own initiative.

There were also statements made that were portrayed as contradicting what the President said in the State of the Union address, when, in fact, Director Tenet also in that statement made it very clear that

those findings were inconclusive. So that's what I'm talking about here. You have some people that are trying to move the goal post. Because there is a very serious investigation going on, some people are now seeing that as a political opportunity to attack the White House. And they're moving the goal post and talking about issues that are not the subject of this investigation.

Randy, did you have something?

Q Yes. Does the President believe that -- excuse me -- that the Israeli strike in Syria escalated tensions in the Middle East? You said they shouldn't do that. Did that strike escalate tensions?

MR. McCLELLAN: Again, I think I addressed that when I said that Israel has a right to defend herself, but should always keep in mind the consequences of their actions. The President answered it, as well, earlier today. And where we are at this point in time is the President has urged everyone not to take steps that would escalate the situation, to avoid heightening tensions in the region. And that remains what we are going to continue to urge people to do.

Thank you.

END 1:54 P.M. EDT