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For Immediate Release
Office of the Press Secretary
July 3, 2003

Dr. Condoleezza Rice Discusses the President's Trip to Africa

Press Briefing by Dr. Condoleezza Rice, National Security Advisor,
On the President's Trip to Africa
The James S. Brady Briefing Room

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3:40 P.M. EDT

DR. RICE: Good afternoon. First, I'd like to provide a brief overview of the President's upcoming trip to Africa. And then I'll be happy to take your questions, as usual.

Africa is a continent of challenge and promise. The President is committed to helping African nations meet these challenges and fulfill that promise with policies and initiatives designed to extend liberty, prosperity and peace on the continent. As one of only two U.S. Presidents to visit Africa in his first term, President Bush's trip next week to Senegal, South Africa, Botswana, Uganda, and Nigeria is emblematic of this commitment.

The President and Mrs. Bush will depart the White House on Monday, July 7th, for an overnight flight that lands them in Dakar, Senegal, on Tuesday, July 8th. In Senegal, the President will meet with President Wade,

with whom he's met several times before. President Wade is a solid and progressive leader of West Africa's longest standing democracy and someone that the President admires as a statesman in the region. The President and Mrs. Bush will visit Goree Island, where the President will deliver remarks and tour a slave house with Mrs. Bush and President and Madam Wade. The President and Mrs. Bush will then depart for Pretoria, South Africa.

On Wednesday July 9th, the President will meet with President Mbeki, of South Africa, on a wide range of bilateral issues, as well as regional issues. They will then join Mrs. Mbeki and Mrs. Bush and other guests for a lunch. Later, the President and Mrs. Bush will join U.S. Ambassador Hume for dinner with South African and U.S. business executives.

The next morning, the President and Mrs. Bush depart Pretoria en route to Gaborone, Botswana. The President will meet with President Mogae, participating in a welcoming lunch with 500 of Botswana's leading citizens. He will then visit a Southern Africa Global Competitiveness Trade Hub Exhibit, where he will meet with -- among others -- several women entrepreneurs. The President and Mrs. Bush will also visit the Mokolodi Nature Reserve and then depart for Pretoria, where they will overnight.

On Friday, July 11th, the President and Mrs. Bush will depart for Entebbe, Uganda, where they will meet with President Museveni, to visit the Taso Clinic that is an AIDS clinic, and a patient support center, where he will give remarks and then depart for Abuja, Nigeria.

Saturday morning, President Bush will attend a briefing on HIV/AIDS programs and meet with mothers who are benefiting from the mother-to-child transmission prevention programs that the United States funds.

The President will then meet with President Obasanjo and deliver remarks to participants in the African/African-American biannual summit that was first organized by the late Reverend Leon Sullivan. The President and Mrs. Bush depart Nigeria for Washington.

I'm happy to take your questions.

Q Regarding Liberia, President Bush has said several times that Charles Taylor must leave now immediately. Can you clarify -- is Taylor's departure an absolute precondition before sending in any U.S. forces? Or is there a possibility that U.S. forces could go in while the details of his departure are being worked out?

DR. RICE: What the President is saying is that until there is -- until Charles Taylor is out of politics, there isn't going to be any stabilization of the situation in Liberia. It doesn't matter what kind of force you send in, it doesn't matter what you try to do, his leaving is a condition for the parties coming to a stable peace and beginning a political process.

So that's the point. I don't think we want to speculate on timing. But the fact of the matter is, Charles Taylor needs to leave because Charles Taylor is the problem. And Charles Taylor is, by the way, not just a problem for Liberia, he's a problem for the region.

One of the reasons that the President is concerned about the situation in Liberia is that Charles Taylor has been a source of insurrection and insurgency in surrounding countries. And the efforts to make stable places like Sierra Leone, in which the British are involved, are extremely important to the stability of West Africa. So Charles Taylor is a problem on a number of fronts.

Q Dr. Rice, as the American public is expecting U.S. troops to go into Liberia, what does it say to the American public that this is the second person that President Bush has asked to step down besides Saddam Hussein?

DR. RICE: Well, first of all, the President has made no decision on what approach and tactics the United States is going to use to help the United Nations and the regional powers deal with this very difficult situation in Liberia. That is still under consideration. As the President said earlier today, he wants to make a reasoned decision about what is going to be most effective in dealing with the situation in Liberia.

But the President calls them as he sees them. There wasn't any doubt that Saddam Hussein was a menace in the region, not to mention a menace to his own people. And Charles Taylor is a menace to his own people. But he is -- and by the way, there are lots of regional leader who also are very concerned about Charles Taylor -- and not just his activities in Liberia, which have been heinous and have driven the country into the situation that it's in now, but also his activities in the region.

Q **Dr. Rice, during the 2000 campaign**, the President said he would be judicious in the deployment of troops. As he considers this option, one among many, in Liberia, how would he define the national interest there? He said during the campaign that it needs to be in our vital interest for troops to be sent. How would you explain that to the loved ones of troops who may be sent in harm's way in Liberia?

DR. RICE: Well, again, Terry, I don't want to get out ahead in terms of what the President may or may not do about forces. He's considering his options. The President does believe that Liberia and the stability of West Africa is important to U.S. interests. This is a region that is only beginning to make some progress on being more stable. It is a region that is vital to -- its stability could be vital to progress on the continent, to which the President has devoted a lot of time and energy. He wants to see that go forward. There is a humanitarian situation there that needs to be dealt with.

And I think that we've also recognized since 9-11 that one wants to be careful about permitting conditions of failed states to create conditions in which there's so much instability that you begin to see greater sources of terrorism, for instance. And so, that's one of the issues.

It's also, of course, the case that we have a historic relationship with Liberia that is unlike our relationship anyplace else on the continent. And the President said all the way back in 2000 -- I do remember, I was there -- that some of the conflicts that had gotten out of hand in Africa -- like Rwanda, which ended up in the great humanitarian disaster there -- that you have to try and act with the regional powers, and you have to try to act with the world not to let something like that happen.

So there was never a sense that you simply stand back and say, we aren't going to touch a situation like this. The President believes in trying to be proactive. There is a political process that's being contemplated by the regional actors. And there's a cease-fire that needs to be secured. And so how we do that -- and I just -- again, how we do that is still at issue. But that the President is committed to trying to do it I think is very important.

Q Dr. Rice, if the President orders troops to Liberia, what's the -- of the troops? How long will they stay? And will the troops take offensive action against the -- forces in Liberia?

DR. RICE: Well, thank you for the question, but I don't want to speculate on a decision that the President has not yet taken. The key to regaining stability in Liberia is to, first of all, have the source of the problem not there. That's Charles Taylor. It's also a matter of the regional powers and the political actors in Liberia coming

to some agreement on a political process moving forward that could make for a smooth transition to a new government in Liberia.

So there's a lot of work that still has to be done on the diplomatic side. Colin Powell has been very active with the United Nations, with Ghana, with Nigeria, in trying to create the political conditions that make sense. There was a meeting today of ECOWAS, which we attended, which looks at what the regional powers may be able to contribute to that stability, but I think it's premature to try to get into questions of mission.

Q Dr. Rice, can you conceive of any circumstances in which the President would send in peacekeeping troops before Taylor steps down? Would it be enough, for example, for him to agree to a timetable, and then a peacekeeping force would go in to assure that?

DR. RICE: Well, Randy, I don't want to try, again, to speculate on exactly how all of this unfolds. But what's very clear, and what the President has been stating very clearly and what Secretary Powell has stated in all of his diplomatic conversations, is that there is not going to be a stable situation, I don't care what you try to do, there's not going to be a stable situation with Charles Taylor there. So that's what we're concentrating on, and I think we have to look at the details of how this will unfold.

Q -- **describe the meeting in Senegal with West African leaders?** What's that about?

DR. RICE: The one that he'll do in Senegal? It's West African leaders that are from small democracies. It's a chance to talk to -- very often when people talk about Africa, they talk about the humanitarian disaster. While we're obviously trying to deal with those problems, through the famine relief efforts that the President has made, the billion dollars we spend on famine relief, the \$200 million that we've requested for emergency famine relief, the \$15-billion AIDS package with \$10 billion of new money, a great proportion of which would go to Africa because you have 12 of the 14 hardest hit countries there -- it's not that we don't recognize the tremendous humanitarian challenges in Africa, but it's also important to celebrate those countries in Africa that are trying to do the right thing. And Senegal is one of those places. The countries that will come together with President Wade and President Bush in Senegal are also countries that are trying to do the right thing.

And if you notice, the Millennium Challenge Account, which increases over the next several years U.S. assistance by 50 percent, is really aimed at having worldwide, African, Latin American, other partners who are committed to good governance. And so when you go to Africa it's important to also celebrate the good things, and that's what the meeting with Western African leaders will be.

Q **You talked about, obviously -- everyone has talked** about the importance in Charles Taylor leaving, but can you enlighten us on the diplomatic discussions that you all are having in order to make that happen? Obviously, he's someone who has been indicted for war crimes. Is there any discussions about immunity or --

DR. RICE: I'm not going to go into the specifics of what's being discussed with Charles Taylor, except to say that I think there is broad agreement that he has done nothing to help his people and he's done a lot to hurt his people and to hurt the region. So let's see how it comes out. There are very, obviously, sensitive discussions going on right now, and I don't want to get into details of them.

Q -- the United States is absolutely committed to, to having him in a position to be tried for war crimes?

DR. RICE: The United States is committed to trying to build an environment in Liberia that's stable. And he has to leave. The circumstances of that, we'll see. The work that's being done by regional leaders on this is

extremely important.

Q Dr. Rice, is there any reason to believe that offering a \$25-million reward for Saddam Hussein will work any better than offering a \$25-million reward for Osama bin Laden?

DR. RICE: Well, first of all, I think the reward language says either for him or for word of what happened to him. We still don't know whether he's alive or dead. And --

Q Information leading to the capture, is what it says.

DR. RICE: Well, or to information leading to what may have happened to him before. We will take information on him, in general. Look, there's no doubt that it would be a very, very good thing to get Saddam Hussein and his sons, if they are still alive. And obviously, there are people in Iraq who worry about their continued existence, if they are continuing to exist. But I'm glad you asked the question, Bill, because I do think there's a tremendous difference between Saddam Hussein and Osama bin Laden.

Osama bin Laden sits in a cave and issues fatwahs as some kind of mystical figure. Saddam Hussein ruled the old-fashioned way: secret police, prisons, torture chambers, an army, territory, oil wealth. This is not somebody who can manage the Iraqi -- a repressive Iraqi government from someplace in a village. He rules by the old-fashioned way. And the people of Iraq should be assured -- reassured -- by what the President said the other day, the United States isn't going anywhere, the coalition isn't going anywhere. We're not going anywhere until there is a stable environment in Iraq for the Iraqi people to pursue a more prosperous future.

And the remnants of resistance that are there -- I hate to even glorify it with the word resistance -- the remnants of the thugs and crooks that looted their country and oppressed their countrymen will be rooted out and they will be taken care of. And really in that sense, it would be a very good thing to have Saddam Hussein. But he's not ruling Iraq, and he won't ever be ruling Iraq again.

Q Just a quick follow -- if we knew what had happened to him, would that stop this continuing insurrection?

DR. RICE: I don't know, because what he did was to pass out a lot of favors to people who now stand to lose those favors, because Iraq will be a society that's based on equality and a society that's based on merit. And so there are some people who, with or without Saddam, are probably feeling that they're going to lose now that he's been defeated.

But the President was very clear the other day -- whatever forces are trying to make it difficult for the United States to create the conditions in which -- the coalition to create the conditions in which the Iraqis can emerge and prosper, they can just forget about it. It's not going to happen. And the forces that do things like sabotage oil production or sabotage electrical supply are not hurting the coalition forces. They're hurting the Iraqi people. And they're the same forces that have been doing that to their countrymen for the last, nearly 30 years. And so maybe it's not surprising that they're still willing to do it to their fellow Iraqi citizens.

Q A quick follow on Liberia. Can you give us a sense of how the discussions on a possible deployment are going on? Is the U.S. in direct contact with Mr. Taylor? Or is the U.N. taking the lead?

DR. RICE: The United Nations is taking the lead in the diplomacy. The United States is in direct contact with ECOWAS, in fact, was represented at the meeting of the ECOWAS leaders earlier today. And we are in direct contact with the United Nations.

Q I wonder, Dr. Rice, if I could follow Dana's question.

DR. RICE: Sure.

Q **Are the discussions so sensitive that you cannot voice** an opinion about whether or not Mr. Taylor should face a war crimes tribunal? And also, in a radio interview yesterday, he accused the President of acting like the President of the world in trying to push out a democratically-elected leader. Do we not feel the election that brought him to power, the most recent one, was legitimate?

DR. RICE: I think people know the history of how Charles Taylor came to power. I also think people know the history of what Charles Taylor has done to his people. And I think everybody knows that Liberia, for instance, since 1990, has basically had no infrastructure. This is somebody who's done nothing to build it. This is somebody who has murdered and looted and really put the country in extremis. So the President is simply voicing what a lot of people in Liberia are voicing, not to mention most of the political movements in Liberia are voicing, which is that it's time for Charles Taylor to go.

Q And the question of --

DR. RICE: I'm not going to get into details of what the conversations are like with Charles Taylor at this time.

Q **Dr. Rice, are you concerned, especially now you have** so many questions about Liberia, that with the President's decision forthcoming, that it's actually going to take away from the original goal of this trip, which obviously is to highlight this first of its kind AIDS policy?

DR. RICE: That's, in part, up to you. I sincerely hope that people will focus on this tremendous positive agenda that this President has, over the last two-and-a-half years, developed for Africa. It's broad. It is a positive agenda. It deals not only with the humanitarian issues like AIDS and famine relief, but it deals with trying to bring the potential out in Africa -- something like AGOA, the African Growth and Opportunity Act, which is doing amazing things for African products so that markets are available for those products, and therefore, supporting poverty alleviation in small villages in Africa.

If you look at the Millennium Challenge Account, which I can tell you, sitting with these leaders when they come to see the President, they're all making -- going to make their case as to why they should be Millennium Challenge Account recipients. And those are criteria that speak to good governance. It speaks to investing in the health and education of your people. It speaks to the importance of open economies and free markets. It speaks to rooting out corruption, which has been one of the great killers of economic activity in Africa.

And of course, it's a broad agenda on education and on counterterrorism cooperation. This President takes seriously Africa, African leaders, and the potential of this continent to be a fully contributing continent to world growth and prosperity. And I hope that that's the agenda that really does come through.

Q **Dr. Rice, can you confirm anything about talks** being underway authorizing a U.S. resolution to use force in Taylor's removal?

DR. RICE: Secretary Powell is simply exploring at this point what needs to be done on the diplomatic side. But there are no formal talks.

Q Okay, and a follow-up to that, Mr. Taylor in various interviews has said that he needs three months to leave.

We've heard 45 days to leave. The President as recently as this morning said, "now." How do you reconcile that?

DR. RICE: I don't think that we can. We can't reconcile it. There are a number of people talking to Charles Taylor. The point to him, though, that's being made by everybody is that in order for this country to move on to a new phase, in order for his country to have political stability, he's got to leave.

Q Dr. Rice, one on Iraq and one on Liberia. First, Liberia. It sounds, if you're saying that the work of the countries in Africa, other African leaders, is vital to what's going on right now, as if the approach that you're using with Charles Taylor is similar to the approach that's being used with North Korea. You're trying to get regional players who perhaps know him a little better to influence his actions. Is that fair to say?

DR. RICE: Well, it's fair to say that the President has a view of all of these issues that the United States needs to partner with the countries and the leaders in the region in order to make this work and in order to make it stable.

We've talked about the fact that Taylor has to leave. We've talked about the fact that the political parties are going to have to come together around a transition mechanism to a new government. That's going to have to be supported by the regional leaders, as well. One of the problems in Africa is this tendency of people to -- in outside countries, to play factions and to arm factions and the like. That also has to stop. And so it's important that there be regional buy into any solution. And in that sense, I think that the -- it's just an approach that the President uses.

Q **And on Iraq, the number of U.S. casualties** that we're seeing since the President declared the end of major combat operations, is this the number of casualties for U.S. troops that you expected to see happening at this time when you launched this war?

DR. RICE: Look, any casualty is one casualty too many, whether we're in major military operations or what we're doing now. But the fact of the matter is, when the President declared major military operations over, he talked about the dangers that still were ahead. He's talked numerous times about the pockets of these Baathists and others who are trying to be determined not to let their fellow Iraqi citizens have a new and better future. And so we knew that it was going to be a dangerous time. I don't think anybody spent time trying to say, well, how you define dangerous. But that it might be possible that we would take more casualties, I think everybody understood.

Q **Dr. Rice, why is the President so reluctant in sending** troops to Liberia, while you have 140,000 U.S. troops in harm's way in Iraq?

DR. RICE: The President is simply considering what options are going to resolve this situation in Liberia. There's a diplomatic piece of this. There are questions about what methods, what kinds of forces, whose forces, what role the regional actors can play. And we're just putting the whole picture together. And the President is going to take a decision when he takes a decision.

But an American President is always reluctant to have forces go anywhere. But he hasn't made a decision. He's trying to -- as he said today, he wants to make a reasoned decision about what's going to work.

Q **You mentioned the President's agenda for Africa.** Next week, while he's there, the House Appropriations Subcommittee is very likely to fund both the Millennium Challenge Account and the AIDS initiative at levels

far lower than he has sought. How badly is that going to undermine that agenda, and what is your message to Congress as they --

DR. RICE: Absolutely. The message to Congress is that the President requested funding at the levels that he thought necessary to get the job done. And we are actively, all of us, actively engaging with the Congress to try and get full funding.

I think the President's commitment is clear to everyone. He has laid out initiative after initiative. These two very big initiatives are in many ways cornerstones, along with AGOA -- AGOA and other free trade agreements throughout our hemisphere, as well as Africa and Asia -- these are the cornerstones of the part of American foreign policy that seeks to make the world better.

Now, it's very often the case -- particularly for a President who has had to face the war on terrorism and the associated conflicts that have been a part of that -- it's very easy to just focus on American power. But American power has always had two parts. It does try to make the world more secure, and we're trying to do that in a number of ways. But it also has always been committed to values and to trying to make the world better. And these initiatives, plus trade and the words that we use about values, are the core of reminding the world that America is a country that is also devoted to the betterment of people.

So the President is hoping that the Congress will fully fund his initiatives. He just yesterday announced Randall Tobias as his AIDS Ambassador. We're ready to go. We're working very hard on how to stand up the Millennium Challenge program. And so, it's time for Congress to fully fund it.

Thank you very much.

Q One general question?

DR. RICE: Yes.

Q But what's the source of the President's commitment to Africa? It surprises some people that a conservative Republican from Texas has committed a humanitarian, economic, and now, perhaps, security level to Africa. Where does that come from?

DR. RICE: The President is -- as President, understands that America is a country that really does have to be committed to values and to making life better for people around the world. But that's what the world looks to America to do. It's not just the sword. It's also the olive branch that speaks to those intentions.

And the President, from the day he was elected, has had a real interest in people and leaders and countries that have a struggle, that have difficulties in front of them, but are willing to take those struggles and those difficulties on in an aggressive way.

Many of the African leaders that he met -- and he's met 22 of them -- but many of the African leaders that he's met have impressed him as people who, under very difficult circumstances, are trying, finally on this continent, to make steps toward making life better for their people -- people like President Wade, for whom he has enormous respect, or President Mogae in Botswana, who's done a great deal to make this economy better. They have struggles. Botswana has extraordinarily high AIDS infection rates among its population. On the other hand, he's been impressed with Uganda, which has been able to reverse that trend.

And what you see in his commitment to Africa is a desire to take the potential that is there and to work with people who are committed to making that potential. He'd be the first to say, you can't do it if you don't have leaders in those countries who are also committed. But he's been very committed to it.

On AIDS, from the very beginning he's said to those of us, I want to try to do something on this. And I think he was impressed with what Kofi Annan said to him about AIDS. He was impressed with what Bono said to him about AIDS, what the leaders, like Museveni, were saying to him. He's wanted to do something about that because he's said that a great country cannot let this pandemic continue and not try to intervene.

And then, finally, of course, Africa is a part of America's history. You know, Europeans and Africans came to this country together -- Africans in chains. And slavery was, of course, America's birth defect. And we've been trying to deal with the consequences of it every since and to bring about reconciliation. The President on Goree Island is going to have a chance to talk about that experience, but also to look forward to the tremendous contributions of African Americans to this country.

So America is a country of immigrants, but, of course, our experience with Africa has this other piece that wasn't exactly an immigrant experience. And yet it is the motherland, of course, a source of cultural pride for a substantial part of America's population. And the President cares about that.

Thank you.

Q Why not an apology for slavery?

DR. RICE: Thank you very much.

Q **Why not an apology for slavery, Dr. Rice? Why not?**

DR. RICE: The President is going to talk about and acknowledge what has -- what slavery has meant to Africa and has meant to America. But there is plenty of blame to go around about slavery. He's going to look forward to the tremendous contributions that we've made, and he's going to look forward to how to help Africa finally realize its potential.

Thank you.

END 4:10 P.M. EDT