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Press Briefing by National Security Advisor Dr. Condoleezza Rice on the President's Bilateral Meetings

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PRESS BRIEFING BY

NATIONAL SECURITY ADVISOR DR. CONDOLEEZZA RICE

ON THE PRESIDENT'S BILATERAL MEETINGS

JW Marriott

Bangkok, Thailand

11:20 A.M. (Local)

DR. RICE: Good morning, afternoon or evening, depending on where your body clock is at this particular point in time. I'm going to speak just for a couple of minutes about the two meetings that were held this morning, and then I'd be glad to take your questions.

The President this morning had a very good breakfast with President Roh of South Korea. They talked about the wide range of issues and the very strong relationship between the United States and South Korea. The President was able to thank President Roh for the commitment that South Korea has made, in principle, to help with troops for Iraq. It is a matter that they will discuss over the next period of time as to exactly what composition or what the nature of those forces have been -- will be, but the President reiterated his agreement in principle that South Korea should be very involved in the reconstruction of Iraq. Of course, the South Koreans have also committed financial resources of \$200 million over the next three years to Iraqi reconstruction.

They had a good discussion also of the North Korean issue, reaffirming their desire and goal of a non-nuclear Korean Peninsula; reaffirming that that means that the North Korean regime must give up its nuclear ambitions and dismantle its programs. And the President, as he had yesterday with President Hu and, prior to that, with Prime Minister Koizumi, discussed his willingness to explore ways that we might move the six-party talks forward, looking for ways within the six-party context to assure the North Koreans of what people have said --

what he himself has said, which is that there is no intention to invade North Korea. But the President is very committed to the six-party talks, believes that it is the forum in which we are most likely to get a satisfactory resolution of the nuclear problem on the Korean Peninsula. And so he reiterated the importance of moving those talks forward.

They were able to talk about a number of other bilateral issues, including the upcoming APEC talks, the situation at Cancun, economic and trade issues. And overall it was just a really very, very good conversation.

There was also a meeting this morning with President Fox of Mexico. And the two Presidents talked about how important it was to focus now on NAFTA and the next phases of NAFTA. President Fox has been very concerned, as everyone knows, about the fact that there's not an equal distribution of the benefits of NAFTA throughout Mexico, and how to improve the competitiveness of North America in the world trading system.

There is a North America initiative that the two Presidents are talking about, both private and public sector efforts to improve through NAFTA our competitiveness as a region. They talked about that. Talked some about immigration. The President -- the two Presidents reaffirming that it is important that we be able to move forward on their desires for an immigration policy that is humane and recognizes the relationship between willing workers and willing employers, but that they would rather get this very sensitive issue right, rather than try to move it quickly. And so they reaffirmed their desire to think about those issues.

Talked about a number of other bilateral issues, and the President thanked President Fox for Mexico's very constructive role in the completion of the recent U.N. Security Council resolution on Iraq.

So that's the general lay of the land in this morning's meetings. The President will, shortly, this afternoon, be off to the first sessions of APEC, where he looks forward to discussing two of the cornerstones of his policies at home -- one, the importance of economic security, the opportunity to talk about trade, to talk about free trade that is also fair, so that we can have a level playing field, because the President believes that American workers can compete when there is a level playing field. And so the APEC talks on trade will be especially important -- trade and economics.

Talk about economic growth and how to get the world economy growing, and also about security matters, because APEC is recognizing now, I think, that it is -- security and economics are inextricably linked. And so they will have a discussion later on during the session about security matters.

Okay? Steve.

Q What's the status this morning about the effort to get security guarantees for North Korea? Are you circulating a draft among the parties, among the -- are you at that stage yet? And what sort of verification procedures would you need to have?

DR. RICE: Steve, this is just the beginning of consultations. The President wanted to have the consultations with some of the most affected countries. We'll, obviously, also be talking with the Russians. The six-party framework is extremely important because it has all of the near stakeholders at the table. It's true that the entire international community has an interest in a non-nuclear Korean Peninsula, but obviously, for China, Russia, Japan, South Korea and the United States, this is a matter of near-term neighborhood. And so the six-party talks are extremely important. We will be consulting.

What the President has done here is to simply say to people: The six-party talks are an outstanding framework

in which to do this. Let's try to move the talks forward. We understand that the North Koreans have some security concerns that they would like to have addressed. Let's look at how we might address them.

Clearly, we -- the President made clear that this wouldn't be a formal treaty. And we have not gotten very far or been very successful with bilateral arrangements with the North Koreans, which is why the President has insisted all along that there be six-party talks. But it does give us now an opportunity to start consulting about precisely how to move this process forward.

Q Have you gotten any feedback yet at this point from North Korea, indirectly or directly, on whether this kind of a process would fly? Nothing else in the past has seemed to have worked.

DR. RICE: We've gotten no feedback from North Korea and I don't know what their reaction will be. The fact is, though, that if the North Koreans are, in fact, serious about trying to move this process forward, if they are, in fact, serious about having security concerns, then I would think they would welcome an opportunity to talk to their nearest neighbors about the problem.

Q How soon -- two questions here; they're unrelated. How soon do you think you might be able to get some sort of framework for this multilateral security assurance -- in the next two to three weeks? And also can you speak to this new agency which would handle the international aid for Iraq?

DR. RICE: John, the first thing is that we have not come to a conclusion on what the nature of the way forward to address North Korean security concerns is. That's part of the consultation process. But within this six-party framework, we believe that whatever we come up with is likely to be more enduring than what we've been able to have in the past, because you'll have all the stakeholders at the table.

And so there hasn't been very much discussions. This is why we want to have consultations with people. This is very much not just a U.S.-North Korean issue, not just a U.S.-North Korean problem, it is a problem for the international community, and it's especially a problem for the states of the six parties. So it only makes sense that before we go and decide we're going to go that direction that we have consultations with the people who are involved in this. And I mean deep consultations, taking their ideas, taking our ideas and seeing what makes sense moving forward.

In terms of -- I guess you're referring to the story this morning about something being set up in Iraq. This is referring to, I believe, what's called the multidonor fund. It is something that we have known has been in the works for some time; we've been very supportive of it. It's a trust fund that would be run by the World Bank. There is a similar trust fund of this kind in Afghanistan. Its purpose is to provide a vehicle for donor-directed funding of priorities that the Iraqi people might have. And the real benefit, in many ways, goes to small and medium-size donors who have no large-scale apparatus to administer their donations and their funding. And as I said, there is one in Afghanistan. We've known about it for some time; we're completely supportive of it. And I will tell you that comments that somehow this was a turnabout are simply not true. I've been aware of it for some time; we've been supportive of it.

Q The suggestion is that monies raised at the Madrid Conference would go into this trust fund. Is that correct?

DR. RICE: It is a vehicle that could be used for monies raised at the Madrid Conference. Monies raised at the Madrid Conference might go into other funding streams, as well. But the thing to keep our focus on here is that all of this funding goes to the highest priority task of the Iraqi people in rebuilding their economy. And we are very supportive of this kind of effort, and we think it will work just fine, as we believe it's worked just fine in

Afghanistan.

Q So when The New York Times reports that this is a concession by the administration because Ambassador Bremer said we've got to give up on our principle because we need the money so badly --

DR. RICE: That doesn't even sound like Ambassador Bremer, all right? Let me just be very clear. It doesn't even sound like Ambassador Bremer. And nobody is giving up on any principle here. The issue is to help the Iraqi people rebuild, to get donations for the Iraqi people to be able to do that.

The reconstruction plan has been put together by the Coalition Provisional Authority. There has been Iraqi input into that -- not just Iraqi input, it's been put together really with the priorities of the ministries of Iraq. And I'm quite certain that the proceeds from this fund, as well as from the development fund for Iraq, which comes from Iraqi assets, as well as the monies that go in from the United States are all going to go to the same purpose, which is to rebuild Iraq's infrastructure, get the Iraqi people and their country on its feet. And that's the principle on which we are operating, that we need to get Iraq rebuilt as quickly as possible.

Q To be clear on that point, so the money that the Congress is in the process of approving, the \$20 billion, that money won't funnel down to this new --

DR. RICE: No, that's right. That money does not funnel through this fund. But there are World Bank trust funds like this in a number of cases. I believe there is one for the Gaza. There is one for Afghanistan. And it's a very good thing. Donor-directed funding is not an unusual concept. And so from our point of view, to be able to do this is a good thing.

Q Can you just comment on what seems to be a phenomenon here with getting other countries to help financially with the reconstruction that essentially they're saying to the American government, you have to jump through some hoops before we're going to take part in this process? Do you dispute that?

DR. RICE: Yes, David, I don't think anybody sees it that way. At least nobody sees it that way who has actually been working on these things. This is another facility, another vehicle by which we can help reconstruct the Iraqi economy. As I said, it is especially helpful to small and medium-size donors who don't have an apparatus like USAID or large-scale measures by which to monitor and the like. And so there is a very clear -- the World Bank did a very clear needs assessment, so people know what the needs look like. They know what funding can be put against to help the Iraqi reconstruction. And it makes perfectly good sense.

Q -- even beyond this particular framework. I mean, why is this administration having comparatively more difficulty with the reconstruction of Iraq than certainly in the first Gulf War, which was amply paid for by the international community?

DR. RICE: Well, first of all, the first Gulf War was not about the reconstruction of Iraq. It was about expelling Saddam Hussein from Kuwait -- different kind of problem and with certain countries, like Kuwait, for instance, literally occupied by the Iraqis. So I think that the analogy is not really apt.

We're actually having good effect in getting countries to be involved in the reconstruction of Iraq. We have more than 30 countries now involved on the ground in Iraq. You're going to see many, many more. The U.N. Security Council resolution, which gives to everybody a sense that the international community is coming together around the proposition that Iraq must be stable and prosperous and on a democratic path, I think has

given new impetus to this.

We'll have the Madrid donors conference, we'll get donations out of that. We've already gotten a large donation from Japan, we've gotten a donation in the last couple of days from South Korea. I think you're going to see more and more countries involved in this reconstruction.

Q Are you suggesting that it was always contemplated that the money raised at the donors conference would be distributed through this fund?

DR. RICE: No, I'm saying, Bill, that this issue, this fund has been discussed for a number of, I believe almost months now, but certainly a couple of months -- I've been aware of it myself for a couple of months -- that this might be a vehicle that donors might wish to use, a donor-directed fund run by the World Bank, a trust fund run by the World Bank that would be directed at the various needs of the Iraqi people. The World Bank is very involved. This makes sense for the World Bank to run this, and we're perfectly --

Q But you were hoping for perhaps better results that are now expected from the donors conference. Where was that money to have gone? Through this fund, or directly into --

DR. RICE: First of all, Bill, I don't know where the notion that we were expecting X and were only going to get Y comes from --

Q From the other nations --

DR. RICE: The donor conference is about to take place, and we believe that we're going to get very good cooperation and very good support from the Madrid Conference. But the important thing is that countries are starting to step forward with their contributions. The Japanese have stepped forward with a large contribution; the South Koreans and others. I think you're going to start to see quite a bit of support for the reconstruction. People want Iraq to succeed.

Where the Madrid proceeds might go, since the Madrid Conference has only been on the drawing board for a couple of months in itself, this is a perfectly good vehicle for people to use to make those contributions. I'm sure that there might be other vehicles, as well. But World Bank trust funds of this kind are not only not rare, their use -- it's been used in Afghanistan, it's been used to good effect in Afghanistan. And we think this is a good way to proceed.

Q Two quick things. You said the other day that the President was working the phones and writing letters in advance of this Madrid Conference. Can you give us an update on that?

DR. RICE: Well, he's been working personally here, because he's been able to encounter a number of leaders. It's, frankly, a little bit harder with the Asian time change to get some of these phone calls done. He is still sending letters, and he will be doing more.

Q Can you tell us who --

DR. RICE: He has sent some letters to Gulf states. I think he will try and talk with at least a couple of European leaders over the next few days. But he's been very actively engaged particularly here and is encountering a lot of the leaders here that he most wanted to talk to about this.

Q -- has he spoken with Tony Blair at all since he's been in the hospital?

DR. RICE: He's not yet spoken with Prime Minister Blair. We were very glad to hear, obviously, that the Prime Minister is doing well, and I'm sure at some early time they will have a chance to speak.

Q A quick return on the Korea thing. I'm confused by the timing issues that are up in this, because the North Koreans have always said, of course, we must have a security agreement before we can even go on to discuss the nuclear issues. I suspect, but don't know for sure, that what you're talking about is describing a general possibility of a security arrangement, but not actually giving them this agreement until you see serious disarmament. Do I have that right?

DR. RICE: David, the key here is that anything having to do with security guarantees obviously also has to do with performance by the North Koreans, and has to do with the North Koreans being willing, able, and verifiably capable of carrying out the obligations that they undertake.

I don't want to talk about, at this particular point in time, what timing we may use because, as I said, we want to discuss this with our partners. We are not going to go in, all guns blazing, say take it or leave it, this is it. But one thing should be very clear: this has to be performance-based. What will not work is that the North Koreans somehow believe that they have security guarantees, and then they are prepared and allowed to do the kinds of things that they did with the agreed framework, which was to start to unravel that by going another route to a nuclear weapon.

So this is going to take some time, but you have within the six-party context an opportunity to address with the North Koreans their security concerns, but most importantly, to address what the rest of the six-party -- members of the six-party framework are concerned about. And that's a non-nuclear Korean Peninsula, where the North Koreans commit, freeze, and dismantle their nuclear programs.

Q To follow that, your use of the phrase, "this is going to take some time," I take it from what you said in the pre-briefs and what the President declined to answer yesterday in the way of the question, that you folks think you have time and that whether the North Koreans have two weapons, four weapons, six weapons a few months from now doesn't make a substantive difference in what you're doing. The size of the arsenal is not a matter of concern.

DR. RICE: David, what makes a difference here is that you have six -- you have five members of this six-party arrangement who are determined to see a non-nuclear Korean Peninsula, determined to see an end to the nuclear programs of the North Koreans, determined that it needs to be verifiable in some way that they have done so, and that's what we are focused on. This is the best framework and the best opportunity that we're going to have to deal with a problem that, frankly, has been brewing for some time.

Let's not forget that, seven or eight months ago, if you had said that we were going to be involved in six-party talks about the North Korean nuclear program, that we would have a strong Chinese role in the six-party talks, that you would have unity at the table about the dismantling of the North Korean program, and that we would now be moving toward looking at how we might actually deal with the North Korean security concerns, people have said well, that's pretty ambitious.

And so this problem didn't start yesterday; this problem started quite a long time ago, probably in the late '60s, certainly in the early '70s with the North Koreans. It's never really been dealt with effectively. They tried in '94 with the agreed framework. It worked for a while and then shortly -- not too long after, the North Koreans started pursuing another route to a nuclear weapon, so they were obviously not really serious about their

commitments under the agreed framework.

So all of that in the past, most of which relied on bilateral U.S. -North Korean interaction, didn't solve the problem. We now have an opportunity within the six-party framework to resolve the problem in a durable way. And it's a problem that has been there for a while. It is a problem that has been growing for a while. It may take some time to finally unravel it. But we're in better shape to do it now than at any other time and, I would daresay, much better shape than anybody thought we would be in by this time.

Q You mentioned the President might pick up the phone and call some European leaders. Three members of the G-8, as you know, Russia, France, and Germany, have said they will not participate in this process. Such big, powerful economies -- must send a signal to other countries. Do you have any plans to try to change any minds here, or is that a lost cause?

DR. RICE: No, we believe this is an evolutionary process and, as the Iraqi reconstruction goes on and as it becomes important to establish good relations with what will be a new and we believe vibrant Iraq, we believe that people will consider what they ought to do on reconstruction.

Q Two questions. First, can you describe the atmospherics between the two men? Have the tensions that were between them a couple of years ago completely dissipated? And secondly, on immigration, what you said sounds an awful lot like what was said last year after their meeting at APEC. Can you describe what progress there's been on the immigration issue since last year?

DR. RICE: The immigration issues are difficult and sensitive issues. And I think that everybody understands that the post-9/11 environment has made all of this, if anything, more difficult. But we're making a lot of progress on, for instance, some elements of smart -- smart borders, the kind of work that Tom Ridge has been doing with his colleagues, that is improving the border, even in the absence of new initiatives on immigration, per se. The movement of goods and people being helped by technology, the ability to sort between what is legal and safe and what is not, those are the kinds of things that I think are going to help improve the atmosphere on this issue in general.

But the Presidents have always made clear, and I think both of them have a strong commitment to humane immigration policies that recognize the realities of Mexico's and the U.S.'s relationship. In the longer-term, they are trying to work through it through the Mexican economy and growth in the Mexican economy so that the best workers, as Fox himself -- President Fox himself has said, can stay home and find good work. But in the short-term, I'm sure that they will continue to work on the issues. They want to get it right. They've made very clear that they want to get it right.

I'm sorry, the first question was?

Q The atmospherics and whether there was any tension.

DR. RICE: No, the atmospherics were great. In fact, the President had called President Fox several days ago before getting here, simply to say, I'm looking forward to seeing you. What happened has happened, and I think that it was a relaxed and really warm discussion and they're looking forward to meeting again.

I saw one other hand. Yes.

Q Is there -- back to North Korea for just a moment. Is there a link between U.S. troop reduction review in

South Korea and North Korea's demands for assurances? What's the link there, or is there --

DR. RICE: First of all, the kind of worldwide assessment of American force strength and the end of the Cold War is something that's just underway. The President hasn't made any decisions. He told President Roh this morning that, of course, that we've made -- he has made no decisions, no one has made any decisions. And so it's not an issue, of course, there's not a link.

Q On Mexico, again, did the President commit to President Fox a timetable for passage of a guest worker program, which Fox is under pressure at home to get passed? Was there any talk of when that would happen?

DR. RICE: They talked about the importance of dealing with this sensitive issue sensitively and recognizing that they want to do it right. They did not talk about timetables. But I think you will -- you will see that both Presidents are committed -- as they were committed when they were both governors -- to immigration policies that are humane, immigration policies that take account of the situation of Mexican workers, immigration policies that try to match willing workers and willing employers. But they recognize that these are hard issues and they're going to work through them in a way that makes sense for both countries.

Q Quickly on this Malaysia issue. Should we expect the President to speak out about the Prime Minister's comments? And in what way do those comments, which the President's spokesman described as "hate-filled," sort of underscore what you're up against with in the Muslim world?

DR. RICE: Well, I do not think that the comments that Prime Minister Mahatir made are emblematic of the Muslim world. The President has gone out of his way to talk about the fact that this is not a war of religions, this is not a "war of civilizations." This is a separation of people who hate and kill and maim, and people who are trying to build a peaceful world and send their kids to school without worrying about them blowing themselves up. I mean, it's a -- the great majority of populations, Muslim, Christian, Jewish and all others, want many of the same things.

Everybody thinks that the comments were hateful, they were outrageous. I think that the leaders may have an opportunity to talk about it at some other time. But right now, the key for everybody is to step back and give no cover to people who kill because they want to kill. It is not a matter of the Muslim faith, it's a perversion of the Muslim faith. It is not a matter of grievances, of political grievances. It is a matter of murder, mass murder and killing. And I think as long as we keep the focus on that's what terrorism really is -- terrorism is an effort not to improve political circumstances; it's an effort to end the conversation.

Q Did President Bush condemn those remarks today?

DR. RICE: I think the President thinks those remarks were reprehensible.

Thank you.

Q May I just ask one more question about the donors conference? I'm sorry. And this, I think, is important in light of the fact that you created the Iraq Stabilization Group to help coordinate the relief efforts. What do you do -- if part of the money from the Madrid Conference goes into this trust fund, how do you coordinate the relief efforts?

DR. RICE: Because there are plenty of needs of the Iraqi people that need to be met. Those needs are outlined, both in a World Bank needs assessment and in the plan that the Coalition Provisional Authority put together

with the Iraqi ministries. And for donors to be able to direct or to decide they'd like to work on this problem or that problem is unproblematic. I mean, it's a good thing that people want to be involved in the reconstruction of Iraq and I simply don't see it as a problem.

Thank you.

END 12:49 P.M. (Local)