

From: "Speicher, William R."
To: "McGinn, Megan E."
Subject: RE: Press Briefing by Tony Snow
Received(Date): Mon, 16 Jul 2007 13:56:16 -0500

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From: McGinn, Megan E.
Sent: Monday, July 16, 2007 2:53 PM
To: Speicher, William R.
Subject: RE: Press Briefing by Tony Snow

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From: Speicher, William R.
Sent: Monday, July 16, 2007 2:52 PM
To: Hennigan, James R.; McBride, Lea A.; McGinn, Megan E.; DL-OVP-WW
Subject: RE: Press Briefing by Tony Snow

Printed. Thanks.

From: Hennigan, James R.
Sent: Monday, July 16, 2007 2:46 PM
To: McBride, Lea A.; McGinn, Megan E.; Addington, David S.; Patel, Neil S.; Morgan, Derrick D.; DL-OVP-WW; O'Donnell, Claire M.; Whitelaw, Aimee; Baker, Grey D.
Subject: Press Briefing by Tony Snow

EXCERPT OF NOTE--

Q Good, thank you. The President's fellow Republican and presidential candidate, Congressman Duncan Hunter of California said, if the President of the United States is going to commute the sentence of Scooter Libby, he should immediately accompany

that with a pardon for Border Patrol agents Jose Compean and Ignacio Ramos. And my question: Since there are a hundreds of sponsors of a bill to this effect, these two agents are in solitary. Why won't the President show the same mercy to them that he showed to Libby?

MR. SNOW: We do not discuss any of those matters, whether they're under consideration or not, and you know it.

Q No, I've heard you discuss them.

MR. SNOW: No, you didn't.

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

July 16, 2007

PRESS BRIEFING

BY

TONY SNOW

James S. Brady Briefing Room

12:27 P.M. EDT

MR. SNOW: Okay, a couple of things to read out for you before we go to questions.

First, the President had a SVTS with Baghdad, spoke for an hour and 12 minutes with Iraqi officials this morning. It began with a one-on-one with Prime Minister Maliki. They discussed the political and military challenges going forward. The President stressed the importance of political reconciliation and progress first with the Iraqi people, to build a stronger sense of national unity and shared purpose. He also made it clear that political progress is essential for continued support here in the United States; political progress from the top down in the form of legislation, and from the bottom up, the sort of thing we have seen in some of the provinces as witnessed by public support for and cooperation in securing Iraq and building political institutions.

He encouraged efforts to build a strong unity coalition and to pass key legislation. They also discussed improving security conditions in different parts of the country. He got an update from the Prime Minister, for instance, on developments in Diyala. The President reaffirmed his strong support for Prime Minister Maliki.

They were joined later by the members of the presidency council: President Talabani and Vice Presidents al-Hashimi and al-Mahdi. He thanked them for their work, encouraged them to continue working for the Prime Minister, and once again stressed the importance of moving forward in having constructive action on the legislative and political fronts, and expressed a desire to keep meeting regularly to exchange ideas and to get updates.

In addition, a little more context on the speech that the President is going to be delivering in the next hour. About five years have passed since his Middle East speech of June 24, 2002.

The President will review the developments, positive and negative, since then. He'll reaffirm his commitment to a two-state solution, and describe this as a moment of choice.

The Palestinians will have to choose between the path laid out by President Abbas and Prime Minister Fayyad, one of peace and statehood, or the Hamas way, of extremism and violence. He'll place the challenges as part of a wider struggle between extremists and those seeking justice, dignity and peace. He'll talk about, for instance, the assaults on democratic efforts in Iraq, Afghanistan, Lebanon and also, of course, with the Palestinian areas, and the roles played by, among others, Hamas, Hezbollah, al Qaeda, Iran and Syria.

He will talk about helping the forces of moderation led by President Abbas and Prime Minister Fayyad: financially, \$190 million this fiscal year; institutionally, building institutions necessary for a peaceful, democratic state; diplomatically, not only in efforts with Israel, but also with regional partners and, in a larger context, with the international community, led by the Quartet.

He's going to note that all parties have responsibilities. The Palestinians have responsibilities; he will describe those. The Israelis have responsibilities; he will describe those. And the Arab states have responsibilities, which he will describe, as well.

He'll propose a larger diplomatic efforts and international conference that will review support for Palestinian institutions, the democratic institutions I discussed before, the ones that Quartet representative Tony Blair has been working on.

And, finally, overall, the speech really reaffirms the basics: a two-state solution, not merely the larger challenge of fighting terrorism, but also supporting freedom and democracy. And he will have some steps to move forward toward achieving those goals.

Questions.

Q Lee Hamilton expressed some doubts about Maliki today. I take it that the President doesn't share those doubts and he thinks that Maliki can get the job done in Iraq.

MR. SNOW: Yes, but the President also -- the President made it clear that he understands how difficult it is and he also understands that leaders have to take on difficult situations and make accomplishments. But, yes, he is -- he supports the Prime Minister and he made that very clear today.

Q The President said he wants progress. What did the Prime Minister tell the President --

MR. SNOW: I'm not going to tell you what the Prime Minister told the President. I'll let the Iraqis read out their side. But it is clear that the Iraqis do understand the importance of political accomplishments.

Q Who drew up this plan? Was it Israelis and Saudis and our -- or State Department worked with them --

MR. SNOW: Who drew up this plan?

Q Yes.

MR. SNOW: Well, typically something like this -- you're talking about what the President will be describing today? We worked it out within the administration. That involves the NSC, it

involves the Department of State, but it is not something that has been vetted or run by other governments.

Q Why not?

MR. SNOW: Because they --

Q And how about with Congress?

MR. SNOW: Members of Congress will get some notification, they will have a chance to see it.

Q When you talk about Prime Minister Maliki having a clear understanding that progress needs to be made, we've heard that for a long, long time. Is there something new that suggests the President -- an urgency --

MR. SNOW: I simply do not want to get into the particulars of conversations from the Iraqi side. But it is a safe characterization to say that they do understand the importance not only for the Iraqi people, but for the American public of seeing political progress.

Q What does the President see in Prime Minister Maliki that leads him to giving his strong support?

MR. SNOW: Well, keep in mind that the President not only speaks regularly with the Prime Minister, but also with our people on the ground -- Ambassador Crocker, General Petraeus and others. And they're also in regular contact with the Prime Minister. But I don't -- Jim, at this point, I don't want to get into particulars that the Iraqi government may be engaged in just because it's important --

Q But I mean in the big picture, when you say the President gave strong support -- communicated strong support to Prime Minister Maliki, what is that strong support based on?

MR. SNOW: The strong support is based on not only his measure of the Prime Minister, it's also what he's hearing from the Prime Minister; it is conversation also with the readouts and the conversations that the Prime Minister and others in his government are having with senior diplomats either at the State Department or in our embassy in Baghdad. It's a combination of factors where -- again, as a result of communications that the President has been having with the government of Iraq.

Q I would think if you're making your case not just to Congress, but to the American people about, stay with us, we need more time here to let this all unfold, that you could say, and Prime Minister Maliki is our guy because -- because of what?

MR. SNOW: Again, Jim, I know that you want me to start talking about things that have been discussed confidentially between the two heads of state --

Q No, I just mean, you can't say --

MR. SNOW: Well, big picture --

Q -- why we support this guy?

MR. SNOW: Yes. Number one, he is committed to political reconciliation and political progress. Number two, he is committed also to dealing with the tough issues of security. Number three, he's been working on the diplomatic front and

continues to express himself --

Q But what has he accomplished?

MR. SNOW: Well, what he's accomplished is you're working toward those goals. Look, the President, again, realizes the political stuff, which is what have you accomplished. Let me back up. Take a look at the difference between the security situation a few months ago and today. And what you have seen is significant security advancements, in part because the Iraqis have stepped forward much more assertively than before. They're putting their forces on the front line. They have had successes in places like Baghdad, Anbar and now Diyala. Why? Because there is a sense now that the Americans are going to -- we're going to keep our word, in terms of security. The Iraqis are stepping forward; they're also demonstrating their faith, in terms of building security. And you have seen a different security situation, not only in terms of the strength of the opponents, but also in terms of Iraqi citizens, themselves, standing up.

You hear a lot of talk of bottom-up progress. Bottom-up progress means the people now who see the Americans and the Iraqis working side by side are saying, we're going after al Qaeda. We will tell you where the militias are hiding out; we will tell you where the insurgents are. And there are very significant advancements just in the two months since Congress approved the finances for this. So that's number one.

Number two, the Prime Minister has made it clear -- and he has shared ideas, and I'm not going to get into them -- but he's being very aggressive on the front of trying to build larger coalitions. And I understand one of the things the President made clear is we hear these things, we need to see results, and that will be the byproduct of the leadership.

Martha.

Q Tony, just a little bit more on this, and I know you don't want to talk about conversations they had. But are things clearer to Maliki now? I mean, because, Kelly's point, it's true, you've said this time and time again -- is it clearer to the President now that Maliki understands? Has he made it clearer to the President he understands?

MR. SNOW: It's not only -- Maliki is not the only player here. You also have a presidency council --

Q Understood, but that --

MR. SNOW: Well, and the conversations today were designed to be very candid about the importance of political progress. The Prime Minister in and of himself can't do it. He needs support from Shia, he needs it from Sunni, he needs it from Kurds. And he spoke to Shia, Sunni and Kurd leaders today, as well. So the question is, do they get it? And the answer is, yes, and not just the Prime Minister.

Q Did the President get any new assurances that the Iraqi parliament will not be going on vacation in August?

MR. SNOW: There was no discussion. What the President talked about was the importance of accomplishments.

Q Senator Susan Collins, Republican of Maine, told Newsweek, in the new issue, that "the fact that the Iraqi politicians feel free to be going on vacation in August, while our men and women are out there dying doesn't make me think we're going to see any more progress by September." What do you say to that?

MR. SNOW: Well, what I say is we're going to have to see what progress we get.

Q She also said, "It's just that my patience with the administration's strategy is exhausted." She was talking, obviously, about the Bush administration strategy, not Maliki.

What do you say -- do you still contend from that podium that Republicans on the Hill are not breaking with the President?

MR. SNOW: No, some Republicans are broken, but a number of these Republicans previously have expressed skepticism. If you look at the difference in votes, it's not huge, but on the other hand, you also have expressions -- you can call it a break, but if you take a look at Senators Warner and Lugar, for instance, they are concerned about getting to a point where you can pull American forces out of the front line role, but they're not talking about leaving, they're not talking about -- they are also talking about having a long-term presence in Iraq. As Steve Hadley said yesterday, those are important conversations to have. But they're important conversations to have after the September 15th report.

Q They are talking about leaving, because they want to start redeploying troops by the end of this year. That's leaving, isn't it?

MR. SNOW: No, redeploying does not necessarily mean leaving. That means moving them --

Q Leaving Iraq, moving them within the region, moving out of a combat role.

MR. SNOW: Again, it means moving them around. It does not necessarily mean -- you're going to have to ask them about any specific troop force or force movements that they may have in mind. But they simply have talked generally about redeployment. My understanding is that they were primarily concerned about

redeployment from front lines.

Q You spoke about the President telling Maliki that it's important to make progress, not just for his sake but for the political situation back here. Is that what he's talking about, statements by Nunn, Lugar, Todd, some of these other folks?

MR. SNOW: There was -- the Iraqis are certainly familiar with what's going on in Congress, and they're familiar with the political situation here in the states. There was no specific discussion of members of Congress or pieces of legislation.

Q On the Middle East plan that the President is going to describe shortly, what do you actually concretely expect to accomplish from this, this year? I mean, are you looking at --

MR. SNOW: Well, first, why don't we let the President make his announcements, and then you can have follow-up questions about specifics that may be. I've left enough here vague that you can ask specifics.

What you're really talking about concretely is getting people on both sides to step up and start working, to energize the peace process, but also -- there's a call not merely with the Palestinians and the Israelis, but also regional partners and international partners. And there will be some discussion of that. But, again, I don't want to try to get into descriptions of concreteness until the President has delivered the speech.

Q To what extent does Maliki have clout, and if it's possible, given the situation in Iraq, the mandate to bring progress between now and September?

MR. SNOW: Well, again, I think that's -- one of the most important things is working on this idea of building a coalition,

a unity coalition that's going to be capable of drawing together people from different factions within Iraq, different ethnic groups and regional groups so that they are able to move more effectively and swiftly through the legislative process.

There have been cases in which various factions or parties have sat out for one reason or another, and it's important to figure out a way to get them to pull together and to work together, and to make their point of emphasis the positive business of getting things passed and to work through what disagreements they have.

Q You said he understands the importance of bringing progress, but does he understand the urgency?

MR. SNOW: I believe he does.

Q Why?

MR. SNOW: I just believe he does. I mean, it's --

Q What do you think they've been waiting for, Tony? In other words --

MR. SNOW: I don't think this is a matter, Joe, of waiting for it. Again, it's a political process where a lot of people are working things through. It's not something -- I mean, we've seen this year in our own Congress how difficult sometimes it is to get things done. These are huge issues for some groups that have had longstanding enmities, and trying to work through those, and at the same time, do it in the context of building a new state is a big challenge, but it's one that they have to take up and one in which they must succeed.

This is not due to a lack of effort or a lack of trying. There have been many efforts on many of these key pieces of legislation. What the President was doing was encouraging them to really focus in on the business of doing what it took to get those accommodations so they'd get the legislation underway, but also to continue -- that's one piece, but also we've got to keep in mind something very significant has been going on in Iraq, and it is a change in opinion toward the government and toward the U.S., which is very constructive from our point of view because it now is the case that people who were insurgents -- for instance, there are a number of cases in Diyala where former insurgents are now working side by side with the Americans to go after insurgents still in place, as well as foreign fighters.

Those are precisely the kinds of things that we need to build upon. And a lot of that is the fruits of the new way forward, and it also does create that political space we've been talking about that enables politicians to say, okay, now we are going to work with Sunni, Shia and Kurd, whatever. And so I don't think -- I know it is -- it's very important to note that the Iraqis have been working this hard. Right now their legislature is meeting six days a week. The President has made it clear that it's important to stay on task, and they do understand it.

Q Last September, President Musharraf briefed President Bush on the deal with the tribal leaders along the border with Pakistan and Afghanistan. It was a period the President said he believed that Musharraf was committed the dealing with the Taliban and al Qaeda. He said, we'll let the tactics speak for themselves after it happens. With the Pakistani troops said to be massing along that area, have the tactics spoken? Has the deal failed? Does the President believe that there needs to be a new strategy for dealing with --

MR. SNOW: Yes, yes. The plan that President Musharraf put forward did not succeed as we had hoped. And therefore, he is moving troops in to get control of the situation.

Q Are we helping? Has the President spoken with him about it?

MR. SNOW: I don't -- no, he's not had a direct conversation with the President, at least recently. On the other hand, you can assume that certainly we are doing what we can to support them. Now, they are vital allies, as the President has said many times, in the war on terror.

Q There are also plans, I understand, for a rather substantial infusion of U.S. aid to that area. Are those plans on hold now, given the unstable military situation there?

MR. SNOW: I'll have to get back to you on that, but it's my sense at this juncture that the important thing is to get some security into the region. But I'll give you a follow-up a little later in the day.

Q Tony, two questions, two questions. One, I just came back from the United Nations, where I was attending the World Hindi Association conference at the U.N., second most spoken language on the Earth after English. And Secretary General was also there. I understand that he is coming here tomorrow to meet with President Bush. What are the major agendas on their discussions? It's back in news that foreign fighters are in Iraq; 40 percent of them are from Saudi --

MR. SNOW: There will be wide-ranging discussions. And, Goyal, as tempting as it is to pick out nations for calumny from this podium I will not engage in any such activities.

But I think -- look, you've got the U.N. Secretary General, they talk about a whole broad series of things, including Iraq, including the Middle East, including what we're talking about in Afghanistan. I mean, the challenges of creating democracy and peace are the things that the United States and the institution of the United Nations share. So you can expect a pretty broad conversation.

Q A second, if I may. In the U.S., Hindu-American foundations are calling on the President (inaudible) -- India Globe last week did a story that Hindu priests are under attack and that visa denial is concern because of the few priests from other denominations did something wrong or they misused their visa, but everybody else --

MR. SNOW: Goyal, I'll refer that to State. That is a fairly technical conversation that I'm not competent to answer.

April.

Q Tony, going back to Pakistan, the issues with Pakistan have been a concern for quite a while. Many have said the United States really does not trust this government -- has not really been trusting Musharraf and how he handles things. Does this go back to that -- point out the fact that this may not be a situation that the U.S. can trust and maybe --

MR. SNOW: No. As the President has pointed out many times, President Musharraf certainly understands the dangers posed by terrorists, al Qaeda, the Taliban -- they've made at least two efforts on his life. He was attempting a carrot approach in the tribal areas. And it involved working with tribal chiefs, putting together packages of infrastructure improvement and economic aid. It was designed to be one that would encourage them peacefully to isolate the Taliban and also to help police the borders so that fighters would not be moving across the Pakistani border into Afghanistan. It did not work. It is clear that there has been activity there, including al Qaeda training. And the Prime Minister is responding accordingly.

But, no, the President -- the President has respect and admiration for President Musharraf, who is dealing in a very tough situation, and his own life has been placed at risk by virtue of his cooperating with the United States in the war on terror.

Q Tony, respect and admiration are totally different from this administration trusting that they could handle the situation appropriately. And looking at the --

MR. SNOW: So what you're asking for is an assessment of confidence?

Q Yes.

MR. SNOW: Again, I'll refer you to my previous answer when it comes to Goyal, but I think what you now see is a change -- what there is, is a change in tactics, to answer the previous question, which is that what had been attempted in the federally administered tribal areas was not working. And the Prime Minister has been effective in using force against those who have been committing acts of terror and we certainly hope it succeeds.

Q And, also, on another story, Liberians here -- many Liberians in this country who sought refuge from tyranny in Liberia, and now they're expected to be deported because the country is deemed safe now under the rule of Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf. You have many people -- to include people from the Congressional Black Caucus -- who have said that immigration policies in this country are not fair to those of color, particularly with Caribbean African nations. Is the White House working on this? Has there been any kind of appeal -- because there are massive numbers of Liberians in this country who for years lead a life here, and now they're told to go home, back to their homes --

MR. SNOW: April, I will freely confess that that's not one I was prepared for today. If you'll call us later, we'll try to give you some help.

Q Tony, Israel today announced the release of, I believe, 85 Palestinian prisoners. Was that something done at the urging of

the United States? Was the U.S. involved in that?

MR. SNOW: I don't know -- the U.S. was not involved. I don't know, on the other hand, if we'd been advised. But the Israelis do -- the Israelis, in the past, have tried to demonstrate goodwill through prisoner releases. I'll leave it at that. This is another demonstration that Prime Minister Abbas [sic] is trying to do what's necessary to build support and encouragement for President Abbas and his government, because they are the essential partner right now. And you did have a significant change over the weekend, where Prime Minister Fayyad, the "temporary" came off, he's the Prime Minister -- and you have a team in which the United States has faith and confidence, and we're working to do everything we can to support them. And President Olmert -- I mean, Prime Minister Olmert also has a good working relationship with President Abbas, and my guess is anything that we can do to nurture and encourage them in a direction that is going to lead us toward fruitful negotiations, fulfillment of the Quartet principles, and a two-state solution is --

Q So that is a positive "no"?

MR. SNOW: Well, again, I'm not going to try to judge it.

Q You used the figure earlier of \$190 million. Is there new money that's being announced today by the President?

MR. SNOW: No, what the President is going to be doing is talking about -- again, it's an aid package, it's with money from this year's -- this fiscal year budget, and he'll lay it out.

Q So re-purposing some --

MR. SNOW: A lot of this -- not "a lot of this," but some of

these have been announced in the past, some of the security funding, for instance. But there will be a couple --

Q Tony, how much of this is really new, then?

MR. SNOW: You know what? I'll go through and crunch the numbers for you.

Q Can I also just ask on that --

MR. SNOW: Yes, let's keep it, because -- we'll get a 10-question limit. Okay, yes.

Q Okay, ten questions. There have been questions about President Abbas and whether he really has control of his own government and corruption within his government. What assurances does President Bush have that this government will not -- this money will not be wasted?

MR. SNOW: Well, again, those are the sorts of things you work through when you do your due diligence on any kind of loans. We've been doing that in the past and trying to work with the Palestinians when it comes to aid, for instance, to Gaza, humanitarian aid, and we'll continue to provide humanitarian aid. But the due diligence about the use of funds is always part of any aid package.

Q Tony.

MR. SNOW: Yes, Les.

Q Yes, thank you, Tony. Two questions. Washington's Weekly Standard reports from Juneau, Alaska, that the new Republican governor, Sarah Palin, has an approval rating of 90 percent in the polls -- that's 9-0. And what is the President's reaction to this and her future?

MR. SNOW: He's very happy for her.

Q Good, thank you. The President's fellow Republican and presidential candidate, Congressman Duncan Hunter of California said, if the President of the United States is going to commute the sentence of Scooter Libby, he should immediately accompany that with a pardon for Border Patrol agents Jose Compean and Ignacio Ramos. And my question: Since there are a hundreds of sponsors of a bill to this effect, these two agents are in solitary. Why won't the President show the same mercy to them that he showed to Libby?

MR. SNOW: We do not discuss any of those matters, whether they're under consideration or not, and you know it.

Q No, I've heard you discuss them.

MR. SNOW: No, you didn't.

Q Tony, given Fatah's history of terrorism against Israel, and given that we're talking about a two-state not a three-state solution, why does this administration think that Fatah's and Abbas's assurances of cooperation are credible?

MR. SNOW: Well, basically because -- because the President -- the question may be -- let's frame it a little more broadly. Israel also, the government of Israel also deems them credible. They think that they have found in President Abbas somebody who's committed to the same principles, somebody who certainly is

showing real courage in stepping up and working toward policies that would make possible a two-state solution, including, we hope, the acceptance of Quartet principles, which are always a precondition for a two-state solution.

Q Thank you. Is the President sending emergency help to Japan? They just had a 6.0 earthquake this morning.

MR. SNOW: At this point, Sarah, I don't know if there have been any requests made. It's a little early. As we find more details, we'll know. Look, let me put it this way: The United States has always been there for other nations when they've been hit by natural disasters, and we certainly would do so for an ally. I'm just not aware of anything.

Deb.

Q Tony, the House could take up a CAFE bill by the end of July, and as you know, the Senate passed a bill mandating increases of CAFE to 35 miles per gallon by 2020. I'm wondering, would the President veto a bill that's a 40 percent increase, and how closely is he watching the debate?

MR. SNOW: Well, we are watching the debate. We have not put out a statement of administration policy; we're going to wait to see what comes out, rather than play "if" about things that are in train.

But let's note what the President has talked about CAFE, which has made it possible for automakers to meet goals. The other thing the President has been stressing is looking for alternative fuels as a way in the future to reduce our dependence on foreign sources of oil, and on oil, period, as a source for locomotion in the country.

Q Tony, you previewed the President's assessment report. I want to get an assessment of the NIE estimate coming out this week, if you could.

MR. SNOW: No, I'm not going to do it. What we have done is we have asked for a National Intelligence Estimate on terror. It has been several months in the coming, and we will just take a look at it, and certainly be happy to discuss it before it comes out. But I'm not going to discuss it prematurely.

Q More negative than it was before?

MR. SNOW: Look, when you're doing an assessment of terror, what you do is you try to provide a snapshot of what's going on in the terror network. Again, I'm not going to try to characterize more negatives. What you try to do is to figure out what's going on, on the ground and how do you respond to it.

There have certainly been a number of cases where you have successes in breaking up of terror cells, and also those where people have been caught in the midst of trying to commit acts of terror. There continue to be ongoing and very aggressive efforts, many of which will never be known by the American people. The President declassified a few a little more than a year ago when he talked about some of the successes of doing terrorist surveillance, but it's a little difficult to try to draw an overall conclusion.

What we can say is that it is always all hands on deck in dealing with terror, and we are trying to make sure that we and our allies have everything at our disposal, everything we possibly can at our disposal to find out who means harm to the United States or to our allies, and to do whatever we can to intercept them or prevent acts of terror.

Q Thank you.

MR. SNOW: Thank you.

END

12:55 P.M. EDT