



THE WHITE HOUSE

PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH

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Press Briefing by Ari Fleischer

The James S. Brady Briefing Room

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12:20 P.M. EST

MR. FLEISCHER: **The President began** his morning with a phone call to President Iliescu of Romania. The two have a very good relationship, a friendly relationship. They had a very warm conversation and the President fondly recalled his visit to Bucharest. They discussed diplomatic steps the United States is taking at the United Nations regarding Iraq. And the President expressed appreciation for Romania's strong friendship and support, and noted that the United States continued to support Romania.

Following that, the President had an intelligence briefing, followed by an FBI briefing, and then convened a meeting of the National Security Council. The President did a drop-by to a visit that the head of administration of the President of Russia had with the National Security Advisor. This was a long-planned visit. The two talked about deepening and broadening the relationship between the United States and Russia.

Then the President met with the National Governors Association, Republicans and Democrats alike,

where he talked about the economy and budget, health care, welfare, the faith-based initiative, as well as education and homeland security. And the President, of course, announced that later today a resolution would be offered up in New York City at the United Nations concerning Iraq.

Later this afternoon, the President will meet with NCAA fall sports champions. And that is the President's schedule for today.

One other item that I referred to you earlier this morning, and that is the importance of the briefing later today about the humanitarian relief effort for Iraq. The President views this as a very important initiative aimed directly at the people of Iraq, who have been oppressed by the government of Iraq. And so American officials will be providing a briefing about the steps the United States has planned to take, in the event of hostilities, to provide humanitarian relief, food relief and medical supplies to the people of Iraq. So I want to bring that to your attention.

And with that I'm happy to take your questions.

Q Ari, on that point, about this humanitarian relief. If the administration is interested in going through the steps of what relief will be offered, why isn't the President giving the American people more information about what an American-led occupation of Iraq would look like, would entail, the sort of sacrifice, the potential danger? Don't we have, as a society, the right to have that conversation before military action begins, if it begins?

MR. FLEISCHER: Well, I think there is no question that you will, in the case the President decides that the use of force is necessary. If the President makes the decision that the use of force is necessary, you can anticipate a series of additional conversation with the President about this matter. These are important questions that you raise. The humanitarian issue is an important question, and they all are important questions. And I anticipate that you will hear from the President on this.

Q I just need to follow on one point about this resolution. It's been very clear, I mean, the President initially was not very enthusiastic about pursuing a second resolution. He said he'd welcome it, but didn't feel he needs it. That hasn't changed, yet now the United States is actually tabling this resolution. Why does the President now believe this is more than welcome, but necessary?

MR. FLEISCHER: Well, the President and our allies will be tabling this resolution. And it's precisely for the very reasons that the President gave when he went to New York on September 12th. The fact of the matter is, there would be no inspectors and there would be no United Nations role if the President did not go to New York and put in process this plan that put the United Nations front and center in this issue.

And so this is now the final moments to see, having put the United Nations front and center, what the United Nations will do. So to answer your question directly, this is the logical follow-up to what the President began last September.

Q But it's not, because he said that he didn't need it, and that it would be welcome. But he clearly wasn't that enthusiastic about it, and now he appears to have changed his view, to the point where he and the UK are actually putting forward the resolution. What's changed?

MR. FLEISCHER: Nothing has changed. I think it's perfectly consistent. The President made clear that it is not necessary, but it is desirable. And, therefore, the President and our allies are presenting it to the United Nations, and now it's up to the United Nations, and we'll see what path they take. But it is not

necessary, from a legal point of view, for the United States, but the President views it as important and helpful, and therefore he is proceeding.

Q A reaction to two stories, if I could. One, this just occurred, so if you haven't heard about it, I understand. The arrest of three Kuwaitis for plotting a terrorist activity on U.S. forces. Have you heard about that?

MR. FLEISCHER: I just saw the top line on the wire immediately prior to coming out here, so I have no substantive details.

Q **If you can report something later, I'd** appreciate it. Secondly, your reaction to Turkey approving -- the Cabinet, anyhow -- approving the deployment of U.S. forces?

MR. FLEISCHER: We continue to make good progress in the talks with Turkey. Our plea is with the actions taken by the Turkish government to date. There are still some additional "t"s to be crossed and "i"s to be dotted, but nevertheless, this is a very serious matter and the democratic country of Turkey has taken it seriously, has responded seriously, has listened carefully, and we're working together. And that's where it stands for now. And we, of course, look forward to a vote in the Turkish Parliament, as well.

Q The British Foreign Minister, Mr. Straw, has said that they're going to be allowing a period of up to two weeks, maybe a little more, before asking for a decision on the resolution which the U.S. and UK are introducing today. We've never heard a time line from you. Does that sound right?

MR. FLEISCHER: The time line for the President is, having said that the resolution will be introduced today in New York at the United Nations, the President expects it to be voted on in short order. And it's impossible --

Q So two weeks, or a little more?

MR. FLEISCHER: I think it's impossible to specify an exact date. I think it's important to be respectful to the United Nations process and to allow the members of the Security Council, who have not yet seen the document, to see the document, to see the resolution, and then to give diplomacy its chance. I can't predict precisely how many days that will be, but it won't be many.

Q Do you stand by your answer from this morning?

MR. FLEISCHER: Yes, no changes. But I'm not going to be more precise than that.

Q Let me follow, if I may. France today --

MR. FLEISCHER: There's flexibility to it.

Q **France today is introducing a memo which** would suggest specific deadlines and time frames. It seems to be in direct competition with the U.S.-UK resolution.

MR. FLEISCHER: I think the most notable thing in the memo is a discussion of increasing the number of inspectors, which underscores the point that Saddam Hussein is not cooperating, that Saddam Hussein is not disarming. If Saddam Hussein was disarming, you could actually have fewer inspectors in Iraq. The fact that people think that -- some people think they need to have more inspectors there underscores the American position that Saddam Hussein is not complying and not cooperating.

You will have later today the text of the resolution the United States is offering. You'll be able to make all apt comparisons.

Q The French, though, don't seem to be attempting to underscore the U.S. position -- one must observe.

MR. FLEISCHER: This is why there are 15 members on the Security Council. And the President looks forward to talking with all of them.

Q **Ari, why is the President pushing the world** into war when millions, and people all over the world are against this war? The Turks are 95 percent against it, even though they're leaders are being bought.

MR. FLEISCHER: Helen, I think this falls right back into the category of subjects that we will not agree on, you and me, or you and the President -- and you and most Americans, frankly. The fact of the matter is that --

Q Maybe it doesn't matter whether all the world is against this?

MR. FLEISCHER: If your perception is -- if your reporting indicates to you all the world is against this, then I don't think you've lent too much reporting to it.

Q Your polls --

MR. FLEISCHER: The President has made clear that the reason we are on the verge of war is because Saddam Hussein has failed to disarm. The United Nations speaking for the world called on Saddam Hussein to disarm -- immediately, finally, final chance. So I think the questions are best addressed to Saddam Hussein --

Q Are you going to make all the countries --

MR. FLEISCHER: -- why has he brought the world to the verge of war.

Q -- in defiance of U.N. resolutions to disarm?

MR. FLEISCHER: The United Nations Security Council will shortly have a resolution before it which spells out what actions the United States and our allies think are appropriate to enforce Resolution 1441. We'll see what the Security Council says.

Q **Why is he paying off our allies?** I mean, if they really are for it, wouldn't they just go all out for us?

MR. FLEISCHER: I think that's a woeful mischaracterization of the situation on the ground in Turkey, which, after all, is a neighboring state to Iraq. It is not a voting member of the United Nations --

Q They don't want to attack.

MR. FLEISCHER: -- it is not a voting member of the United Nations Security Council, but as a country on the front line, that as 1991 proved, would suffer economic damage as a result of any hostilities.

Q But the people are against it.

MR. FLEISCHER: Relations between the government and Turkey and the government in the United

States are democracy to democracy, and the Turkish democracy will have its chance, per Turkish laws, to speak. We'll hear what Turkey says.

Q The U.N. weapons inspectors have determined that Iraq has this missile which exceeds limits that it agreed to, or were imposed on it by the U.N. Hans Blix has said it should be destroyed. If Iraq destroys those missiles, why isn't that concrete progress toward disarmament?

MR. FLEISCHER: Well, number one, we expect that Saddam Hussein will destroy those missiles. The United Nations Security Council has called on it to do so, and unless he engages in further defiance, we expect that he will. But, number two, as the President said over the weekend, that would just be the tip of the iceberg. And the reason for that is when a criminal holds a gun to your head and takes one bullet out of the chamber, you still have to worry about all the rest of the bullets in the chamber, because they can kill you, too.

And the fact is, with Saddam Hussein, he still has not shown the world that he has disarmed from the VX, the nerve agents, the botulin, the anthrax, all of which the United Nations found that he had in his possession in the late 1990s, which he has yet to account for. That's the fear about what's in the rest of the gun, in the other chamber -- in the chamber in the gun.

Q So there's no way that Iraq can do anything, really, to avoid war? Because if they begin to dismantle their weapons, the President still believes that they've got other bullets in the chamber and is --

MR. FLEISCHER: Under Security Council Resolution 1441, which was passed in November last year, Iraq had an obligation to immediately and fully disarm from all the weapons that were prohibited -- and I just cited several of them. So if Iraq were to take one missile out of the chamber that they left in the chamber -- VX, sarin, botulin, anthrax -- the world still has a lot to worry about.

Q I understand. And you won't wait to see whether the French proposal or any other proposal could get them to take those bullets out of the chamber -- you aren't willing to take "yes" for an answer here on the missiles and anything else?

MR. FLEISCHER: Given the fact that the resolution passed in November and called for full and immediate compliance, "yes" has not been a word that anybody has heard out of Iraq.

Q Can I ask one question on Turkey? Has the United States agreed to the Turkish request to send, in the event of war, tens of thousands of Turkish troops to occupy Kurdish areas in the north of Iraq?

MR. FLEISCHER: The position of the United States is unequivocal, that the territorial integrity of Iraq should be honored.

Q That's not what I asked.

MR. FLEISCHER: The territorial integrity --

Q Will there be Turkish troops in northern Iraq?

MR. FLEISCHER: As for the complete agreement in terms of the loans, et cetera, and the financial compensation to assist Turkey because of the economic consequences of hostilities, I think you can anticipate that all information will be shared once an agreement is finalized.

Q So is that a "yes" or a "no" that we have or have not agreed to Turkish troops in northern Iraq?

MR. FLEISCHER: You will hear once the agreement is finalized in its entirety.

Q **What is the status of U.S. forces in Colombia?** Are they preparing to go to war against the FARC? Is that an extension of the war on terrorism?

MR. FLEISCHER: The situation in Colombia has been a situation of a vexing nature as a result of FARC's involvement in narcotics. And per authorization from the United States Congress, the United States is engaged in a counter-narcotic and counter-terrorist effort in Colombia. And that is the purpose of having American military in Colombia, to assist the government of Colombia and President Uribe's new government in its efforts to fight the FARC, which has inflicted huge damage on the people of Colombia. And that's why this is a congressionally authorized action, and we are pleased to stand shoulder to shoulder with the people of Colombia in this regard

Q So they'll now be engaged in combat missions against the FARC?

MR. FLEISCHER: No, I didn't say that. I said, the United States is down there in a position of providing assistance to the government of Colombia, which Colombia is involved in the combat against the FARC. We are there to provide assistance in counter-narcotics and counter-terrorism efforts.

Q Ari, you've repeatedly talked about why it's important that Saddam Hussein follow exactly what the Security Council has mandated in the 17 resolutions. Should you be defeated in the Security Council on this new resolution that you're introducing today, would the President consider it to be a violation of the Security Council's will to go forward with a military action in any case?

MR. FLEISCHER: Well, the President has always made clear that he hopes the Security Council will enforce its resolutions to disarm Saddam Hussein. But if they do not, the coalition of the willing will do so.

Q That's slightly different than my question. That would be extant if you were just dealing with the 17 resolutions that have been passed so far. But if the Security Council specifically declines to give an authorization for military action in this resolution, wouldn't taking military action then be in defiance of the Security Council's will about how it would go about enforcing its past resolutions?

MR. FLEISCHER: Given what the President has said, if the Security Council does not act, the coalition will be assembled. And I think in that case, the question is similar to the previous situation, which was not far removed from this, which is where the Security Council did not act, given the threat of Slobodan Milosevic and the ethnic cleansing in Serbia and Bosnia -- or Kosovo, and the international community responded because the Security Council would not.

Q If it looked like the Security Council would not pass this, would the United States then withdraw it, rather than bring it to a formal vote?

MR. FLEISCHER: I think we'll just let events take place. And the President, as he said over the weekend, is confident that once the Security Council members see the resolution and then the matter proceeds to a vote, it will be passed.

Q France has basically said that its veto is not necessarily needed, because there are so many other countries opposed. I know that Tony Blair spoke with President Putin. What has been high-level contact,

either with the President or others, with Russia around the issue of the resolution?

MR. FLEISCHER: Well, of course, today the President had a meeting with an important staff member of the President of Russia, and so there was conversation today about it, as well. And I think you can anticipate that over the next little while you're going to see a whole series, as you have been seeing, of diplomatic phone calls and meetings. And those will involve the President, it will involve the Secretary of State, it will involve others in the administration, as well. And Russia, of course, is a member of the Security Council and we always look forward to talking to Russia.

Q Can you tell us who the staff member was?

MR. FLEISCHER: I have the title, I don't have the name. We'll be happy to post it, and if I had the name, I couldn't pronounce it. But it's the head of the administration of the President of Russia. I believe it's the equivalent of the Chief of Staff.

Q Ari, given the fact that the French are going to introduce at least a memo, maybe even another resolution saying that inspectors need more time, what -- besides saying that the U.N. will be irrelevant if they don't act now -- what is going to be the U.S. strategy over the next two weeks to try to get this passed, and at least try to avoid a veto?

MR. FLEISCHER: To those who say the inspectors need more time -- need more time to do what? To get run around? They haven't had any cooperation from Iraq to date. And so when the resolution that was passed unanimously last year stated that Iraq's compliance should be full and immediate, it didn't say it should be delayed and stretched out. It didn't say it should be denied. It didn't say that it should be gamed. It said full and immediate. The question is: will Saddam Hussein disarm? He has shown the world that he has not and will not.

And that will be the case that the administration makes. The administration, in the course of phone calls and meetings and through diplomacy, will work with each of the 15 members of the Security Council about the language that is being offered today. We'll hear their thoughts and concerns about the language, and we will work together, and then see what ultimately happens when it's put to a vote.

Q The next obvious question, which is, the resolution, or the language of the resolution that you are offering today is obviously negotiable -- based on what the French and the Russians and the Chinese say?

MR. FLEISCHER: Certainly. The United Nations Security Council is not a rubber stamp. The United Nations Security Council is an important deliberative organization. And the President has been successful, I remind you, in going to the Security Council before.

Q **Ari, the President has said before** about Iraq -- to paraphrase, that if he waited -- if the United States waited until Iraq developed and possessed a nuclear weapon, that the will to confront Iraq might be even less. Does the fact that North Korea is known to possess nuclear weapons play a factor in the very different approach we're taking toward Pyongyang?

MR. FLEISCHER: Well, as the President has made abundantly clear, there are different ways of dealing with different regions of the world. The ultimate outcome is always to enforce the proliferation regimes of the international community so that would-be threats do not come into possession of weapons of mass destruction. In the case of Korea, the President's approach is based on a multilateral approach, is based on diplomacy, because he thinks it will be the most effective.

In the case of Iraq, the President has very little hope left that Saddam Hussein will respond to diplomacy. And that's why it requires different solutions in different parts of the world. But, certainly, I don't think anybody would like to look at the situation in North Korea and Iraq and come to the conclusion that if North Korea has nuclear weapons than it's okay for Iraq to have nuclear weapons. That would be a very wrong conclusion to reach.

Q On the second resolution, though we don't know the specific language yet, it does seem clear that the allies who are proposing it will not seek specific, explicit authorization for the use of force. Why not?

MR. FLEISCHER: I think you have to wait for the language to be offered. I'm not going to venture into guesses about what the language may or may not be.

Q Well, we know that it's not going to ask for authorization force. Can you respond to that at all?

MR. FLEISCHER: No, I'm going to wait for the language to be introduced, and then at that time I think we'll be in a position to answer most of your questions.

Q Can you characterize the thrust of this resolution in any way?

MR. FLEISCHER: The resolution that will be offered at the United Nations today is direct and to the point, and it makes certain that Resolution 1441 is implemented.

Q That sweet -- that short and sweet?

MR. FLEISCHER: Short and sweet.

Q Ari, a lot of the diplomatic efforts by the President we've seen of late are sort of preaching to the choir. He's almost always shown with someone who supports him.

MR. FLEISCHER: I differ with that entirely. I mean, the President yesterday -- or Saturday, as you know, spoke to President Fox of Mexico, he spoke to President Lagos of Chile, the President spoke to President Chirac of France.

Q But the photos and the visits are almost always with someone who agrees with him. What about any meetings face to face with some of the more difficult people to win over in the U.N.? And what's the status of things with Chirac? Will we see any conversations there, or is the President given up on --

MR. FLEISCHER: Let me make a couple points. Number one, when you look at how many leaders, particularly in Europe, line up on the side of the United Nations, there are not a whole lot of leaders to meet with who don't.

So the simple arithmetic of it means there are many, many more people to meet with who agree with the President than people who oppose him. Now, the President will of course work very closely with the members of the Security Council on the terms of the introduction of a resolution who agree with the United States. You begin with your sponsors, and then you move forward from there to build support beyond the sponsorship.

And you will see that. You will see in diplomacy. You will see with -- Secretary Powell, for example, was just in China, and he met with Chinese officials. And so you'll continue to see it through a number of meetings with a number of ways, with nations around the world. But I don't think that's an accurate

characterization.

Q What about the press -- what can we -- he's making these phone calls, but will he invite Fox to the White House? Will he do any face to faces, and has he since two weeks ago or 10 days ago when he talked to Chirac, has he spoken with --

MR. FLEISCHER: We'll keep you filled in, as we always do, about the phone calls the President makes and the conversations that he has. And I think you can anticipate that he'll use his time wisely. He will call and make -- enter into contact with whoever it's deemed that it's most fruitful, as the diplomacy is pursued, to win the support of the Security Council.

Q According to reports out of Moscow, Saddam's old friend, Yevgeny Primakov is back in Baghdad today for a chat with Saddam. What do we think he's up to? Do you think Primakov is playing a useful role here? We didn't think much of his role in '91, of course. Is this a reprise of that, or have things shifted?

MR. FLEISCHER: I have not gotten any reports out of the Primakov meeting. Let me see if there is anything I can get for you on it.

Q Ari, two questions. You have stated from this podium that France is a good ally of the United States and will continue to be a good ally.

MR. FLEISCHER: That's correct.

Q You've answered the first. Next question, on the Colombia issue, there's an additional 150 troops, I think, being sent to Colombia.

MR. FLEISCHER: Not correct --

Q The President doesn't like people speaking -- you know that. (Laughter.) Let me ask you this, will the U.S. troops there engage in combat in assisting President Uribe, especially now that three Americans are being held hostage? The FARC has accepted that they're --

MR. FLEISCHER: There was an erroneous report that said 150 United States Special Forces have been sent to Colombia. That is not an accurate report.

Q Not accurate on the number or --

MR. FLEISCHER: In both. In both the nature of the forces and the number. It is a far, far smaller number, and it's a varied type of DOD officials to go down there to assist Colombia in ongoing counter-narcotics, counter-terrorist effort. It coincides with the taking of the hostages by the FARC. DOD can give you any information about rules of engagement, but it's a different situation from the one you're asking about.

Q **Ari, can I take another crack at the box** score questions about the U.N. Security Council? What degree of confidence does the White House have going into this, as it prepares to table its latest resolution? What degree of confidence that you are passed a veto at this point?

MR. FLEISCHER: Well, the President has said that he is confident that the requisite number of the Security Council will vote for it. Of course, it passes with nine votes and no veto. I'm not in a position to

give you an answer from other nations about how they will use their veto.

Clearly, the United States hopes that nobody will veto it. We see no need for it to be vetoed. We think that a veto would mean that Iraq will get to continue to build up its arms and get away with it. But I'm not in a position to answer you authoritatively on what the outcome will be. As far as a veto, clearly, the President hopes that would not be the case. But we are confident we will have the requisite number of votes to pass, unless there is a veto.

Q And on a separate but related subject, the Palestinians have indicated that they will engage in -- for lack of a better term -- cease-fire, should a war with Iraq occur. Is this something that potentially puts the Palestinians back on a track towards the road map?

MR. FLEISCHER: Well, one of the interesting side notes to the many discussions the President has been having with world leaders about Iraq is the President always brings into the conversation the importance of making progress on Israeli-Palestinian issues. It remains a vital, central goal of the United States of President Bush, and there continues to be a serious effort underway for reform of the Palestinian institutions. The President still views that, just as he said in his June 24th Rose Garden speech, as the core of the way to move forward.

At the same time, the President does believe that all nations -- including Israel and the Arab nations in the area -- have responsibilities to contribute to the peace process. It's a lengthy process. If it was an easy or short process, it would have been done many, many years ago. But nevertheless it does remain a key part of all the discussions that the President has.

Q Are you saying then that a cease-fire on the part of the Palestinians is, in fact, a contribution towards the war effort?

MR. FLEISCHER: I think the President views any diminishment of violence in the Middle East as a contribution to the peace and security of the people in the region. And the best way to move forward with the President's vision of having a state of Palestine and a state of Israel living side by side and in security is through a diminishment of violence. It is through an end to violence.

Q If you -- as far as war is concerned with Iraq -- if you can go inside the President's mind, he must be really tremendous -- under pressure from every side and also the most tense person in the world today. When he sees all these demonstrations, like millions against him -- and thousands in favoring with him, how does he feel about this? And where can he go from here?

MR. FLEISCHER: Well, it's an interesting question. But I think as many of the people -- particularly reporters who knew the President from the campaign and who have been up close with him know, there is something about President Bush that when he makes up his mind about something, he demonstrates leadership and acts on principle and is very comfortable with the actions and decisions that he makes. And that's the zone that the President is in.

The President believes very strongly in the importance of consultation and working with our allies. And he believes very strongly in the need to lead. And that's what he's doing. And when he looks at what has happened in Iraq, when he looks at the threat Saddam Hussein can present to the American people -- particularly after September 11th -- the President is certain that what he is doing and the path that he has chosen to protect the peace. And that's his approach.

Q -- as far as the U.N. Security Council is concerned, Mr. Thomas Friedman of the New York Times,

he has written a commentary or article which -- carried. And he said that since France is not cooperating as far as the world affairs are concerned in the Security Council, France should be put off the Security Council, and -- the world's largest democracy -- India -- to be the member of the -- Security Council in the United Nations. So

how does the United States will --

MR. FLEISCHER: I remember that column. I have not heard the President weigh-in on that topic. What I know the President believes -- and this is what I was indicating earlier in response to Jacobo's questions -- is in the President's conversation with President Chirac, it's important, despite the difficulties that have been made and the relations between the United States and France on this issue to always remember that France is on our side. There is a difference between France and the United States on the approach to the use of force.

But the President knows the that nations of Western Europe and the nations of Eastern Europe are allied nations with the United States. We have shared values, we have shared approaches. We may have differences with a minority of a minority of nations on a continent, but the President still believes that it's important for us to respect those countries.

Q Ari, with respect to the timing of the Security Council vote coming in a couple weeks or something like that, that seems to -- at least the British have told us that they'd like to leave some room for additional reports from the U.N. inspectors. You were just saying that Saddam has not and will not disarm, so what's the point of additional reports from the inspectors?

MR. FLEISCHER: Well, number one, we look forward to the additional reports that will come in from Mr. Blix and Dr. Baradei. They have been given a assignment the United States supports through the United Nations Security Council, and we want to hear what they have to say.

Q If you've decided that Saddam has not and will not disarm, do we even need any more inspectors?

MR. FLEISCHER: We have seen no evidence from Saddam Hussein that he has or that he will. And the inspectors are there to carry out their mission as we asked them to do so.

Q I mean, what's the point, if we decided that there's no further chance that Saddam is going to disarm?

MR. FLEISCHER: This is why the President said almost a month ago that time is running out. This is a matter of weeks, not months. The signal the President was sending is this cannot go on indefinitely, given the fact that Saddam Hussein has not shown that he will comply, has not shown that he will disarm. But there remains an important process underway that the Security Council set in motion with the resolution that the United States supports. But that was not an indefinite process.

Q Ari, the U.S. is sending around 1,700 soldiers and Marines to help the Philippines -- the Abu Sayyef. With a possible war on Iraq very close, are we spreading ourselves too thin by getting involved as well in the world?

MR. FLEISCHER: Emphatically, no. The United States military, given its size, given its abilities, given its mobility, is very well situated to be able to handle such instances. In fact, the President views this as all part of a common struggle against terrorism. And the government of the Philippines has been very strong in fighting the Abu Sayyef group and the terrorism that they face and the Philippine people face. And of course, hostages have been taken who were Americans and there was one killing of an American

as a result of Abu Sayyef.

And so the President is pleased to respond to a request from the government of the Philippines. This will be a Philippine-led operation, and the United States stands ready and able to assist in this mission.

Q Was the President concerned at all about a proposed resolution by the National Governors Association to oppose his tax cuts even though the Association is dominated by Republicans?

MR. FLEISCHER: I'm not aware of any such motion moving forward, so I don't think there's anything to worry about.

Q Well, let me ask another question. Did he or anyone in the White House work, perhaps through the President's brother, to quash this resolution in order to prevent an exodus of Republicans?

MR. FLEISCHER: I'm not deeply involved in the processes by which the Governors Association moves the resolutions or doesn't move the resolutions.

Q To follow mi amiga, Sarah, you've got military scenarios and potential flashpoints in many parts of the world, including the ongoing war against terrorism. At what point does President Bush consider this a third world war, as some have described it?

MR. FLEISCHER: The President views this as the war against terrorism. And the President views this, particularly after September 11th, as a United States of America for whom everything changed. And the President is not content to sit back and take a chance that dictators, terrorists, people who have killed their own people, people who have gassed their own people, people who have shown a willingness to link up with others would bring harm to our country once again. The President does not want to undergo another September 11th for our country. And it is a worry. And so, therefore, the President views this as an ongoing war against terrorism. I have not heard him use any other language than that.

Q Ari, when 1441 was introduced, it took about seven weeks, I think, of diplomacy, language was negotiated word by word. The President said today, put the stress on we're going to work with the Security Council for days this time. I'm wondering if in his mind there is sort of a drop-dead date for getting this thing done, and if this time around the language is firm, this is what we want an up or down vote on and we're not going to be negotiating about language?

MR. FLEISCHER: Well, number one, this resolution is far, far shorter than Resolution 1441. It contains far fewer words, far fewer pages. So there is less to talk about. This is very straight and to the point. And that's one reason why the President indicates that there need not be interminable delays in bringing this to a vote. But the President has said that the time is coming, and the President is confident that the timetable that the United Nations will act on will also be reflective of not letting this stretch out and drag out interminably. The President thinks it will be voted on in short order.

Q You mean the language, this is the resolution he wants voted on?

MR. FLEISCHER: Clearly, the United States is a sponsor of it; it's the resolution that we want voted on.

Q Ari, the President told the governors this morning he was disappointed the Congress didn't approve \$3.5 billion for homeland security measures. But with the looming war, what is the President planning on doing to give states the critical funding to improve homeland security?

MR. FLEISCHER: Well, we hope that Congress will revisit the flexibility issue within that funding. Congress voted for the \$3.5 billion the President asked for, but then it put strings on \$2.2 billion of it. So there's only approximately \$1.3 billion that is actual -- the flexible grants that provide the most assurance for the states to get the type of equipment that they need to respond to homeland security and potential terrorism. It would be helpful if Congress would revisit some these grants to universities and other things that are earmarked. That was something that was discussed today in the meeting. That would be the very first, most helpful thing that could take place.

Q Ari, if there are, indeed, military hostilities with Iraq, would the President condone the use of the so-called mini-nukes, which have been authorized for development under recent presidential directives, in the fight against Saddam Hussein for bunker-busting or anything like that?

MR. FLEISCHER: In standing with our long time policies, the White House and the government do not rule anything in, do not rule anything out. So I don't talk about specific types of munitions.

Q Yes, Ari, one of the most vocal arguments being made by people who are against the war is that if we start bombing, there are many innocent civilians, Iraqi civilians will be killed. What's the response to that?

MR. FLEISCHER: Well, I think that the United States military takes great pride in the fact that they work incredibly hard to make certain that there are as few civilian casualties as possible. And that is part of the training of the military, it is part of the technical expertise of the military. Unfortunately, in war, not everything goes perfectly, and so nobody can rule anything out.

But one worry is clearly Saddam Hussein's effort to use people around the world -- to have them come to Baghdad, then to take their lives as human shields. It is one of the cruelest things a leader can do, to put people in harm's way. And this is why the Pentagon has gone out of its way to warn people about Saddam Hussein's efforts to take innocents and put them in harm's way, and create them as -- put them in place as human shields. It is illegal, it is against international procedures. Unfortunately, it is something that Saddam Hussein has done before.

Q **South Korean President-elect Roh Moo Hyun** will be sworn in as President on Tuesday. Now Seoul is Tuesday. Could I get any comment on his inauguration?

MR. FLEISCHER: President Bush has asked Secretary Powell to travel there, as you know. The Secretary is there to honor President-elect Roh on his inauguration. The United States and the people of South Korea have long had a very strong relationship. South Korea is a democracy. The President enjoyed his conversation with President-elect Roh and looks forward to meeting with him and congratulates him on his inauguration.

Q Ari, could I follow up on the human shield question? There are some anti-war demonstrators who have voluntarily offered themselves up as human shields in Iraq. How does the President feel about the safety and well being of those people in the event that there is a war?

MR. FLEISCHER: The President hopes that no one will allow themselves to be used in such a manner, that this is very, very serious, and that to put -- for anybody to put themselves or to allow Saddam Hussein to use them in such a way as human shields is very worrisome. And the President hopes that nobody will do that to themselves.

Q He doesn't view their presence as a deterrent?

MR. FLEISCHER: The President views the use of military force as a last resort, which he hopes can be avoided. But it's a last resort that if he makes the decision that it's necessary to engage in, he will do so to protect the people of the United States from attack.

Q Ari, do you have anything to tell us at this point about a change in the threat level? Is there any consideration of moving back down a notch?

MR. FLEISCHER: I have not been given anything new on it today.

Q One other thing, if I could. Is there some limit on the number of people who are allowed to go the microphone at the stakeout position?

MR. FLEISCHER: There's always been a practicality issue. I think there's always a sensitivity, for example, to having 50 governors stand in front of one microphone. It might be very dangerous for the technicians. (Laughter.)

END 12:56 P.M. EST