



# THE WHITE HOUSE

PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH

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## Press Briefing by Scott McClellan

The James S. Brady Press Briefing Room

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2:18 P.M. EST

MR. McCLELLAN: Good afternoon. I want to begin with a statement by the President: "Laura and I are saddened by the death of President Boris Trajkovski of Macedonia, a distinguished leader and a great friend of the United States. On behalf of the American people, I extend condolences to President Trajkovski's family, and to the people of Macedonia. President Trajkovski showed extraordinary courage in leading his country from the brink of civil conflict to peace by signing the Ohrid Framework Agreement. The United States strongly supports President Trajkovski's vision of a multiethnic and democratic Macedonia, at peace with itself and its neighbors, and on the path to full membership in the transatlantic community."

And with that, I will be glad to take your questions. Go ahead, Jacobo. You don't get to go first every day, Terry.

**Q Let's go with Haiti.** The situation there is getting harder every minute, more difficult. I understand the U.S. is considering sending three ships with over 2,000 Marines to patrol the --

MR. McCLELLAN: We heard comments from the President earlier today. We remain committed to working with our international partners toward a peaceful, constitutional and democratic solution in Haiti. That's where our focus remains. The President also talked about the importance of having an international security presence in the context of a political solution. Obviously, we prepare for all contingencies, and we are in the process of planning for an international security force if a political solution is reached.

Q Would the United States be a member of that international --

MR. McCLELLAN: Well, again, I wouldn't over-interpret the planning that's going on right now. We make appropriate contingency plans for circumstances. But right now, we remain focused on finding a peaceful and democratic and constitutional solution to the situation in Haiti, and that's where it remains.

I would also give you a quick update. The Coast Guard is in the process of safely returning some migrants to Haiti, working with the Haitian Coast Guard. And so that process is ongoing. Obviously, safety is a high priority for us in this effort.

Q Scott, to follow up on that, on Haiti, members of the Congressional Black Caucus --

MR. McCLELLAN: She just jumped right in on you, Terry. You lost out again.

Q I'm sorry. But it's a follow-up.

MR. McCLELLAN: Apologize to him, not me. It was his turn next. But go ahead.

Q Sorry, Terry.

Members of the Congressional Black Caucus are calling for a change in the immigration laws. Would the President favor something that would give the Haitian boat people the same kind of status as the Cuban boat people?

MR. McCLELLAN: Our policy on boat migrants remains the same. It has not changed. And the President has made it very clear that we have a plan in place to return migrants to their country of origin if they seek to leave. And that's exactly what is going on right now with the Coast Guard.

Obviously, in that process, safety is a high priority. And I think that you're seeing that the Coast Guard is taking that into account. Again, our efforts remain focused on finding a political solution. We are also working with our international partners to make sure the Haitian people are getting the humanitarian assistance that they need during this difficult period.

Q Scott, for a long time, this has been considered unequal, Haitian boat people versus the Cuban boat people. And many people are looking at it as racial. You would not, because of this, at all, you would not --

MR. McCLELLAN: You have heard the President talk about making sure we have a consistent policy when it comes to migrants. And in terms of Haitians -- the Haitian people, our migration policy remains the same.

Q You don't think that it's consistent?

MR. McCLELLAN: Go ahead.

Q Does the United States think any country has the right to spy on Kofi Annan, and would we condemn the spying of the U.N.?

MR. McCLELLAN: We had this conversation earlier, Terry, and I would --

Q We didn't go into it from that perspective.

MR. McCLELLAN: -- just say that I'm not going to get into commenting on intelligence matters relating to national security. There are a lot of reasons why I won't get into discussing intelligence, and I think the reasons are obvious.

Q No, but I'm talking about what another country does. Do we think that another country has the right to --

MR. McCLELLAN: Well, you're asking this in the context of recent reports in the United Kingdom, and I think that matter has been addressed by Prime Minister Blair.

**Q Scott, the previous** administration had pledged to end the use of all antipersonnel land mines, including self-destructing land mines, by 2003. And it also pledged to sign the Ottawa treaty banning land mines by 2006. Why did the President go back on those pledges?

MR. McCLELLAN: Actually, let me point out to you, this is a strong step forward in our efforts to eliminate a serious humanitarian problem. The policy that was announced today is a comprehensive strategy for addressing the use of land mines. And unlike any previous land mine policy, it covers all persistent land mines, or long-lasting land mines, would be another way to refer to it -- both antipersonnel and antivehicle. So it goes beyond previous land mine policy in that regard.

Q But the previous administration had pledged to sign the Ottawa treaty by 2006, and I just wonder, what did this administration -- what did the President see as flawed?

MR. McCLELLAN: Well, the previous administration did not agree at the time to participate in the Ottawa agreement. This administration has stated the same, as well.

Q But the previous administration had pledged to end the use of all persistent land mines -- all land mines, including the so-called self-destructing ones. This administration wants to keep using those land mines. Can you explain that a little bit?

MR. McCLELLAN: Let me talk about -- sure, absolutely. When you're talking about using our military to address some of the dangerous threats that we face, it's important that they have certain resources available, not only to protect our troops and save their lives, but to save the lives of civilians. You're talking about smart land mines, now. That is not the issue here when it comes to the humanitarian problem that is posed by land mines.

I would remind you that the United States is a leader in confronting this issue and eliminating this humanitarian problem. The State Department funding for the United States Humanitarian Mine Action program will be increased by an additional 50 percent above the fiscal year '03 levels, to \$70 million a year. That's significantly more than any other country. So the United States is providing strong leadership to eliminate the humanitarian problem that exists from persistent land mines.

**Q Scott, why is the** administration continuing the deportation of Haitians from this country -- not boat people, but Haitians who have been in this country -- why are we continuing the deportation in the midst of the current crisis?

MR. McCLELLAN: Well, the President expects our policies to be enforced and enforced consistently.

Q Does that mean he does not consider what's happening in Haiti right now to be serious enough to suspend the deportation?

MR. McCLELLAN: As I said, that when it comes to migrants seeking to leave there, we are working to safely repatriate those migrants. There is a current situation going on in Haiti that we are working with nations in the Caribbean Community, with nations in the Organization of American States and with France and Canada and others to address. We're working to bring about a political solution, and then support an international security presence to help move forward on that political solution.

Q We are sending Haitians back to an airport in Port-au-Prince that virtually everyone is trying to get out of.

MR. McCLELLAN: The way we are working to repatriate those migrants you bring up is to make sure it is done safely and that their safety is taken into consideration. And that's the way we expect it to be done.

Q So that means the President doesn't consider what's going on in Haiti right now to be serious enough to suspend the deportations?

MR. McCLELLAN: Again, I think I've addressed our policy in terms of migrants. But in terms of Haiti, obviously it is a difficult period right now and we're working to bring about a political solution.

**Q I have one more** question on an unrelated matter. From our affiliate here in the District, is the President drinking Washington, D.C. water? The concern, of course, is over lead levels in the water.

MR. McCLELLAN: Yes, I understand. And that's obviously an issue that needs to be addressed to the District. I'm not going to get into a discussion of the President's eating or drinking habits. (Laughter.)

Q Are you able to say whether the water that comes into the White House is Washington, D.C. water, or is it a separate source?

MR. McCLELLAN: I'm not going to get into addressing those matters.

Q One, the State Department released the human rights report the other day and they have criticized China on many matters of human rights. It appears Chinese were cracking down on -- against Taiwan and then Tibet and now they are after democracy in Hong Kong and they are cracking down the peace lovers and democracy lovers in Hong Kong. So where do we stand? How China is getting away with all these including this human rights report that is very critical of China?

MR. McCLELLAN: We continue to work to promote human rights and promote human dignity across the world. And that includes in our discussions with China, as well, and including in our discussions with regard to Hong Kong and supporting democratic efforts there.

Q Second question. The President the other day he encouraged governors, during his speech, that they should watch "Osama" movie, film. We still don't have Osama, Taliban are still there operating in Pakistan and Afghanistan, they are back there. Why he encourage them to watch the movie on Osama? It's painful for people to bring the memories back.

MR. McCLELLAN: I would say I think it's important for people to realize the benefits of liberating the Afghan people from an oppressive regime in the Taliban, and from a regime that supported and harbored terrorists, terrorists that sought to do harm not only to America, but our friends and allies across the world. It is a very powerful film that really, in the President's view, had a profound impact on his thinking.

**Q Scott, Democrats** in the House, at least the leader, is suggesting that the reason why Denny Hastert is not bringing up the two-month extension on the 9/11 Commission is because of sort of a wink and a nod from the White House. What do you --

MR. McCLELLAN: I don't know how anyone could suggest that when the fact is that this President has publicly stated that he is for an extension of the 9/11 Commission, at their request. Not only have we stated it publicly, but we've stated it privately, as well. Our views are very well-known. And the commission said that they need another two months to do their work, and we support them in their efforts. Their work is very important. And that's why we've been working with them in an unprecedented way to make sure they have the information they need to complete their work.

**Q** Totally different topic. The Senate Intelligence Committee apparently yesterday voted to subpoena the White House for documents if you don't voluntarily turn them over in the next three weeks. Are you planning to do that?

MR. McCLELLAN: One, I'm not aware of any formal request that has been made. And even though the Senate Intelligence Committee does not have jurisdiction over the White House because of a separation of powers issue here, which we discussed earlier in regards to the 9/11 Commission, we have cooperated with their investigation. We provided access to relevant documents and access to White House staff, as well. And we believe we have met the needs of the committee's works. And we understand there may be additional requests and we will be glad to discuss those with the committee.

**Q** Is that a no or yes?

MR. McCLELLAN: Well, again, we'll be glad to discuss that with the committee. I'm not aware of any formal request.

**Q Could you read** out the meeting with the German Chancellor and, in particular, give us a sense of whatever discussions they had about the Iraq contracts and the dollars?

MR. McCLELLAN: The Iraq contracts didn't come up. There was a discussion on dollar policy, and the President reiterated our policy. And, by the way, we will be putting out a joint statement by the two leaders here shortly.

**Q** Can you characterize a little bit their personal chemistry?

MR. McCLELLAN: It was a very constructive meeting. I think you heard directly from the President of the United States about their relationship. We appreciate the fact that Germany is a partner in leadership on many of our common challenges, and working to build a better and safer world.

**Q** What did the Chancellor do that's so funny? (Laughter.)

MR. McCLELLAN: You can direct that question to the President the next time you see him.

**Q Scott, can I ask** about Haiti? The President talked about a multinational force, such as a stabilization force, part of the contingency plans the Pentagon are developing. Was this part of the discussion with Secretary Rumsfeld this morning? And, two, wouldn't, as most multinational forces are, be mostly made up of U.S. forces?

MR. McCLELLAN: Again, I think I've addressed this matter previously. We prepare for all

contingencies. And I would not make too much of that when I say that. I would take it for what it is. That is appropriate planning or prudent planning that we do. But we are committed to working toward a political solution. That's where it lies right now, and that's where we're working with our international partners, to bring about a democratic and peaceful and constitutional solution to the situation in Haiti. Obviously, we have said -- and the President has said, he said earlier today -- that we would be supportive of an international security force going into Haiti as part of a political solution. And so we are going to make appropriate contingency plans.

Q That begs the question, though, how much of a troop strength the United States could even provide to such a force considering --

MR. McCLELLAN: You're making assumptions there, Bob. I wouldn't make those assumptions.

Q Can I follow on the U.N. story? Can you deny or confirm the allegation that the UK did the spying at the request of the U.S.? And secondly, The Washington Post report about the CIA practice in the Reagan administration against Russia, is the practice about exporting flawed technology for intelligence purposes --

MR. McCLELLAN: Well, let me -- the first part, again, on the United Kingdom issue, I think the United Kingdom has addressed that issue. And like the United Kingdom, like others in this administration, I do not get into a discussion of intelligence matters, for national security reasons. And I would not read anything into that, one way or the other, when I say that. It's just a matter of policy.

Q But is the U.S. still exporting flawed technology for intelligence purposes to sabotage other countries? (Laughter.)

MR. McCLELLAN: Nice try, but -- go ahead, Les.

Q Senator Kerry was one of -- I have a two-part -- Senator Kerry was one of only 14 members of the Senate who voted against the Defense of Marriage Act, because, he claims, it is, in his words, gay bashing. Yet Kerry keeps announcing that he opposes gay marriage. And the Boston Globe now reports that he supported an amendment to the Massachusetts Constitution to ban gay marriage. And my question: Does the President disagree with the Bush-Cheney campaign statement that this is "hypocritical"?

MR. McCLELLAN: The Bush-Cheney campaign is the President's campaign.

Q So he doesn't disagree. (Laughter.)

MR. McCLELLAN: Les, I think you've heard the President's views on marriage. You heard them earlier today. I think he stated it very well.

Q -- about the hypocrisy, that's what I was saying.

MR. McCLELLAN: You know that if you've got campaign questions, you can direct those to the campaign.

Q Both The New York Times and The Washington Post reviews of "The Passion of the Christ" were very strongly negative. Despite that, you told us the President plans to see it, as did the largest winter opening day audience in American history. And my question: Since these two newspapers often pan the

President, like they panned "The Passion," would you deny this is a sign of their notably waning influence?

MR. McCLELLAN: I don't think the President has seen those editorials, but I would just remind you that --

Q He doesn't read those papers?

MR. McCLELLAN: No, again, I said that at some point in time he intends to see it and he is interested in seeing it.

Q But he doesn't regard those --

MR. McCLELLAN: Go ahead, Sarah.

**Q Thank you.** Scott, according to an Iraqi Governing Council member, an interim charter will not be reading in time this weekend. This member says the problem is that Islamic fundamentalist want a new government with religion as the major part. Would that be unacceptable to the President?

MR. McCLELLAN: Well, one of the things that was called for in the transitional law, one of the fundamental elements of that law would be freedom of religion. There are a number of specific rights that were spelled out in the agreement reached on November 15th with the Iraqi Governing Council. The actual transitional law continues to be in the process of being drafted, and we continue to expect them to expect that the deadline will be met. But that work remains underway.

Q Scott, if the deadline expires without an agreement, what happens? And --

MR. McCLELLAN: Well, I don't want to speculate about that, but obviously, they are moving forward on the transitional law and great progress is being made. The deadline is coming up, right away, and we'll see.

Q I mean, you must have contingency plans in place in the event that --

MR. McCLELLAN: I think good progress is being made, and we're hopeful that the deadline will -- the timetable will still be met. This is part of the efforts to transfer sovereignty to the Iraqi people on the timetable that was set out in the November 15th agreement.

Q Scott, you said that this morning the President and the Secretary of Defense discussed one contingency, that being a political settlement --

MR. McCLELLAN: I didn't say what the President discussed with the Secretary of Defense. He has regular meetings with the Secretary of Defense, and I don't tend to read those meetings out.

**Q I stand corrected.** But in any event, one of the contingencies that you mentioned was the possibility of a political settlement in Haiti. Another contingency no doubt you're preparing for is possibly things go the other way and Port-au-Prince goes the way of at least three other cities in Haiti at this point. In these cases, it's fairly standard for the United States to float a Marine expeditionary unit out to protect the embassy. Is that being done?

MR. McCLELLAN: Well, the Pentagon has already sent a team into the embassy. There was already a

team sent to protect the embassy and protect the people in the embassy. That was already done.

Q Is the discussion of a Marine expeditionary unit --

MR. McCLELLAN: I don't typically get into discussing military movements or deployments. I think those questions are best addressed to the Pentagon. But they have already sent a team in to make sure that the embassy was secure and to make sure the people in the embassy were protected.

**Q On Wednesday**, at the Brookings Institution, Senator Hillary Clinton called for a statement from the President to the effect that the U.S. will not have become the vehicle by which women's rights in Iraq were turned back. She said that under Saddam Hussein -- and I'll quote -- "women had rights. They went to school, they participated in the professions, they participated in government and business. And as long as they stayed out of his way, they had considerable freedom of movement." Do you agree with her assertion that women under Saddam Hussein had more rights than they do today?

MR. McCLELLAN: I think that the former regime was one that was oppressive of the rights of the Iraqi people. This was a regime that brutalized the Iraqi people. We went into Iraq and liberated some 25 million Iraqis, just as we did in Afghanistan, as well. You're seeing in Afghanistan that progress is being made and that we're moving forward on making sure that there is greater rights for women. And we are also moving forward on the transitional law -- the Iraqi people are moving forward on the transitional law. It's one of the -- again, one of the fundamental elements of that is equality. And so I think that the Iraqi people are pleased to be free of that oppressive regime that you mention.

Mark, this must be good.

Q Yes, it's a good one. (Laughter.) Tell us why --

MR. McCLELLAN: That's what scares me. (Laughter.)

**Q Me, too.** Tell us why the President only wants to give the 9/11 Commission an hour to question him.

MR. McCLELLAN: Well, Mark, let's keep in mind a couple of things. One, this administration has provided unprecedented cooperation to the 9/11 Commission. Their work is very important, and we are working with them in a cooperative and close manner to make sure that they have the information they need to do their job. There's lots of ways to get them the information they need to do their job.

And I would point out to you that it is extraordinary for a sitting President of the United States to meet with the 9/11 Commission, a legislative body. This is a legislative body under the law that it was created under by the United States Congress. There are separation of powers issues that are involved here, and that's an important principle. Nevertheless, this President has agreed to meet in a private session with the chairman and vice chairman because he believes their work is important. And he looks forward to that meeting. And we believe that we can provide the necessary information to the chairman and vice chairman in the time period that was set aside and that they can share that information with the rest of the commission.

Now, there were some questions brought up earlier today on this very issue. I would point out to you that there have been more than 560 interviews, there have been more than 100 briefings, including head-of-agency level. When DR. RICE: . Rice met with the commission, there was a request for her to meet with all the commission, and she gladly accepted. There was weeks, weeks of notice on that meeting, yet only five members of the commission showed up for that meeting. There was another NSC official that

met with the commission and only four members showed up. So I think you need to look at their past conduct in the context of this issue that has been brought up. There's not a single commissioner that has participated in every interview. They depend upon others to provide them the information they need to complete their work. And I think that's important to keep that in context.

But again, this administration has bent over backwards to make sure the commission has the information they need to do their job. The chairman of the commission has stated the kind of cooperation that they are receiving from the White House and from the administration -- more than 2 million pages of documents; more than 60 compact disks of radar, flight and other information; more than 800 audio cassette tapes of interviews and other materials; more than 100 briefings, as I mentioned; and more than 560 interviews. So we are providing a tremendous amount of access to the commission so that they can complete their work.

Q When would you expect an agreement on a session to be nailed down?

MR. McCLELLAN: Obviously, we will keep you posted on those developments.

Q So it's not this weekend?

MR. McCLELLAN: Nothing to announce, no, Wendall. Nothing to announce.

Q If you've got even Republican senators voting in a committee that they need to take extraordinary steps to try to get information out of you on prewar intelligence on Iraq, and then you've got members of the commission saying, why do we only get -- why do only the chairman and vice chairman get to interview the President and why is it only one hour --

MR. McCLELLAN: Look at their past conduct when people make those comments.

Q Pardon me?

MR. McCLELLAN: I think you should look at their past conduct when people make those comments. I just pointed out to you some facts. And I would ask you, why are you not reporting the fact that we have provided unprecedented cooperation to this commission? It's important to report what we are doing to help the commission complete its work. Because this President wants the commission to do a good and thorough job. It's important that if they have information that can help us prevent another 9/11 from ever happening again, that we have that information. And that's why we're working in a spirit of cooperation very closely with the commission.

Q The fact that these things are going on, it obviously opens up the criticism from people like John Kerry, and even from people who are sort of normal, everyday people out there that look at the administration and say, why isn't the President giving us more information? Why are --

MR. McCLELLAN: We are giving them all the information that they have requested. And I would point you back to Chairman Keane's interview this morning: "We have gotten a lot of cooperation from the President." I go on to quote him: "This is one of the first Presidents to agree to an interview. Even during the Kennedy Commission, Lyndon Johnson wouldn't give them an interview. From day one, when they helped" -- he was referring to the administration. "From day one, when they helped us get our clearances expedited, they have been helpful. We have now seen the most secret documents in the possession of the United States government. No congressional committee has seen those kinds of documents. We have seen them. We have been able to take notes and they will inform our report. There hasn't been a single

thing" -- single thing, he said -- "we have asked for that some members of the staff haven't seen. Not a single person has refused to be interviewed," he went on to say. I think it's very important to make sure that when there's a discussion of this, that the facts are being reported.

Q I don't mean to be smart, but wouldn't it be safe to hypothesize that all the commission members would show up for the session with the President?

MR. McCLELLAN: I'm sorry?

Q Wouldn't it be safe to hypothesize that all the commission members would show up for a session with the President?

MR. McCLELLAN: What's been agreed to is that the chairman and vice chairman will meet with the President in private session. But, I mean, look at their past conduct. They've had ample opportunity -- and that's the whole point here, when I say that we have great confidence in the chairman and vice chairman to share all that information with the other commissioners so that they can get their -- so that they can get their work done.

Q -- saying the commission is not committed to its task?

MR. McCLELLAN: You would have to ask those individuals that question.

Q Are you suggesting some members of the commission are not committed to the task?

MR. McCLELLAN: I'm not suggesting anything. I'm just -- I'm reporting facts that I don't think are necessarily being reported in this discussion.

Q Scott, can you articulate the reason for only wanting to speak to the chairman and vice chairman?

MR. McCLELLAN: Well, I just talked to you about how this is an extraordinary move by a sitting President of the United States to do this, and how we are confident that the chairman and vice chairman will be able to share all this information with the rest of the commissioners. There is an important principle involved in this discussion, and that is the separation of powers issues. This is a legislative body.

Nevertheless, the President agreed to the request to meet with the chairman and the vice chairman. And he looks forward to meeting with them because he believes their work is very important. And he wants to help them complete their work in a timely manner. I would say that we are also working in a very timely manner to make sure that the commission has the information they need. We are bending over backwards to make sure that they are able to do a thorough job and complete their work in a timely manner. And that's the way we have worked from day one.

Thank you. Have a good weekend.

END 2:48 P.M. EST