



Daily Press Briefing
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TRANSCRIPT:

(1:30 p.m. EST)

MR. ERELI: Good afternoon. Let me begin with apologies for starting late. Sorry about that, but events beyond my control.

QUESTION: In a case like this, could you please try to let us know because, as you point out, you're an hour and two minutes late, and that's kind of a long time for no notification.

MR. ERELI: I will do so.

QUESTION: Are you also willing to consider postponing your 2 o'clock briefing for those of us who might have to file on this briefing beforehand?

MR. ERELI: It will be done.

QUESTION: Thank you.

QUESTION: And would you put that briefing on the record?

QUESTION: Yeah, what is the point --

QUESTION: Why? What's the point of secret briefing about Sudan?

QUESTION: -- of a briefing on background?

MR. ERELI: Why don't we -- we can maybe discuss this later.

QUESTION: Okay.

MR. ERELI: We'll deal with the issues, the news of the day, now.

QUESTION: All right. Shall we go on to today's questions? There are reports in Moscow that Beth Jones called in the Russian ambassador to complain about the Ukraine elections. Can you verify that?

MR. ERELI: I'm aware that Ambassador Jones has spoken with the Ukrainian ambassador about the elections and about our view on those elections. I'm not aware that there's been a discussion with the Russian ambassador. I'll have to check on that for you.

QUESTION: I may have it wrong. I'm sorry. It's a Russian Ministry report, and it isn't clear. It's Ambassador Ushakov.

QUESTION: It's in *The Washington Post*.

MR. ERELI: What I have to tell you is that Ambassador Jones has talked to the Ukrainian ambassador about our views of the elections, as has Ambassador Herbst in Kiev spoken with officials of the Ukrainian Government, relaying to them our deep concern over the allegations of fraud and abuse, making the point that because of these reports we question the results, preliminary results, as they've been released, and that we are calling for, along with others in the international community, a complete and immediate investigation into the conduct of the election in order to get to the bottom of reports of fraud.

QUESTION: Four, at least four, Ukrainian diplomats at the embassy here have written a letter, essentially complaining about the way the elections were conducted. That's unusual behavior. Do you have any observation, any remarks to say about that?

MR. ERELI: There are numerous indications and evidence of the outrage of the Ukrainian people over the way this campaign and elections have been conducted. There are the examples that you cite. There are also reports of high-level Ukrainian military officers, police officers and others who have spoken out for democracy and against the use of violence by government forces against demonstrators.

I think what's clear is that there is a widespread perception in Ukraine over the fairness -- a widespread perception that the elections were not free, were not fair, and do not reflect the will of the people. That's why we are making clear our position that the authorities need to take steps now to address those concerns, to restore public confidence in the process and legitimacy to the election results so that the people's will is heard and reflected.

QUESTION: Can I ask you one last thing and then I'll stop dominating this thing? There have been, for a long time now, but there are increasing reports that president, or would-be President Yushchenko is looking a little different -- a little worn, a little not like himself, and that's raised suspicions of all sorts of dirty doings. Is there anything the U.S. Government knows about this?

MR. ERELI: I would -- I don't have any information to share with you on these reports. They've been out there for some time, but I have no information to refute or substantiate them.

QUESTION: Adam?

MR. ERELI: Mm-hmm?

QUESTION: Adam, are you saying that the account and the editorial in *The Washington Post* that Assistant Secretary Jones spoke to the Russian ambassador was incorrect?

MR. ERELI: No, I just don't have anything for you on the -- I mean, I don't know --

QUESTION: Do you know for a fact that she did not speak to the ambassador?

MR. ERELI: I told you I'll get you what I can after the briefing.

QUESTION: Well, when did she speak with the Ukrainian Ambassador?

MR. ERELI: She spoke to -- either today or yesterday. I think she was -- probably both days, but I believe she was going to talk to him today.

QUESTION: But you were able to get a readout of that meeting, but yet you don't know whether she spoke to the Russian ambassador?

MR. ERELI: I have not checked to see whether she has spoken to the ambassador. I'll do that.

QUESTION: Well, regardless of whether she spoke to the Russian ambassador, does the United States have any feelings about President Putin calling Mr. -- the Prime Minister to congratulate him on his victory?

MR. ERELI: As I said, we -- as I said yesterday, in answer to that question, I'd refer you to the Russians on President Putin's call. Our view is that, at this point, no one has been declared the winner in the election and we hope that all democratic governments would join us in supporting efforts to investigate the conduct of the election and to get to the bottom of reports of fraud.

QUESTION: Okay, wait. Let me see. You're referring me to Russia to find out whether you guys have an opinion about President Putin's phone call; is that correct?

MR. ERELI: I just gave you -- I just gave you my view -- our view of the status of the elections and what we hope -- the kind of support we hope to get from other governments in response to those elections.

QUESTION: Well, do you think that you have seen that kind of support from the other government of Russia?

MR. ERELI: I don't have any comments on particular actions by particular governments at this point.

QUESTION: Yesterday, you raised veiled suggestions that the relationship with Ukraine could be altered. That left us, you know, looking at the -- staring at the ceiling and trying to figure out what you might do. There have been suggestions in the past that the U.S. would help Ukraine in European councils. Of course, there's the whole aid question. Are you -- can elaborate at all as to what punitive, if that's the right word, steps the U.S. might take?

MR. ERELI: Again, I think at this point, it's a little too early to go down that road. Clearly, as we said yesterday, should the elections prove to be -- prove, in the end, and the results to be obtained by fraud and abuse, then we would -- then those would have consequences for our bilateral relations. There's no question about that. What those specific consequences would be, I don't -- you know, it depends -- again, it depends on the circumstances. I'm not in a position now to give you specifics or provide hypotheticals.

QUESTION: Okay.

QUESTION: It seemed to me that yesterday you said that if Ukrainian authorities did not take steps to thoroughly investigate and deal with the allegations of fraud, and to see that the will of the people was respected, that you would then consider taking steps against Ukraine and against individuals said to have --

MR. ERELI: Right.

QUESTION: -- believed to have engaged in fraud.

Given the authorities' failure thus far to, it seems to me, take any steps in the direction of thoroughly investigating, let alone dealing with the allegations, are you closer to

the point at which you're going to start looking at these steps? How long are you going to give them before you actually decide to take some action?

MR. ERELI: I don't have a timetable for you. Obviously -- obviously we think it's important to act expeditiously and, I think, to move decisively in the right direction. But I'm not being -- I'm not in a position to be prescriptive for you and tell you in specific detail what steps need to be taken when.

Clearly, however, what we're looking for is a decision, an action, to investigate reports of fraud and take -- determine what happened and take corrective action, if warranted, and to do it in a verifiable and demonstrable way.

QUESTION: What kind of corrective action are you thinking of?

MR. ERELI: I can't be more specific than that.

QUESTION: (inaudible) on something else?

MR. ERELI: No, I'm sorry.

QUESTION: Going back to the conversations that Assistant Secretary Jones has had with the Ukrainian Ambassador and that Ambassador Herbst have had, who has Ambassador Herbst been speaking with?

MR. ERELI: Ambassador Herbst has been speaking with officials in the prime minister's office, in the president's office, in the Central Election Commission and with members of the opposition -- or representatives of the opposition as well as representatives of the parliament. And all our officials in their conversations have made the same points: to discuss the recent developments; to call for a resolution of the fraud complaints; and to urge authorities not to use force against its own people.

QUESTION: Right. Okay. And you also mentioned before that you've noticed that a number of senior military and police figures had spoken out against the use of violence on opposition demonstrators.

MR. ERELI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: Are you aware that any violence has been used?

MR. ERELI: Not as -- not at this point in time --

QUESTION: They've spoken out against the potential use of violence?

MR. ERELI: Yeah. Spoken out against the use of violence against demonstrators.

QUESTION: And then just going back to the conversations that you have had with Ukrainians. Have been -- in these conversations, have they been solely about the election or have things like Ukraine's contribution of troops in Iraq come up as well?

MR. ERELI: The focus has been the elections and the aftermath of the elections.

QUESTION: Okay. And you're not aware of any direct contact with President Kuchma?

MR. ERELI: I'm not aware of it. I'm not -- I can check and see if we've had any direct contact with him.

QUESTION: I'd be --

QUESTION: That's my question. And you would announce it, I suppose, because you'd want it known, but is the Secretary waiting with a telephone call or something?

QUESTION: Or the Deputy Secretary?

MR. ERELI: No.

QUESTION: No?

MR. ERELI: No.

QUESTION: All right. Can we go to something else? India. There was a statement put out, I think yesterday, which I simply don't understand. It referred to a meeting and it said the U.S. and Indian officials -- and the tenor of it was to improve relations with India. I thought you had good relations, excellent relations, with India. What new ground is being broken with India?

MR. ERELI: The statement -- I'm not sure the statement -- I'm not sure what statement you're referring to, but if there's --

QUESTION: Well --

QUESTION: About the meeting with Christina Rocca.

MR. ERELI: Yeah, that's right. Yesterday?

QUESTION: I think it was yesterday, yeah. It was put out yesterday.

MR. ERELI: Yeah, there's -- let me put it this way.

QUESTION: Oh, there it is. It sort of suggested --

MR. ERELI: We did not intend to suggest that somehow relations were not good and went from a position of being less than excellent to something better than that. Our relations -- I think what the statement was trying to underscore is that we have a very strong bilateral relationship with India, that our level of cooperation in a variety of

fields is intensive and mutually beneficial, and that the meeting in question contributed to that overall -- that overall condition.

QUESTION: Gotcha.

QUESTION: Can I follow?

MR. ERELI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: High-level officials from here or from the State Department, like Secretary Powell and Deputy Secretary Armitage, and also Ms. Christina Rocca, they all have traveled to India and Pakistan and worked hard to bring both nations on the table, and they are still talking, and relations are improving dramatically day and night, and leaders are talking of India and Pakistan.

But Indian Americans here, and what they are saying is that at the one level U.S. is trying to improve relations between India and Pakistan, but on the other hand selling arms to Pakistan. And Mr. Shyam Saran, the Foreign Secretary of India, was here and he had a strong protest with Ms. Rice, Dr. Rice, and also before Mr. Armitage, and also at the Pentagon, protesting that these arms sales to Pakistan cannot improve relations or can damage the relations between U.S. and India.

And your counterpart in Delhi, Mr. Sarna, said that it could bring a dent in the relations between U.S. and India, as far as selling sophisticated weapons to Pakistan. My question is here. What kind of message you are giving to New Delhi or to Islamabad? One hand, improve relations? Second, arms races are there, because then India will shop elsewhere for its nuclear weapons.

MR. ERELI: There is no contradiction between having strong, good relations with India and meeting the defense needs of other countries through the sale of U.S. arms. Our arms sales policy, I think, is clear, governed by U.S. interests and congressional legislation, it's transparent, it's publicly notified, and we've done that in the case of the recent transactions in question. So there should-- I think there should be no question that you can have good relations with one country and sell arms to another country. It's not a mutually exclusive proposition, and nor should it be.

QUESTION: So then that means if India buys arms from, let's say, France, Russia, Israel or somewhere else, then U.S. will not have any objections?

MR. ERELI: Again, I mean, as a general proposition, our views is countries are free to buy arms from whatever their source. The question is what -- you know, what is the purpose of those acquisitions? What does that represent for the strategic balance in the region? And that's how we evaluate these sort of things.

QUESTION: And they are saying, Adam, that most of the arms bought by the Pakistan were used against India, only the history tells it by itself, and those arms will not help Pakistan to fight against terrorism because U.S. is already fighting against terrorism and --

MR. ERELI: I'm not interested in getting in a debate with Indian officials about U.S. arms sales policy.

QUESTION: Adam, can I go back to Ukraine for a second? As you said, the outcome of the election has not yet been decided and its results are only preliminary, even though you question them. I'm wondering if, given that, you have any -- you take any position on the opposition candidate swearing himself in, basically, in parliament and proclaiming himself to be the president.

MR. ERELI: I'm not sure that the event is as you describe it. Our position is, as I said earlier, that the results are not final and we urge the authorities not to certify the results until full and complete investigations are undertaken.

QUESTION: So would that also -- you would also suggest that neither candidate run around proclaiming victory right now?

MR. ERELI: We certainly don't believe there is a declared winner at this point.

QUESTION: Well, I know, except for self-declared winners. Both of them have declared themselves a winner so --

MR. ERELI: Without commenting on the specific incident, the details of which I'm not fully aware, this is our position.

QUESTION: One more, Adam.

MR. ERELI: I'm sorry. Let's go to this lady.

Yes, ma'am.

QUESTION: Based on the new report of UN AIDS Agency, has been published today, there is almost 40 million people affected with HIV virus. Do you have any new policy, any new policy change in your supporting the President program for HIV?

MR. ERELI: Well, the report may be news, but it's certainly not news to us. And, frankly, for the last four years, President Bush and his Administration have undertaken a commitment of historic proportions to fighting the pandemic of AIDS. President Bush has, I think -- and his Administration, have raised it to a level of policy concern that it's never been before and have backed up that -- backed that up with real resources in acquiring unprecedented levels of budgetary support to fight AIDS and putting together a very focused and sophisticated program to confront AIDS in those countries where it is the-- poses the greatest threat, so that the HIV/AIDS initiative that we have been pursuing, the Secretary has spoken about so powerfully for the past four years, I think represents a real, tangible commitment of the U.S. Government, a recognition by the U.S. Government, this is a threat to, I think, not only the United States, but the international community, and that we are going to devote real resources to fighting it.

And I would also underscore in that regard, that with regard to the UN, that the U.S. remains the largest contributor to the global funds on AIDS. So, you know, rather than look to something -- some new policy, the point you should take away is that we've been consistent and emphatic about recognizing this problem and doing something about it.

Yes.

QUESTION: Adam, there has been a surge in fighting in Darfur since Monday, apparently, and the Sudanese Government is accusing the rebels of launching widespread attacks and killing dozens of policemen. Do you have any view on that or culpability on either side?

MR. ERELI: Our view is that the humanitarian situation in Darfur and eastern Chad remains extremely fragile. Fighting and ceasefire violations by both sides continue. The most recent incidents involve violence reportedly instigated by the Sudan Liberation Army.

Our response is to remind both sides that they have made commitments in the N'Djamena ceasefire under the humanitarian security protocols, that the African Union

force is -- will be aggressive in investigating and monitoring the situation. I think we've seen already concerted action by the African Union mission in Darfur. Their numbers are steadily increasing; upwards of 800 at the present time, looking to grow to another approximately 400 in early December, to a total of 1,200 or so, and all towards the goal of a total of 3,200 later in the year.

I would also remind you that there's another report due by Special Representative Pronk at the end of this month. It will give us an opportunity to meet again in the UN to review activity in Darfur, and I think that's an important milestone.

And finally, it continues to be our view that what was accomplished in Nairobi last week by the UN Security Council provides a way forward for dealing with the Darfur crisis, in the sense that, when implemented, the final north-south agreement will contain provisions for local autonomy and federalism that can be applied to the situation in the west of the country.

Yes.

QUESTION: Adam, a question on U.S. Commerce is proposing over 20,000 more high-tech visas, which will go to the foreign-born students or -- from overseas. Does the State Department support this policy of bringing more 25 -- more foreign-born high-tech visas?

MR. ERELI: I'm not sure what specific visas you're talking about. I'd have to check into that. I would note that if you look at our student visa numbers for 2004 over 2003, we've begun to see an upward trend in number of visas issued, which we take as a positive sign that perhaps we've turned the corner and are beginning to inch back towards levels that are indicative of greater ease of coming to the United States and increased interest and involvement of students in coming here.

QUESTION: I'm talking about, actually, many of U.S. companies, hi-tech companies like, you know, Microsoft or Texas Instrument or Hewlett-Packard and all, that they are short of hi-tech workers, and they need more and more workers --

MR. ERELI: Yeah, right.

QUESTION: That's why they're taking their -- outsourcing their business.

MR. ERELI: Right. Again, I don't have any comment on that issue, and that's domestic policy.

QUESTION: Thank you, thank you.

MR. ERELI: Yes. I'm sorry. One more question.

QUESTION: Any update on talks with Congress regarding the U.S. aid to the Palestinians?

MR. ERELI: Still underway.

QUESTION: Nothing new?

QUESTION: Can I have one more, please?

MR. ERELI: No, I'm sorry. That's -- we've got another briefing to go to.

QUESTION: Iran, okay.

(The briefing was concluded at 2:00 p.m.)

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