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Dr. Rice Previews the President's Trip to Europe and the Middle East

Press Briefing by National Security Advisor Dr. Condoleezza Rice on the President's Trip to Europe and the Middle East

James S. Brady Press Briefing Room

[In Focus: G8 2003](#)

4:12 P.M. EDT

DR. RICE: Good afternoon. I'm going to apologize for what is a rather schedule. So I'm only going to go through the schedule, and then I'm happy to take your comments and your questions.

First I'll highlight the schedule for Europe, Russia and the Middle East, and then take questions. The President and Mrs. Bush will arrive in Krakow, Poland the night of Friday, May 30th. The following morning they will travel to Auschwitz and Birkenhau. This visit is to honor the memory of the innocents lost in the terror of the Third Reich and the Holocaust, and to serve to remind all of us of the dangers of evil unchecked.

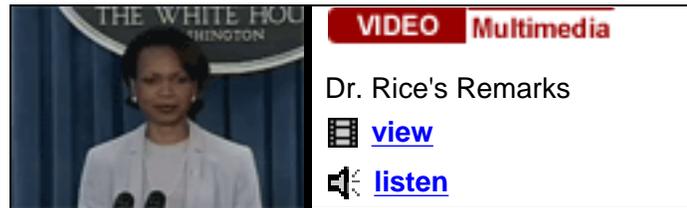
The President will then have a bilateral meeting with President Kwasniewski and also Prime Minister Miller of Poland, and deliver an address to the people of Poland at the Wawel Castle, before departing for St. Petersburg, Russia later that afternoon.

That evening, President and Mrs. Bush will join President and Mrs. Putin and their guests in celebrating the 300th anniversary of the founding of St. Petersburg, with a dinner at Peterhof Palace, followed by a ballet performance and fireworks display.

On Sunday, June 1st, President Bush and President Putin will meet to discuss issues of bilateral and regional interest. Later that morning, the President will depart St. Petersburg for Geneva, en route to Evian, France, for the meeting of G8 leaders.

President Bush will lunch with the meeting host, President Chirac, and the other G8 leaders. At this lunch, President Chirac will also host many other heads of state, as well as the leaders of several multilateral organizations. All of these leaders will then participate in a meeting later that afternoon.

Early in the evening, President Bush will meet with Chinese President Hu Jintao. The President will



then dine with his fellow G8 leaders. President Chirac will also host the heads of the member nations of the New Partnership for African Development at this dinner.

The next morning, Monday, June 2nd, the G8 leaders will hold a working session, following which President Bush will meet with his host, President Chirac. And then that meeting will be followed by a G8 leaders working lunch.

Later in the afternoon on June 2nd, President Bush will depart France for Geneva, en route to Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, at the invitation of President Hosni Mubarak.

The following morning, June 3rd, the President will have a bilateral meeting with President Mubarak. President Mubarak will then host a meeting with President Bush, Crown Prince Abdallah of Saudi Arabia, King Abdullah of Jordan, King Hamad of Bahrain, and the Palestinian Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas. That will be followed by a working lunch of that group of leaders.

President Bush will depart the next morning, Wednesday, June 4th, for Aqaba, Jordan, at the invitation of King Abdullah, with whom he will meet upon his arrival. Later that morning, conditions permitting, President Bush will meet with Prime Minister Sharon, followed by a meeting with Prime Minister Abbas. That afternoon the President will have a trilateral meeting with Prime Minister Sharon and Prime Minister Abbas.

The President will then depart en route to Doha, Qatar, where the next morning, Thursday, June 5th, he will breakfast with Ambassador Jerry Bremer and General Tommy Franks, followed by a meeting with his host Amir Hamad. The President will then travel to Regional Central Command Headquarters to visit with coalition forces. That evening, President and Mrs. Bush will depart for Washington, arriving home on the night of June 5th.

Now, I'll take your questions. Yes.

Q Dr. Rice, on the Russian part -- on relations with Russia, do you expect to bring up the subject of Iran? And what exactly do you want from the Russians on Iran? You don't really expect to drop Bushehr and other projects there?

DR. RICE: Well, we're discussing with the Russians and have been discussing for some time the proliferation threat that we believe Iran poses. We believe that the recent findings of the IAEA on their visit to Iran will demonstrate that there is, indeed, a problem that needs to be dealt with in Iran. We will wait for that IAEA report. But I think that the Presidents will want to talk about what steps can be taken to make certain that to make certain that any efforts in which anyone is engaged in with Iran -- and by the way, it's not just Russia who is engaged in various kinds of cooperation with Iran -- are not actually contributing to the potential problem of a military nuclear program in Iran.

We believe that we've had pretty fruitful discussions with Russia in recent months on this matter. Particularly, Minister Rumyantsev and Secretary Abraham have had very important discussions. And the discussions, as I said, have been fruitful and far-ranging, and I think the Presidents will want to build on those.

Q Dr. Rice, a next meeting of the G8, will it be in Texas next year?

DR. RICE: We don't have an announcement yet to make on where the U.S. will host a G8.

Q What does the President hope to come away with in the summit in Jordan? Does he want immediate implementation of the road map, a cease-fire, what exactly?

DR. RICE: The President has always said that when he thought he could give a little impetus to what is going to be a very long and difficult process, that he would do so. The President believes that this is a new opportunity for peace at the end of the war in Iraq. And particularly with changes in the Palestinian leadership, that there is a new opportunity, with the Israel government's acceptance of the steps in the road map and some of the statements that Prime Minister Sharon has made about the future that he sees with the Palestinian people, the President just believes that this is a good time to sit down, face-to-face, eye-to-eye with the leaders who have responsibilities for trying to bring about that peace.

I want to be very clear, This is going to be a long process and it is going to have ups and downs, as it has always had. But on this entire Middle East portion, what the President will do is to talk to the assembled leaders about their responsibilities and about our responsibilities to try and push forward the peace.

Q May I ask about the Sharm el-Sheikh end of that? Are you going to be asking the Arab leaders to make a formal statement endorsing Mahmoud Abbas's effort to centralize all armed force, police force under the recognized Palestinian Authority and the militias? Are you looking for something that concrete out of that?

DR. RICE: Well, we're examining the best way to signal the commitment of all who want peace to the extremely important efforts that are underway in the Palestinian Authority for reform -- reform of transparency in the finances of the Palestinian Authority and, perhaps most importantly, reform of the security services into security services that are unified and, therefore, accountable.

And there are a number of Arab states who have already talked about the importance of that effort, who are, indeed, supporting that effort in various ways. And I'm sure the President will want to have a full discussion of that. There's no secret that we very much think that this is one of the most important steps that Prime Minister Abbas will need to take; that he will need to be devoted to creating security services that can be accountable and that can truly fight terror. But the form in which we express that support, I think, is up to the leaders.

The most important thing is that when we sit down, we all have to recognize that the responsibilities for everyone who says that they want a peaceful outcome of this, that those responsibilities are quite heavy. And those responsibilities include fighting terror. Those responsibilities include ending incitement. Those responsibilities include saying that anyone who is engaged in terror cannot possibly do anything but harm the process toward peace.

And so those are some of the principles that the President put forward in his June 24th speech. And I

think he looks forward to an opportunity to sit down face-to-face, in the group with Arab leaders and talk about those responsibilities.

Q Dr. Rice, can you please tell us how Iraq fits into this schedule? Because the heavy emphasis on the Israeli- Palestinian issue and the G8 agenda in place -- where does Iraq fit in? How much time will the President spend talking about getting together peacekeepers and reconstruction, financial aid, that sort of thing?

DR. RICE: Well, these discussions since the passage of Resolution 1483 in the U.N. have been quite intensive with a number of countries that even before 1483, but particularly since the passage of the resolution, have been quite intensive on matters of who might be willing over a period of time to contribute to stabilization forces; who might be willing to contribute to the well-being of the Iraqi people through development assistance, or reconstruction assistance.

I would remind everybody that this was a broad coalition from the very beginning. There are a lot of other countries that are already contributing fundamentally to what is going on in Iraq. So there's no need to suddenly launch an agenda on issues of support for the Iraqi people because that's already an agenda that is well launched.

I'm sure that the President will, with his G8 colleagues, talk about the reconstruction effort, talk about what can be done to support the Iraqi people. But those discussions are well underway.

With the Arab leaders, the President will want to talk also about Iraq. Again, he's had many discussions with them by phone, by letter, in some cases in person. And they will talk about that agenda.

The one thing that the President will have an opportunity to do that I think he's particularly looking forward to is at CENTCOM to sit down with Ambassador Bremer who's now been in the region for a couple of weeks with General Franks, and to talk about how the reconstruction effort is going, and how we're going to discharge our responsibilities to the Iraqi people.

Q But can you get together the peacekeeping forces that you need if you don't have the bigger, wealthier, traditional allies in the game here?

DR. RICE: Well, I wouldn't jump to any conclusions about who will or will not engage in the production of stabilization forces. We're not at that stage just yet of having a massive peacekeeping operation. I remind everybody, the war is only recently over. It is also the case that American forces, the coalition forces, have the bulk of the responsibility right now for security. As Secretary Rumsfeld has said a number of times, we've focused particularly on trying to deliver security to Baghdad.

And so, it is a conversation that is underway. I'm quite certain that because everybody is committed in 1483 to making things work for the Iraqi people, that there are a lot of countries out there, and the President has had expressions of interest from a wide range of countries. And, by the way, countries, whatever their stand was at the time of the war, countries that understand the importance of doing well in Iraq and have said that they want to talk about what kind of contribution they can make.

Q May I do a follow-up on Iraq, please?

DR. RICE: Yes.

Q As you probably know, the Pentagon is my primary beat and there are several senior military officers I've been talking to since the trip was announced. And almost to the officer they're saying, look, any President who traps on a tactical aircraft on a carrier is no wimp. But they would be very disappointed if he didn't choose to go on after Doha, at least into Iraq, to meet the troops. Can you state unequivocally that he will not take that trip?

DR. RICE: The President's schedule is as I have stated it.

Q But he can change the schedule, is that correct?

DR. RICE: The President's schedule is as I have stated it.

Q I'm interested in this meeting you're going to be having with Hu Jintao. It reminds me a little bit of the G8s at the beginning of the '90s, when you had President Yeltsin coming on his way to Russia's becoming a permanent member. Is that what you have in mind? And can you also tell us what the North Korea agenda may be with President Hu?

DR. RICE: Well, the outreach that President Chirac has arranged has been actually a feature now of G8s for the last couple of times. And it's in that context that China is coming. China is coming --

Q It's usually been with developing nations, though, not with --

DR. RICE: Well, but there are a number of countries that are coming to this outreach session. And I think that people feel that it's important to have a wide spectrum of countries involved in this particular outreach. This is not all developing countries; this is an outreach in which China I think will have a very important role to play because, for instance, one of the issues will be about trade and global growth -- and those are issues in which China plays a role.

As to any restructuring of the G8, I don't think that's on the table at this particular point in time.

On the North Korea agenda, it's very clear that the key to resolving the North Korean issue peacefully is for everyone to continue to send a strong message to the North Koreans that they cannot blackmail their way into the international community of states; that they are going to have to live up to their international obligations -- obligations which were founded on the premise of a non-nuclear Korean Peninsula.

The Chinese have said -- along with every other state in the region and states globally -- that a non-nuclear Korean Peninsula is the goal of everyone. The Chinese have gone so far as to say that a nuclear program on the Korean Peninsula would be an anathema to their interests.

So we have a very strong collective view, shared by Japan and South Korea. You've heard expressions from Prime Minister Koizumi, you heard expressions from the South Koreans when they were here, that the North Koreans need to live up to their obligations. That's the core. Any discussions with the North Koreans about this have to reflect the fact that this is a problem between North Korea and the world -- not a problem between North Korea and the United States, it's a problem between North Korea and the world.

The unfortunate thing is that North Korea was actually doing relatively well last summer, a couple of years ago, when President Putin had been to North Korea; then when the Prime Minister of Japan when to talk about a pathway to normalization, the North-South talks were pretty active. Secretary Powell met with the North Korea Foreign Minister at Brunei. And the North Koreans, we hope temporarily, abandon that path in favor of one that tries to blackmail people. The world's answer in response to that is it's not going to work; it's simply going to deepen North Korean isolation.

Q Dr. Rice, can you tell us something about the speech in Poland, in Krakow, on two fronts? One is there's an expectation this will be a statement about the President's view of the transatlantic relationship after the Iraq war. And also on the Iraq war itself, there's a view in Europe that WMD still haven't been found, that there's chaos in large parts of Iraq, that many Iraqis have died. Is the President going to explain the war in Iraq to the European people? Or is that history?

DR. RICE: The President is going to talk about the transatlantic relationship, about it's strong core values, about the shared goals that we have. I would take you back to the speech that the President gave in Warsaw in 2001, in which he talked about Europe now whole, free and at peace -- and, indeed, Europe is now whole, free and mostly at peace -- and the need now for that Europe to turn and look outward, to help others to come to the kind of prosperity based on common values that we have all enjoyed, or that we now all enjoy.

And he will reprise that theme and will focus, I think, on the common agenda that we have, the agenda that we have for cooperation that we have ahead of us on issues like nonproliferation, on issues like fighting disease and poverty in the poorer areas of the world, on issues like the global economy and trade. We have a large common agenda.

But I just want to remind everybody when we come to the Iraq war that what happened in Iraq is that Saddam Hussein, one of the worst dictators of modern times, was finally deposed and overthrown. Yes, it is going to be difficult and a long haul to return the Iraqi people, after 30 years of the brutal regime that -- under which they lived, to return them to prosperity and to a life that they deserve. It's going to take time. And it is going to be hard. The United States and the coalition have made a commitment to do that. But let's not lose sight of the mass graves that are being found there, that are testament to what this regime was like. And let's not lose sight of the fact that the Iraqi people are far better off with that brutal dictator gone.

Q The Israelis have accepted the road map on principle, but with reservations they presented to you -- one being removing any language or reference to the Arab Peace Initiative. And you have this summit that you're holding with Arab leaders in Sharm where Prime Minister Abbas will be participating. I'm

wondering why Sharon couldn't come to that summit. Or are you facing a situation where regional leaders aren't willing to go out on the same limb that the President is to give him their endorsement -- to give Abbas their endorsement, they're still aligned with Arafat, so that you don't quite have the support from the region that you need to make it all --

DR. RICE: Well, I think that there is a great deal of support for Prime Minister Abbas and -- because Prime Minister Abbas has a history as someone who has been very strong in his condemnation of terrorism, very strong in his condemnation of violence. And I think that the President believes that the reason that this is the time to go is that the Arab leaders with whom he will meet are all telling him that this is a historic opportunity for peace. And that historic opportunity for peace is only going to be delivered if there is, on the part of all parties, a desire to take up their responsibilities.

That means that the Palestinians will have to reform the way that their security services work. It means that they will have to take up the cause of fighting terrorism. It means that the Israelis will have to welcome and support and try and help to bring in to being a Palestinian state that is viable and capable of existing side by side. And that's what the President is going to do.

Now, the format that we're using is the best format in which to get that done. But I think that you will find that these Arab leaders are actually quite supportive of what Prime Minister Abbas is doing because he is at, finally, for the Palestinian people, hope that the Palestinian leadership is going to be more concerned about making peace, about creating conditions under which the Palestinian people can be prosperous, than fueling their grievances and continuing to deal with terror. That's what he represents.

Q Just to follow-up, did any of those Arab leaders at the meeting refuse to appear with Sharon?

DR. RICE: The format that we decided on was one that we thought worked best. And this format will work best. The Prime Minister of the Palestinian Authority is someone that everybody wants to give a chance, because the Palestinian people have deserved better leadership for a long time; we believe they're finally getting it and it's time for everybody to support him.

Q What are the Saudis telling you about the people they've picked up who are responsible for the terrorism? Do they think they've gotten the ringleaders, gotten them all? The Ambassador seems to think there may be some more problems.

DR. RICE: Bill, we've not gotten a full report. We're also just seeing some of the reports of what may have happened in Saudi. There's been a lot of cooperation with the Saudis in the war on terrorism in general, and in particular on the Riyadh situation, the Riyadh bombing. And I believe that we will, working with the Saudis -- the Saudis will be able to find these ringleaders and to bring them to justice. We're doing everything that we can to help them. I don't think anybody knows at this point the extent of what we're actually looking for, but the Saudis are doing quite well in their efforts and we're applauding them.

Q You're satisfied?

DR. RICE: The Saudis have been extremely cooperative and working very, very hard. There were Saudis, as well as Americans and others, killed in that bombing in Riyadh, just as at the World Trade Center there were people from all over the world killed in the World Trade Center. What we're really seeing with terrorism is it doesn't matter where the attack takes place, this is an attack on civilization. This is an attack on the international system. This is an attack on civilization as we know it. And that's why we're getting great cooperation from everybody involved.

Q Back to the European end of the trip. Does the President feel any need to do any fence-mending? And, also, on the G8 summit, which he's leaving early from, is this a calculated snub to the French?

DR. RICE: The French have said -- and I talked to my French counterpart personally about this -- they fully understand why the President needs to take this opportunity to go to the Middle East. And everybody supports the mission that he is going to undertake.

Now, he's going to have the opportunity -- first of all, during the time that he is at the G8, he will have the opportunity to talk to his G8 counterparts about the Middle East, to solicit their views, to listen to their advice, to talk to them about the vision that he has. We are active in our diplomacy in Europe on the Middle East, just as we are active with the parties in the Middle East. So everyone understands why the President needs to do this, and I think everybody is really pleased that he's doing it, because we have been encouraged over and over to seize opportunities when they come along.

We've been very engaged in the Middle East since the beginning of this administration. We've been engaged in trying to rebuild fundamentals after an extraordinarily difficult period of time in which the intifada was restarted, in which there were suicide bombings, in which things have gotten appreciably more difficult for the Palestinian people. And we've tried a number of steps: the Tenet plan, engaging in the Mitchell plan.

The President, on June 24th, laid out a vision that really did finally challenge everybody on the fundamentals of the Middle East peace, not to worry about whether the guy next to you is doing what he ought to be doing, but worrying about whether you're doing what you ought to be doing. That's the core of the President's message when he goes -- that it's fine for the Palestinians to talk about what Israel ought to do, and Israel to talk about what the Palestinians ought to do, but it's best if everybody takes on their responsibilities for peace and pursues them aggressively.

I think that's a message that is getting through in the Middle East. And it's a message that our European colleagues are telling us that they're very glad he's going to have this opportunity to take.

Q Dr. Rice, I want to ask you about Iran and how it fits in here. You mentioned that the President will obviously be talking to Putin about it. The government of Hu Jintao has rejected the State Department finding that the Chinese company was helping Iran with its missile development. Will he bring that up directly with Hu Jintao? What will be the message? And how prominently will Iran play in this?

DR. RICE: Well, we will certainly continue to talk to the Chinese about activities with Iran, just as we talk to Russia and others about activities with Iran.

Again, the IAEA is going to make a report. There are a lot of troubling things about what has been going on in Iran -- doesn't surprise the United States, where for a long time we have talked about the fact that Iran is pursuing a nuclear weapons program, perhaps even under cover of some of its civilian nuclear activities. So it won't surprise anyone that Iran will be an important topic of interest.

You asked about the Europeans. We're through the Iraq conflict. I think you can see that 1483 shows that everybody wanted to move forward in a cooperative manner. I would doubt that there are too many of you out there who thought this was going to be a 14-0 vote. And it was. And it was done so because people want to move to a common agenda.

We have a great deal in common -- we have everything in common with our friends in Europe. These are relationships that go back decades and centuries. Now, we had some difficult times. Clearly, the United States has never believed that there had to be a choice for European countries, between their European-ness, and their transatlantic ties. The United States has not said to countries, you have to choose between us. We believe that those ties are completely compatible. And this will be an opportunity to reaffirm that compatibility and to talk about common issues of interest, like controlling WMD, like dealing with AIDS and poverty alleviation, and the Middle East.

Q Just to follow up on that, there's a -- President Bush has made it clear that he puts a lot of stock in his personal relationships with leaders, and that that can translate into the relationships with the countries. He's going to be meeting with a lot of leaders who the United States has disagreed with, he has disagreed with, recently. And there's a perception that perhaps he might be somebody who would hold a grudge against people he doesn't agree with. What do you say to those people, and whether that will hurt moving forward these countries that the U.S. hasn't agreed with?

DR. RICE: The President understands honest policy disagreements. No one understands if things take on an anti-American tinge. Let's be realistic. It isn't the power of the United States that needs to "be checked." It's the power of the United States that needs to work cooperatively with others who share the same values to achieve common goals.

We may have disagreed about how to deal with Iraq, although most countries in Europe, it turns out, agreed with the United States about how to deal with Saddam Hussein. But I would like to find one person who doesn't think that the world is better off without Saddam Hussein. Because, since we're all devoted to freedom and liberty and human rights as the basis of our own prosperity and own well-being, we can't possibly not want to see that extended to other peoples.

So there will be a common agenda now on trying to build a better Iraq as a -- as one example in the Middle East of a prosperous and pluralistic country in the core of the Muslim world. I think that's the agenda that the President is going to be pursuing; not issues that have to do with personalities.

Q Dr. Rice, you said that the President would be meeting unilaterally with Prime Minister Sharon and then with Prime Minister Abbas. And then you said if conditions permitted, he will have a trilateral meeting -- is that correct?

DR. RICE: Other way around. If conditions permit, we'll have the whole group.

Q Would you define "conditions"?

DR. RICE: Sure. First of all, the President has always said that he wants to meet when he believes that he can advance the agenda. He fully believes that he is now in a position to advance the agenda, or we would not have proposed the plan, the trip that I've just talked to you about. We're watching the circumstances; we're watching to see if the parties are moving forward. It is, after all, the case the parties have to be dedicated and devoted and moving forward. But we believe that we're at a place where this meeting is likely to be very helpful. And so the President is simply saying that he will assess, but he fully believes that he's going to be able to go forward.

Q Dr. Rice, in recent days you have had many visitors from India and Pakistan. Your counterpart from India was here. and Pakistan's Foreign Minister was here and so many other ups and down now, and visit from the U.S. -- on the issue of Kashmir. As far as President's visit is concerned, he's meeting with G8 and high-level officials there. Do you think this issue of Kashmir will come? And what discussions have you had with both countries, where we're going --

DR. RICE: Well, we're, in fact, encouraged by recent trends in the relationship between India and Pakistan. I think that everybody in the G8 is encouraged by those recent trends. I do believe that the core here, the key here is that India and Pakistan, themselves, move the relationship forward. It's not something that can be moved forth by the will of the G8. But certainly the G8 will -- not formally, but I know that members of the G8 are welcoming what is happening with the Indians and the Pakistanis.

It's not that there isn't more to be done -- there is more to be done and, in fact, the United States has been very engaged -- Secretary Armitage was out there not too long ago. There will be a lot of other activities and visitors. But this is a time for encouragement on that particular issue.

Q Just to follow -- I'm sorry -- just to follow -- just to follow on what -- General Musharraf will be here meeting with President Bush. And you think how much President Bush is involved in this issue to have one-on-one talk with General Musharraf?

DR. RICE: Well, the President has been very involved in this set of issues. He has talked with the President and the Prime Minister repeatedly about it. He has taken -- when other officials of those countries were here, he's had a chance to talk with them. He's looking forward to the talk with President Musharraf.

But, of course, we have a broad relationship with Pakistan, just as we have a broad relationship with India. And every time that he talks to Prime Minister Vajpayee or President Musharraf, this is not the only issue on the agenda. The issue is how to broaden and deepen our relationships with Pakistan, with which we have important counterterrorism issues, important issues concerning Afghanistan, important issues of democratization in Pakistan. We talk about those things -- economic development in Pakistan.

With India, we talk about scientific cooperation and trade, and the fact that this is the world's biggest democracy and we share a lot in value -- a lot in common concerning values. And so, yes, India and

Pakistan are an important part of the agenda. But it's by no means the entire agenda with either India or Pakistan.

Q Does the President have plans to meet bilaterally with Chancellor Schroeder?

DR. RICE: The President is having only one bilateral during this, which is with President Hu Jintao, and of course, with his host, President Chirac. As you might imagine, it's a very short period of time, unfortunately, given that he has to leave for the Middle East. But he will have an opportunity to do those two meetings and then to be with all of them, including with Chancellor Schroeder in the various meetings that take place between the leaders -- most of which, by the way, take place leader-on-leader. There are not many staff there and the like, and so they're in very close quarters.

Q Dr. Rice, if the U.S. is willing to go to war with Iraq over weapons of mass destruction, what is the policy about Iran, which is another axis of evil country, if they're close to possessing nuclear weapons?

DR. RICE: Well, we've always said that every circumstance, every situation requires a response that is tailored to that set of circumstances. We are deeply concerned about what is going on in Iran. We do believe that there are multilateral ways to deal with that situation, including what we're trying to do with Russia, what we will try to do with China. We will see what the IAEA report says, and we will see what options we have once the IAEA has reported.

I would remind everyone, though, that Saddam Hussein was in a category unlike anyone else, having lost a war of aggression in his neighborhood; having then signed on to a series of resolutions over a period of 12 years, under Chapter VII of the Security Council, and then flaunting at every opportunity those resolutions and simply saying he simply didn't care about the resolutions that had gotten him a cessation of hostilities. So there was a different circumstance in Iraq, a Chapter VII circumstance in Iraq. And I think it's important to keep in mind that distinction.

Q The President outlined a fairly ambitious free trade proposal with the Middle East a couple weeks ago and, yet, we haven't heard a whole lot about that. Has that been overtaken, in a sense, by the peace process? Or will the President will be also pushing for that when he visits the region?

DR. RICE: I'm really glad you asked that question. No, in fact, the entire economic agenda in the Middle East will be on the agenda at Sharm el-Sheikh. The Arab leaders I think are quite excited about the proposal that the President made to try, by the end of the decade, to get a free trade area between the United States and the Middle East.

Ultimately, the Middle East needs to have economic and political reforms and an opening of trade that will permit the Middle East to enter the prosperous international community of states from which, unfortunately, it's largely been isolated. And the President really believes that this is one of the keys to a peaceful Middle East. It's not that trade makes peace, but it is that prosperity and trade give people hope; it gives them a desire for a better life; it allows them to concentrate on the things that all people are concerned about -- better life for their children, opportunities for their children. And the President is very excited about the Middle East trade initiative.

Now, Ambassador Zoellick and Secretary Powell will be traveling to Jordan just a couple of weeks after the President is there, to engage in discussions with Middle Eastern leaders about these particular issues, about the trade issues. Ambassador Zoellick has a quite ambitious agenda of working bilaterally with Middle Eastern countries on framework agreements, on free trade agreements. He announced one the other day for Bahrain. This is going to be an extremely active agenda for the United States, within the context of the Doha round. But I think the President really hopes and expects that this will be one of the most important elements on his agenda when he talks to the Arab leaders.

Last question, because I planned to come to you last.

Q -- is the White House any more concerned than usual about maintaining the President's personal security on this trip?

DR. RICE: I'm not going to discuss the President's security, except to say that his security is always taken into account by the people who worry about those things. And they'll take it into account this time.

You were the one to get the last question.

Q On Iran, is U.S. credibility, in terms of its assertions from intelligence about what's happening in Iran, on the line here because of assertions made about weapons of mass destruction in Iraq that have not proved, at least, to have been true now in new evidence?

DR. RICE: Well, first of all, as we've said in Iraq, this is a process that is now underway to determine precisely how the Iraqis were pursuing their weapons of mass destruction program. You have to believe that Saddam Hussein was willing to live under sanctions for 12 years, for no good reason, if you really believe that he was not hiding a weapons of mass destruction program. I just don't think that argument is credible.

We have found, in Iraq, biological weapons laboratories that look precisely like what Secretary Powell described in his February 5th report to the United Nations. We are in the process of interviewing scientists and uncovering documents. This was a country, Iraq, that went to great lengths to conceal and deceive on what it was doing in terms of weapons of mass destruction.

It has always been the position of the United States that most of the information about Iraqi weapons of mass destruction program was going to come from people. That's why we were so insistent that it was important to have interviews of scientists outside the country. Now those people will be free to talk. But it is going to take some time because this is an Iraqi government that built its programs for deception. Secretary Powell described how the chemical weapons program had really been embedded in the dual-use facilities program. That is much of the -- of what we're learning about these programs.

So this story will be there. But let's be very clear; the Iranian program, about which we have been talking for quite a long time, is now a subject of an IAEA inquiry. And I think people are genuinely concerned about what the Iranians are doing. We were concerned quite a long time ago. Now, everybody else is concerned. I think that U.S. credibility on these issues is actually quite high.

Thank you, very much.

Q Thank you.

Q Have a good trip, Doctor.

DR. RICE: Thank you.

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