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28 October 2003

## U.S. Calls on Iran to Turn Over Suspected Al-Qaida Operatives

### Iran must also take action on IAEA requirements

State Department spokesman Richard Boucher told reporters October 27 that the United States calls on Iran to turn over all suspected Al-Qaeda operatives to the United States, their countries of origin, or third countries for interrogation and trial. He was speaking during the regular State Department briefing.

In answer to reporters' questions, he also said the United States continues to look for action on Iran's promise to comply with International Atomic Energy Agency requirements; is concerned about the safety of American academic Dariush Zahedi, reported as being held in Iran on espionage charges since July; and supports religious freedom in Iraq, including freedom for Iranian pilgrims to visit religious sites in Iraq.

Following are excerpts from the May 27 State Department briefing about Iran:

(begin excerpt)

QUESTION: Change of subject -- Iran? The Iranians say that they have handed the United Nations a list of major al-Qaida suspects that are in Iran. Have you had an opportunity to see this list, and does it satisfy Iran working towards resolving the issue of al-Qaida operatives in the country?

MR. BOUCHER: The first place is to say that we believe Iran needs to turn over all suspected al-Qaida operatives to the U.S. or to their countries of origin or to third countries for interrogation and trial. It's essential that other countries have direct access to information that these people may have about past and future al-Qaida activities. Iran has, in the past, turned over some al-Qaida to third countries, however, frankly, we're not aware of any particular

progress with regards to the al-Qaida who are currently in detention, and the Iranians have previously stated that that includes senior al-Qaida officials.

We will be following up with the United Nations and others in the international community regarding this issue of the names that they have provided and on handovers, but we remain concerned by reports that additional al-Qaida members remain in Iran. We reiterate our position that these operatives must be turned over to the U.S. or to countries of origin or third countries for further interrogation and trial.

So, it remains a subject of continuing concern and it's certainly not clear at all that the information that they have named -- that they have provided -- actually names the kind of people that we have talked about in the past, the senior leadership and who may be in Iran -- who are in Iran, we have asserted.

QUESTION: Can we get to Iraq, please?

QUESTION: Yeah, thanks.

MR. BOUCHER: Elise, did you have -- Charlie?

QUESTION: Just on the same subject. Has the U.S. had any direct contacts with Iran on this -- on the matter of these people?

QUESTION: Or through a third party?

QUESTION: Or has the Secretary made a call?

MR. BOUCHER: Or is the Secretary phoning? (Laughter.) The -- you mean recently. You didn't -- I -- I mean --

QUESTION: I mean, we can parse this any way you want it --

MR. BOUCHER: No, but I do -- I think we have said in the past that when we had some direct discussions with Iran, it was on the subject of al-Qaida and the people that were there. I'm not aware of anything new, but I'll check and see if there's anything I can share with you.

Certainly, Iran is well aware of our position that we believe they should turn over information, turn over individuals on these senior al-

Qaida people that they may -- that we think they have in custody.

QUESTION: Richard, while you're checking, can you check third party?

MR. BOUCHER: As you know, I'm not in the habit of reporting on every particular contact or particular topic, that we may have some communication with Iran through third parties. There are a variety of people who know our views on these issues who may, in fact, share these views; who may have contacts with Iran. So I'm not in a position to report on who, among third parties, may or may not have talked to Iran about these topics.

Elise, you had more?

QUESTION: It's kind of related to this and also on the IAEA question. The U.S. has said in the past that if Iran is willing to deal with the nuclear issue, is willing to cooperate with the IAEA, and it sounds -- over the last week they've said that they've handed over a declaration to the IAEA of their nuclear program's history, that you can resume cooperation in these kind of talks in Geneva, so to speak, on other areas of cooperation, such as al-Qaida and the like.

So do you see that the cooperation that they've been providing to the IAEA thus far --

MR. BOUCHER: Wait. Well, I mean, first of all, we haven't exactly put it that way. And second of all, there are four days left for Iran to demonstrate compliance with -- full compliance with the requirements of the IAEA.

I know they've talked about signing this, they've talked about providing information, they've talked about full disclosure, suspension, other words like that. We're looking for action. We're looking for the kind of action -- specific kinds of action that were outlined in the resolution. So, until that happens, I wouldn't speculate that that forms a basis for something else.

QUESTION: Staying with Iran. Dariush Zahedi, a political science lecturer with U.C. Berkeley, has been held in Iran since July on charges of espionage. He is, I believe, an American of Iranian descent.

Do you have information about him? Have you raised his case with

the Iranians? Do you have any sense of whether he is going to be prosecuted or has been prosecuted? Do you have any views on whether he may or not have committed any crimes there?

MR. BOUCHER: We are concerned about his welfare and safety. I think we may have discussed this to some extent last week, at least -- it wasn't used in the briefing, but I think people who called might have gotten an answer on it.

But I think the point is we are concerned about his welfare and safety. We need to contact his family. We have a protecting power, a Swiss Embassy in Tehran, which would serve as protecting power for us and help any of our citizens in Tehran. But I think we became aware of this last week and we're trying to work on it and see if there's anything we can do.

QUESTION: Could I -- and I realize you don't want to detail every contact the U.S. Government may have with the Iranians directly or indirectly, but on this particular issue, have you raised his status with the Iranians in any way, shape or form?

MR. BOUCHER: That's -- as I said, we're at the point of looking into the case, trying to contact the family, find out what we can. I don't think we've reached that stage yet.

Yes.

QUESTION: Just on Iran generally. Was there a concerted effort made at Madrid made for -- to avoid the Iranian delegation that was there? And also, I'm wondering if you welcome with the same enthusiasm Iran's generous donations to Iraqi reconstruction as the others.

MR. BOUCHER: I don't know exactly what it involved, frankly, so I'm not in a position to comment on that in specific terms.

QUESTION: Well, one was subsidizing visits by pilgrims, Iranian pilgrims --

MR. BOUCHER: Yeah, no, I know. There were a number of categories.

QUESTION: Exactly. Specifically on that --

MR. BOUCHER: Again, the shrink-wrap on all this stuff is being done by the World Bank, and until we have kind of a breakdown to see how much it really means then it's a little hard to comment on that --

QUESTION: Okay, so you don't want -- your --

MR. BOUCHER: -- particularly the less -- particularly the less financial components of the announcements, which --

QUESTION: But you're in a position to comment specifically on the UAE's contribution, but you don't want to talk about that?

MR. BOUCHER: I think I would say that the UAE's announcement was much more in the financial nature, and the Iranian comment was much more of a -- a little more complicated, required maybe a little more preparatory --

QUESTION: In a way, it's a serious question. Do you object to --

QUESTION: What do you mean, "in a way?" It's a totally serious question.

QUESTION: Okay, fine --

MR. BOUCHER: In a way, it's somewhat serious. No.

(Laughter.)

QUESTION: Okay, forget about it. Okay, no, well, we can make light of it.

MR. BOUCHER: All right. It's a very serious question, Matt.

QUESTION: Do you want --

QUESTION: -- that is not true.

MR. BOUCHER: -- it's harder, it's -- I'm not in a position, really, to go through every, every announcement because some of them were, you know, X amount of dollars, some of them were, "We've got this, we've got that." The Iranian question was much more complicated.

The World Bank is going to have evaluate and tell you --

QUESTION: But you don't object to the idea of Iranian pilgrims, you know, going to Iraq? That doesn't bother you particularly?

MR. BOUCHER: As long as they're truly pilgrims. You know, we have made clear right from the start that religious freedom in Iraq -- remember, shortly after the war there were major pilgrimages in Iraq for the first time in decades. We've made clear that religious freedom is part of the environment that we'd like to create in Iraq and part of the environment the Iraqis themselves want to create. So as long as people are really pilgrims and not up to no good or smuggling, then I'm sure they'd be welcomed.

QUESTION: But considering the history of Iran and Iraq --

QUESTION: What about the first part of my question?

MR. BOUCHER: The first part being?

QUESTION: Was there a conscious effort to avoid the Iranian delegation?

MR. BOUCHER: We don't have any particular direct contacts with the Iranians, so we don't go out of our way to look for them or schedule meetings with them.

QUESTION: Right, no. There was a report over the weekend that suggested that the U.S. delegation was told to avoid them. You're not aware of that?

MR. BOUCHER: That might be true. That's standard U.S. guidance for international conferences: don't go looking for Iranians. That's based on our recognition.

QUESTION: Considering the Iranian -- the Iran-Iraq history, I mean, at some point I would hope there would be some analysis here of whether there's an accommodation developing, which there seems to be between -- I think it's kind of maybe a more important relationship than the UAE, for instance, and Iraq, and some of the other -- I mean, they fought a big war and Iran's a big power. So if all these things add up to some nice turning point in the minds of the people here, remember you used to think there were reformers in Iran. I haven't heard that in a while. But if there is something

developing, it would be nice to have the State Department say things are looking up, instead of, you know --

MR. BOUCHER: Barry, if things start looking up, I'll be glad to tell you first. We'll make the news right here.

(Laughter.)

QUESTION: But you know what I mean. Well, I mean, I think -- no, I think it's really serious.

MR. BOUCHER: No, it's not -- we have had --

QUESTION: If we avoid the Iranians while the Iranians are showing signs of cooperating on nuclear, they're showing signs of rapprochement with Iraq --

MR. BOUCHER: Hold on, hold on, don't --

QUESTION: -- I think somebody ought to take notice of it.

MR. BOUCHER: Don't count your chickens before they hatch.

QUESTION: I know it's early.

MR. BOUCHER: We have to be, I think, measured in our response to these things because it's true, the Iranians have talked a lot about cooperating on nuclear. But have they signed the protocol? Have they suspended the programs? Have they defined what that means? Have they complied with the IAEA resolution? I think the answer is no, not yet.

Now, will they do so in the next four days? We'll see. Have they done anything about the senior al-Qaida figures inside Iran? No. Have they cut off their support for Hezbollah and the groups that use violence to oppose peace? No.

So, before it's time to say things are looking up, well, maybe we ought to wait for things to look up a little bit. The fact is that Iran's involvement in Iraq is complicated. There may be pilgrims who come for legitimate purposes. But we've also raised concerns about people coming across for not-so-legitimate purposes, either smuggling or people coming across to foment violence, and to oppose the progress that's being made.

So, I think one has to be reasonable about this, and not look for one swallow to make a spring, in order to confuse all the metaphors that I've been using across here. Okay?

(end excerpt)



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