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Daily Press Briefing

Richard Boucher, Spokesman

Washington, DC

November 26, 2003

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TRANSCRIPT:

1:10 p.m. EST

MR. BOUCHER: Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. It's a pleasure to be here. I don't have any statements or announcements, so I'd be glad to take your questions.

Mr. Gedda.

QUESTION: The Israeli media is saying that Secretary Powell is going to meet with backers of the Geneva Accord on December 12th, I believe. Do you know anything about that?

MR. BOUCHER: I don't have anything on that, at this point. As you know, we have welcomed the efforts by various people, the Israelis, among the Israelis and Palestinians, to have a dialogue on some of the issues that these two communities face. But, no, I don't have anything on any particular meetings at this point.

QUESTION: Is there any breakdown upon how much of the deductions from the U.S. loan guarantees to Israel will correspond to the building of the barrier?

MR. BOUCHER: The breakdown -- I can't give you a breakdown -- how much is, you know, various aspects of settlement activity, how much is the various aspects of the route that the so-called fence is taking. But I could just tell you that the concerns that we took into account in reaching agreement with Israel and this number include both, concerns about settlement activity and concerns about the route that was planned for the fence.

QUESTION: Why can't you give us a breakdown?

MR. BOUCHER: I think the discussion really proceeded from Israeli budgetary figures, and their understanding of their own spending, and we discussed that with them. So if there is a breakdown to be given of how much they spend on these different projects or areas, it would have come from them.

Tammy.

QUESTION: Just to argue the point a little bit. The --

MR. BOUCHER: Go ahead.

QUESTION: These are U.S. loan guarantees, and the money is being deducted from what the U.S. provides. So I'm a little confused as to why the U.S. can't provide the breakdown.

MR. BOUCHER: The U.S. is providing you with the amount that the U.S. is deducting from the loan guarantees, \$289.5 million U.S. That's the total. And the calculation to get to that total was based on Israeli budget figures. And I think the Israelis, themselves, put out the first announcement saying that this is the number that they had come up with in discussions

with us.

QUESTION: So you know the about, you're just not going to say it, since you got it from their budgetary notes?

MR. BOUCHER: We went through the process with them, but they were the ones that, as I think they said in their statement, that suggested the -- the Israeli statement says that they suggested that the U.S. deduct the agreed sum of \$289.5 million.

QUESTION: Are you afraid if you disclose the amount, and it's a small amount, that it will look as if you really aren't that troubled by the facts?

MR. BOUCHER: I'm not afraid. It's not a small amount, and we've given you the total from the U.S. side, which is the amount we're going to deduct from the loan guarantees -- happy to do all the math you want on the loan guarantees. But as far as the breakdown of this figure, I'll leave it to those who -- whose budget it is that these figures are derived from to explain how much they spend on fences and how much they spend on settlement activity.

QUESTION: Can you at least say that some of the calculations for the amount did come from fence expenditures?

MR. BOUCHER: Yeah, I think I said that.

QUESTION: Yeah. But you're --

MR. BOUCHER: It's costs of settlement activity and costs of some of the fence expenditures.

QUESTION: Are you prepared to say that a vast majority of it is settlement activity?

MR. BOUCHER: I -- that would go back to small amount. I am not going to use adjectives; small amount, vast majority are both incorrect. But if we try to use other adjectives, we're really just trying to come down to a number. There are substantial amounts being spent on the route of the fence, as well as substantial amounts being spent on settlement activity, and the total that we feel is appropriate to deduct this year is 289.5 million.

QUESTION: Did the Israelis specifically ask you not to break it down?

MR. BOUCHER: I just don't think it's for us to break down. It's the basis on which we had these discussions, but I leave it to the Israelis to explain their budget. That's the bottom line on this one.

QUESTION: Richard, maybe I missed your answer to this. But is this your assessment of the total value of Israeli work on both the fence and the settlement in the last year?

MR. BOUCHER: No, you didn't miss my answer to that because I hadn't been asked. But I think if you look at publicly available Israeli budgetary numbers, it's not the total cost of all activity. The way I've described it, saying that the deduction reflects issues of concern to the United States, including settlement activities and the route of the security fence.

QUESTION: So --

MR. BOUCHER: So it's an assessment that's based on the amounts spent on those activities that should be deducted.

QUESTION: Well, I don't quite understand that. I mean, you think that all settlement activity is unhelpful and therefore inconsistent, presumably, with U.S. policies or objectives, so why would you not deduct the whole value?

MR. BOUCHER: You asked me if it was the whole value of all settlement activity plus the whole value of the fence, and it's obviously not because the fence cost a lot more than \$289.5 million.

QUESTION: Yeah, exactly. Why is it not the whole value since you --

MR. BOUCHER: Because it's not. We've always said that we understood Israel's need to provide for its security and that the fence or the barrier, the wall, whatever we're going to call it today, the fence was, if built along the Green Line, would be an appropriate security measure.

QUESTION: But no parts of it are on the Green Line, as far as I am aware.

MR. BOUCHER: I think parts of it are, but --

QUESTION: So can we -- okay, can we just get this straight? So you have not included the part which are on the Green Line, but you've included everything else?

MR. BOUCHER: I'm not prepared to give you a breakdown. I haven't done that for the last 15 minutes. I'm not going to start now in another way.

The point is that there are concerns about the route of the fence, which we have stated in policy terms, and which are now included as deductions here.

QUESTION: We're not asking for a breakdown, (inaudible) wasn't asking you for -- is it correct that the deductions for the fence barrier, reflect only costs incurred for those portions of the fence barrier that you view as prejudicial to the peace process?

MR. BOUCHER: I can't -- we have a problem with adjectives today. I can't accept the adjective "only." The definition in law is that the loan guarantees are to be issued only to support activities in geographic areas subject to Israeli administration before June 5, 1967. Okay, that's the law that we're following, so that's one element -- and the legislation also states that there shall be deductions for activities. At the present, the terms are inconsistent with the objectives and the understandings reached between the U.S. and the Government of Israel regarding a loan program. So those are the two right here:

One is areas subject to Israeli administration before June 5, 1967. So any costs incurred in areas that were not subject to Israeli administration before June 5, 1967, would result in deductions.

And second of all, there would be deductions for activities that are not consistent with the objectives and understanding that we reached with Israel about this.

So it's for those two reasons. So there are costs associated with the route of the fence that are deducted here, and that's what I've said before.

QUESTION: Okay, that's the deal for the fence. But to deal with the settlements part of this, are there any -- is there any settlement activity which is consistent with U.S. objectives or (inaudible)?

MR. BOUCHER: I'm not -- Jonathan, it's the same kind of question, and asking me to explain to --

QUESTION: It's a reasonable question. Anyway, what's your answer?

MR. BOUCHER: Another problem with the adjectives that you guys are using. But it's the same -- it's the same issue. I'm not in a position to give you the calculation on the breakdown of this. The amounts the Israeli Government spends on settlement activity, on fence, and which parts go where, I have to leave it to the Israelis to explain their budget, not me.

Sir.

QUESTION: Another question?

MR. BOUCHER: Yeah.

QUESTION: South Asia, huh. First, last week on Friday, before his confirmation hearing as U.S. Ambassador to India, Mr. David Mulford was speaking before the Senators and he said that U.S. should not be manager or mediator between India and Pakistan. What does he meant by -- was U.S. managing in the past, or what he was talking about when he said we should not be manager between the countries as far as their relations are concerned?

MR. BOUCHER: I think -- I didn't see the statement. I'm sure there was a whole lot of context to it, and that he probably did talk about the important role the United States does play with both those nations. But we have always made clear it's not -- we're not inserting ourselves as some kind of mediator; that the relationships that we have with Pakistan, the relationship the United States has with India, is not a triangular one, I think is the phrase the Secretary always uses.

We're not a manager in a U.S.-India-Pakistan relationship. We have relationships with two governments, two countries. Each of those relationships is important to us. We want to develop each of those relationships, and in that process we want to encourage them to deal with each other on the issues that are of concern. That's why we've always stressed dialogue between the two countries themselves as the best route to address issues that are of concern to them, including Kashmir.

QUESTION: Yesterday they announced ceasefire along the LOC or line of control, and if, in this process, if the U.S. played any role or not?

MR. BOUCHER: We have certainly kept in touch with both governments. We've welcomed the statements that have been made, the announcement by, I guess, the Pakistani Prime Minister first, and then the response, the very productive and constructive response from India.

The Secretary has kept in touch with the parties. He spoke yesterday by telephone with the Indian and Pakistani

Foreign Ministers. In those phone calls he welcomed their decisions to observe a ceasefire along the line of control in Kashmir and the Siachen Glacier area as well. We think this -- these steps toward peace offer hope for real progress in the region.

As we've said before, greater engagement between them can lead to a resolution of their differences, including moving toward a permanent end of their conflict. So we hope these measures that have been announced, and now implemented, are also followed by the implementation of steps to improve people-to-people ties. They're talking about communications and transportation links between India and Pakistan. And we look forward to the early implementation of all those steps that they've announced and talked about.

QUESTION: Finally, if there was any talk when he called them both, since India is still insisting that Pakistan must stop infiltrations or terrorism in Kashmir -- India's Kashmir -- before any full-scale friendship or relations between the two countries, if Secretary -- if any of these came between his telephone calls or something?

MR. BOUCHER: They've certainly discussed -- the Secretary has discussed with both sides the terms of the ceasefire that's being implemented now. But I'd say the emphasis has been on the implementation of the measures that they've announced, including the ceasefire, and we've certainly welcomed the announcements and now we welcome the implementation that's going on.

Tammy.

QUESTION: In light of the agreement reached with Australia, where do things stand with the discussions with the British, because it sounded like things were awfully close?

MR. BOUCHER: That what?

QUESTION: It sounded like a resolution was awfully close when you were in London last week.

MR. BOUCHER: Yeah, we're still working with the British. The Defense Department, I think, has put out a statement on military commissions in general that deals with some of the issues the British Government has raised. We've also, as you know, reached agreement now with the Australians based on discussions we've been having with them.

We have discussions going on with a number of countries about one aspect or the other about their people who are at Guantanamo. We've facilitated visits by governments. We've had discussions with governments about transfer.

Overall, we'd say, as well, that approximately 84 detainees have been released worldwide, including 20 last week, and in the near future we expect other detainees will be sent to their home countries for investigation, detention and/or prosecution, as appropriate.

So this process is underway. We did announce that we had reached agreement with the Australians, but we continue to work with the British Government in hopes of reaching agreement with them, too.

QUESTION: I have a question, but --

QUESTION: Same --

MR. BOUCHER: Do you want to stick to the same thing, Teri? Okay.

QUESTION: What are some of the holdups with the British that weren't there in the Australian case that made it so much easier to settle?

MR. BOUCHER: Each case is a little bit different, and so I'm not in a position to go into specific cases. But as we look at each of these cases, we try to address each case on its merits and consistent with our needs, our requirements, but also those of the foreign government. So some cases are a little more complicated than others, I guess is the only way I can put it.

Ma'am.

QUESTION: One of the detainees, the Canadian, Abdul Rahman Khadr, he was released recently and sent back to Afghanistan. So I wanted to know if he was told he had the option to go to Canada, and if Canadian officials have been interested in --

MR. BOUCHER: I was -- I'm afraid I don't have an answer for you on that. That kind of detail is handled by the Department of Defense, and I think you need to ask over there.

QUESTION: Do you know the case I'm talking about?

MR. BOUCHER: I do know the case you're talking about, but I think you have to ask over at the Defense Department to find out how this was -- why this was handled that way. Okay?

QUESTION: On Iraq. Last time you mentioned the list of 32 countries in the coalition. Do you have any update of -- there are new countries or are they?

MR. BOUCHER: It hasn't been too long ago we started talking about 32 countries that are involved, militarily or police on the ground. So, no, I don't know if there are any additional numbers today. But certainly, we'd welcome additional contributions, whether it's to people on the ground or training. And as you know, other governments continue to work with us on deployments.

Yeah.

QUESTION: Follow-up?

MR. BOUCHER: Yeah.

QUESTION: Yesterday, during the Pentagon's briefing, Secretary Rumsfeld mentioned some 34 countries.

MR. BOUCHER: Oh.

QUESTION: So that's the reason why I wonder do you have some new countries.

MR. BOUCHER: Sometimes when we count, we don't always count the same number, but I'll go back and have our guys compare our numbers to his number.

Yeah.

QUESTION: Yes. It's about Iran and its nuclear program. Now that an agreement has been reached in Vienna regarding the Iranian nuclear program, are you going to continue to press the Russians to stop their nuclear cooperation with Iran for the Bushehr nuclear facility?

MR. BOUCHER: Well, first let me say how pleased we are with the outcome in Vienna, that we were able to work out an agreement that was adopted today without a vote, meaning by all the members of the Board of Governors. We think it's an appropriate and effective resolution.

It reflects strong concerns among the Board about Iran's past non-compliance; it reflects the international community's commitment to preserving and strengthening the nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty; and it makes clear that we need full Iranian cooperation with the agency. Iran has been put on notice, and should there be any new information that comes to light or inaccuracies that come to light, then the Board would take up the issue again and take appropriate action under the charter and the safeguards.

In sum, this resolution puts a requirement on Iran to cooperate in all the ways that it's promised and all the ways demanded by the Board of Governors. That would mean that governments who have programs or who have had programs with Iran would only want to cooperate within those guidelines. And I think you can check with the Russian Government on how they will handle that situation as Iran is implementing its promises.

QUESTION: Can we go back to Iraq for a second? Ayatollah Sistani is said to have expressed misgivings about the U.S.-Iraqi plan to restore sovereignty to Iraq. I'm wondering if you've had a chance to see the comments that are attributed to him, and if you are bothered at all that he sees flaws in this, given his influence with the Shiite community.

MR. BOUCHER: I saw a story by a certain wire service on the subject, which I assume is completely accurate. I guess my only comment would be that there is politics in Iraq. That's one of the good things. There are different views among Iraqis about how we carry some of these things out. There is a need for Iraqis to get together and work out these programs and decide how they want to proceed, and I'm sure there will be continuing debate on various aspects of this.

The plan that was worked out was worked out with the Governing Council and endorsed by them as a group. And so I would expect there to be continued progress in that -- in that regard. But it's an Iraqi plan, it's worked out by Iraqis, and I'm sure there will be a variety of views expressed by Iraqis as we go down the road.

That's a good thing. That's what we're trying to do in Iraq, is give the Iraqis a chance to express themselves and decide their own future together, through debate and discussion about how they want to proceed.

QUESTION: One of the things he's said to have misgivings about was that the plan doesn't -- he said that he would have

liked some kind of a stipulation which would have prevented legislating anything that contradicts Islam in the new Iraq, and I wonder what you think about that. I would have guessed that the United States would prefer a more secular outlook for any new Iraqi government.

MR. BOUCHER: I don't want to try to specify various pieces of legislation or otherwise, sort of, rule things in or rule things out for some future transitional assembly. I think the goal is to have representative government for the Iraqi people and they'll decide how they want to conduct that government, and what legislation will be passed and not passed.

QUESTION: Can I go back to that Russia-Bushehr question, because I think you came close to saying that as long as this cooperation stayed within the guidelines, then you would no longer have any objections and that it could go ahead, right? Is that -- is that what you mean? That now that there's a framework --

MR. BOUCHER: No, I didn't say that.

QUESTION: No?

MR. BOUCHER: I said they would have to decide how to handle their cooperation during this particular period to see, while we're waiting to see whether Iran carries out its promises or not.

As you know, Iran has talked about signing the additional protocols, and I think did so again today, but I'm not aware that they have actually signed and implemented them yet. Iran has talked about suspending enrichment programs and allowing visits and verification. Some of that may have happened, some of that not. So all the countries that may have programs one kind or another with Iran are going to have to consider how they proceed in this immediate period.

QUESTION: Yes.

MR. BOUCHER: And Iran would --

QUESTION: Well, no doubt they would decide how to proceed, but do you -- do you have a view on how they should proceed?

MR. BOUCHER: Our view is people ought to be careful, continue to be careful about their programs, particularly at this moment, when Iran has not yet implemented all its commitments.

QUESTION: Well, okay. But that's not the same as saying that they should stop their cooperation.

MR. BOUCHER: We've never said they should stop the reactor cooperation. We've said that other aspects of cooperation with Iran should not be carried out, and that peaceful reactor construction should proceed only if Iran was meeting all the requirements of the international community to satisfy the international community that Iran was not conducting weapons programs on the side.

Charlie.

QUESTION: Different subject. Today, the remains of Charlie Dean are being repatriated to Hawaii. As you know, the

deceased brother of Governor Howard Dean was in Laos in 1974. My question is, do you know whether he had anything, was he doing anything for the U.S. Government when he was in Laos? Or do you have any information about what he was doing in Laos?

MR. BOUCHER: I don't have any information on that, no.

QUESTION: Okay.

QUESTION: Richard, may I go back to --

MR. BOUCHER: Well, I was going to go farther back, but okay. Sure.

QUESTION: One more back to India, please. When I was recently in India, the biggest story was visa fraud, but this issue has come also on this podium in the past also several times, and several top stars, film stars, and singers are in jail. They were charging as much as \$25,000, and victims paid them for bringing them to the U.S. as artist and actors and singers. Where do we stand on this as far as our consulate in Bombay and U.S. Embassy in Delhi is concerned, how they should visas to, or how they -- these people get hold of visas and they charge this much and they said this is a very big issue, not even in the Parliament.

MR. BOUCHER: We're against visa fraud. (Laughter.)

QUESTION: No, you are. I know you told me in the last year also.

MR. BOUCHER: And we take very extensive measure at all our embassies and consulates to prevent visa fraud, to make sure applicants are bona fide applicants, and we cooperate with law enforcement authorities where there are investigations of visa fraud, and in many cases we also investigate ourselves if we find any hint of it. There can be no fraud or malfeasance involved in the issuance of U.S. visas. We go to great lengths to make sure that doesn't occur.

QUESTION: I understand some team from the State Department, including Inspector General, they went to the U.S. Embassy in Delhi. Were there any findings about the visa fraud or --

MR. BOUCHER: I'd have to check with the Inspector General's office, if they did that. They decide what to say about their activities.

QUESTION: Thank you.

MR. BOUCHER: Sir.

QUESTION: Yeah, there was a -- some arrests yesterday in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. I was just wondering if you had a response to that. And also, the Secretary's going out to the region and earlier this month, the Deputy Secretary had traveled to Saudi Arabia, or had plans to go there. Before that though, there were some arrests, and then an attack. Are you seeing a pattern here? And also, in way of that, I've talked to several expatriates, U.S. expatriates over there, who are concerned that the visit of a U.S. official is somehow inciting some of the attacks.

MR. BOUCHER: First of all, the Secretary's not going to Saudi Arabia on this trip. He's going to go to North Africa to the Maghreb, which is still a little ways away from Saudi Arabia.

But certainly we've worked very closely with Saudi Arabia on counterterrorism. We're very satisfied with that cooperation. We'll continue to work with them. The Saudis, I guess we've seen reports now that they've got two -- they prevented a car bomb attack from occurring this morning in Riyadh, and two suspected militants were killed in that action.

It's an example of the kind of coordination, but the kind of effort that they themselves are making against terrorism, and we are certainly pleased with that cooperation. We're pleased what they've done for security of Americans and of our own personnel who are out there.

There's a lot to do in order to fight terrorism, particularly in a place -- particularly in Saudi Arabia, and so it's something that we'll continue to work on with them as we move forward.

I just can't, in any stronger terms, reject the notion that somehow the visits by U.S. officials cause attacks. Terrorists cause attacks. Terrorists are responsible for attacks. The fact that they're attacking everything that we hold dear, every sign of organized society and civilization that others are trying to build and promote has nothing to do with visits back and forth. It has something to do with them and their totally misguided ideas.

And I think that takes care of all your questions, if I can.

Elise.

QUESTION: There were some reports by the Defense Department of Argentina that there's been some terrorist threats against potential U.S. targets. Has the U.S. Government received any warnings from the government on this?

MR. BOUCHER: I haven't seen anything on that. I'd have to check and see if there's anything to say.

QUESTION: Okay. I have one more from the region. Is the U.S. Government offering Ecuador any assistance on allegations that the President's campaign could be funded by narco trafficking?

MR. BOUCHER: I hadn't seen that one either. I'll have to check.

QUESTION: Thank you.

MR. BOUCHER: Thank you.

(The briefing was concluded at 1:35.)

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