



Daily Press Briefing

Adam Ereli, Deputy Spokesman

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TRANSCRIPT:

1:30 p.m. EST

MR. ERELI: Thank you for your patience. Welcome to our briefing the day before Thanksgiving. Wish you all a happy holiday for tomorrow.

Let me begin with a statement on the continuing violence in Darfur. The United States strongly condemns the escalating violence and continued ceasefire violations taking place in Darfur. We are deeply concerned. The fighting that is going on is a clear violation of the N'Djamena ceasefire agreement of April 8th, as well as of the humanitarian and security protocols agreed to by all parties in Abuja on November 9th. This fighting must stop immediately.

The latest incidents of violence were instigated by the Sudan Liberation Movement Army and they have resulted in the suspension of humanitarian activities in the areas of fighting. This has caused increased suffering to the civilian population and our message to the Sudan Liberation Movement Army is clear. The international community expects that all violence stop and agreements reached be honored.

We have also made it clear to all the parties that the international community will hold accountable those responsible for committing violence and atrocities. We strongly urge them to cooperate with the African Union mission in the exercise of that mission's mandate and responsibilities. We will continue to support the AU mission and maintain a -- help it maintain an activist posture.

On to your questions.

QUESTION: All right. If there is no follow up on that, could you just give us some words about the -- your hopes and expectations for the IAEA meeting that will be held on Thursday in Vienna?

MR. ERELI: Our hopes and expectations -- we would hope for a full and candid discussion of the Iranian nuclear program based on the Director General's report. We will make clear our view that this program remains an issue of serious concern with a number of unanswered questions out there that need to be addressed.

Another topic of conversation will obviously be the agreement reached between Iran and the EU-3 on suspension of uranium activity. We expect that to be a subject of discussion and consensus on what action to take on the basis of that agreement. But I think, frankly, the bottom line is the Iranian activity continues to be of concern. There continue to be questions that need to be answered.

And, you know, we all continue to take a long-term view of this issue, looking, not just at the status quo but also where we want to be, and where we want to be is in a situation where nobody has any cause for doubt or question about what Iran is up to. That certainly isn't the case today, and our goal is to create an international environment where Iran's activity

in the nuclear area is -- and Iran's actions are, you know, fully consistent with international obligations, fully transparent and not threatening.

Yes.

QUESTION: Hi. There is a U.S. citizen, Ahmed Abu Ali, who has been held by the Saudis for almost a year and a half. His family believes he's been tortured. Can you tell us what his status is, whether he's been visited by U.S. consular officials and whether the U.S. Government believes that he has been tortured?

MR. ERELI: There's a limit to what I can tell you based on Privacy Act considerations. We have permission from Mr. Abu Ali to release information to his parents and lawyers only. So what I can tell you publicly is that, as you know, he is incarcerated in Saudi Arabia. I'd refer you to Saudi authorities for comment on the reasons for his incarceration.

We have and do visit Mr. Abu Ali regularly. The last such visit was October 23rd of this year. I think those visits -- there's not much I can tell you beyond that.

I've seen those allegations of torture. Obviously, that is an issue that is -- when any American citizen raises those allegations, they are looked into and dealt with. We make clear our views that we expect American citizens to be treated consistent with international standards. This would certainly be the case in this instance as well. But I don't have any more details to share with you.

QUESTION: Can you say if you have made that view clear in this particular case that American citizens should not be tortured?

MR. ERELI: We make that -- that is a view we reiterate consistently. And if it was applicable in this case, I'm sure we made it.

QUESTION: If I can follow up on -- what -- is the U.S. doing anything to get him released? Is there any active negotiations? And are you upset that he is still being held without even being charged?

MR. ERELI: For that I'd refer you to the Department of Justice, as it involves -- well, actually, as far as the charges go, I'd refer you to the Saudi authorities. As far as the reasons for his incarceration and what U.S. Government -- the U.S. Government position is that -- is on that, I'd refer you to the Department of Justice.

Yes.

QUESTION: Back to the Ukraine. The Secretary in his remarks said that he and the Russian Foreign Minister report interest in finding a solution to the impasse. Are they agreed in what the solution should look like?

MR. ERELI: The solution -- I think we're all in agreement that the solution should be one that puts to rest questions about the -- questions about fraud and questions about the -- questions the international community has raised about the legitimacy of the election results, and what the solution should represent, or should be something that reflects the will of the people. But it is -- we are not proscribing specific courses of action.

Yes, sir.

QUESTION: Some reports said that sharp words were exchanged during the meeting between Secretary Powell and the Syrian Foreign Minister Farouk Shara at Sharm el-Sheik. Do you have any comment on that?

MR. ERELI: No, I don't--I don't know on the basis of those -- I haven't seen those reports. I don't know on what basis they would have that information. I think the Secretary spoke to his meeting with Foreign Minister Shara. The Secretary meets with him regularly. They are colleagues who know each other. You know, they're consistently meeting -- I would say, good meetings where we make clear what our points of view are and the Syrians make clear what their points of view are.

Sometimes there are, I think, areas of agreement, areas where some progress is made. That was certainly the case in New York this year. But as far as this specific meeting goes, I'm not aware of any heated words, heated exchanges.

QUESTION: Terje Roed-Larson has said from Damascus that Syria is ready to resume the negotiations with Israel without conditions. How do you see this position?

MR. ERELI: Well, the United States has consistently been in favor of direct talks between Israel and the Palestinians -- Israel and the Syrians to resolve their longstanding dispute over the Golan Heights and the state of war between them. It is something that, I think, we are encouraging of both sides to take steps to make that happen. But again, it's really a matter between the two countries. We are willing to play a supportive role. We've always been of that view and it remains the case.

Yes.

QUESTION: In addition to the IAEA, the South Korean nuclear experiment issue is also talked -- will be also talked about in the IAEA. And what's the position of the U.S. Government? Your senior officer Mr. John Bolton, is reported to say the matter should be go -- should be sent to the Security Council.

MR. ERELI: Yeah, let me see if I can get you a position on that, get it for you after the briefing.

QUESTION: Okay?

MR. ERELI: One more?

QUESTION: Yes. It's about Venezuela. What do you think of the terrorist attack in Caracas that killed the prosecutor Danilo Anderson, who was investigating opposition members for the coup against Chavez in 2002? And the suspect of the attack was killed by the Venezuelan police yesterday. I don't know if you have something.

MR. ERELI: I hadn't seen that. We spoke to this matter last week. We condemned this. We condemn the killing of the prosecutor. We called it a terrorist act and we called for a swift and full investigation and said we viewed it as a terrible crime.

QUESTION: Also on Venezuela, too. There are newly released CIA documents that show that the CIA knew of an imminent plot to oust Chavez in the weeks prior to the coup of April 2002. Why did the U.S. kept quiet on this plot to oust him?

MR. ERELI: Well, I'm not aware that we did. In fact, my information is that, based on an Inspector General's report of U. S. policy toward Venezuela dated July 2002, that we alerted President Chavez to coup plots and warned him of an assassination threat that was deemed to be credible.

QUESTION: Is that public?

MR. ERELI: Is the report public? You know, I asked just before coming out here and didn't get an answer, so let me follow up on it.

MR. CASEY: If it is, it's on the IG's website.

(The briefing was concluded at 1:45)

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