



Daily Press Briefing
Adam Ereli, Deputy Spokesman
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TRANSCRIPT:

1:00 p.m. EST

MR. ERELI: Good afternoon, everyone. If I may, let me begin with the subject that I think is on everybody's minds, and that is the attack today in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, against our consulate.

On behalf of the Secretary, I offer our condolences to the families of those Foreign Service National employees of the embassy -- of the consulate, who were killed today. It is a loss that saddens us deeply. These were our colleagues. They were working on behalf of the American people and we take it very much to heart that they lost their lives in service to our country. Our condolences go to their family members and our thoughts and prayers are with them, as they are with the victims who have been wounded in this attack and their families.

Secondly, we express our gratitude and appreciation to the Government of Saudi Arabia for their quick action and their decisive moves to confront this attack. They, too, lost their citizens and we offer our condolences to the victims and their families, and again, our thanks to the Government of Saudi Arabia.

And finally, this incident is yet another reminder that we are all in this together. This was an attack not just on the U.S. Consulate in Jeddah, but on all of us, American, Saudi and other nationalities, as were represented by our Foreign Service Nationals, who work on behalf of dialogue, who work on behalf of understanding, who work on

behalf of dealing with the world's problems in a way that stands in marked contrast to the hatred and violence preached by those responsible for this attack.

There are no definitive answers on who's responsible, so I wouldn't want to join in that speculation at the moment. I would say, we're still gathering a lot of details related to the events in Jeddah today. Different facts will be emerging over the course of the next couple days and weeks. There is an investigation going on.

Here's what we know at the moment, that at approximately 11:15 a.m., local time, this morning in Jeddah, five armed men attacked the U.S. Consulate in that city. The attackers attempted to drive their vehicle onto the compound via one of the gates but they were prevented from entering the compound by security measures in place. When their vehicle was not able to enter the compound, they got out of the vehicle, fired their weapons and fought their way onto the compound on foot. They then tried to get into the consulate building, where the Office of the Consulate General and other consulate offices are located. They were unable again. Because of security measures in place, they were unable to penetrate that building. The Marine security guard detachment and the Regional Security Officer assigned to the Consulate General took defensive measure to protect the employees on the compound at that time, alerting them to the attack and moving them to safe haven areas.

Contrary to reports that have been out there, there were no hostages taken by the attackers at any time to our knowledge during this attack. There were no Americans that were killed or injured in this attack. As I said earlier, sadly, four of our Foreign Service National employees were killed, as well as one local guard, who was working for a private company guarding the consulate, was also killed.

Again, we extend our deepest condolences to them, to their families, and we mourn their loss, as they do.

At least four other Foreign Service National employees were injured during the attack. I don't have specific information about the extent of their injuries at this time. The attack lasted several hours. I think the final all-clear signal was given about 3:15. The Saudi security forces succeeded in killing three of the attackers and arresting an additional two.

We will be working closely with the Saudi Government to investigate this incident. The compound has been secured. Additional security assets have been requested and should be in Jeddah to protect the consulate later this evening, early tomorrow morning.

As I said before, we don't know at this time who was responsible for the attack. I've seen reports of various claims of responsibility, but frankly, it's just not in a position to speak to their credibility or veracity.

Our Embassy in Riyadh and Consulates General in both Dhahran and Jeddah will be closed tomorrow -- or closed to the public -- will be working, but they'll be closed to the public. Emergency services for American citizens will be available on a -- if they're needed. And that's what I've got for you.

Yes.

QUESTION: Could you be more specific about what the Saudi forces did in this incident?

MR. ERELI: Not really. Just because I think that -- I just don't have the information. The Saudi forces responded to the attack. We were in touch with the Saudi Government and Saudi forces from the secure areas, safe areas within the embassy so that we knew they were there. I think our embassy, both in Riyadh, and Consulate General in Jeddah, were in contact with the Saudi security forces and other government officers during the incident, but -- and so that the Saudis got there after the fighting started, after the guys got onto the compound. Their forces entered the compound and pursued them and subdued them, but precisely when, how and in what sequence, that's all a level of detail I just don't have.

Yes, ma'am.

QUESTION: How many Saudi security forces were involved?

MR. ERELI: I don't know.

QUESTION: And were there any U.S. diplomatic security forces involved?

MR. ERELI: There were a number of Marines assigned to the consulate who acted very quickly, per their procedure, and I think took decisive action that prevented the loss of life and thwarted the attackers, as well as the Regional Security Officer that I mentioned putting in place the kind of react and defensive moves that you take in an emergency situation like this to get everybody into the safe areas. But in terms of actual confrontation with the attackers and whether there were armed engagements or not, I think I'll have to leave that to a fuller debrief. I don't have it.

Yes, Saul.

QUESTION: Regarding the Americans and anybody who may have been injured, I think I understand that the attackers did not cause any direct injuries to any Americans. In that process where they had to move, were there any injuries sustained there?

MR. ERELI: I don't know. My understanding is, and the information I have from our people on the ground in Jeddah, is that there are no injuries to speak of to any Americans.

QUESTION: When you talk about how there were preventive measures in place, that prevented the vehicle coming through the gate, and then later you said the same -- similar thing, that they tried to go into the building, are you talking about preventive measures, security guards were there with guns firing back, or are these sort of barriers?

MR. ERELI: These are, without going into a lot of specifics, every diplomatic mission abroad has a number of both physical as well as procedural measures to prevent violence and attacks against our facilities and personnel.

In this case, both came into play, and I think were very successful in containing this crisis and thwarting the intentions of the attackers and protecting our people with the qualification, and the very important qualification, that eight or nine -- that that protection wasn't perfect. But it -- there were a lot more that actually came out safe. And for that we're grateful both to the Saudis as well as recognizing the quick thinking, good training and intelligent action by our Consulate General staff, including the Marines and including the RSO.

QUESTION: When the attackers got on foot and they -- you said they fired weapons, were they only using guns? Did they have grenades? Did they have mortar backup?

MR. ERELI: Again, we'll have to wait for the after-action report. My understanding is there were both guns and grenades. Since I don't have all the facts, and I don't think it's been actually finally determined what there was, let me hold off on preventing any -- on giving you anything too definitive.

I would note that there was -- that the attackers did go after -- there's been a lot of reporting -- the attackers did go after a building that housed the residential quarters for the Marines, and that building was significantly damaged. What caused that damage, whether it was just bullet fire or grenades or other kinds of explosives, again, I don't

know. But it was significantly damaged.

Yes, Tammy.

QUESTION: A couple of questions. One is, were any Marines injured in this?

MR. ERELI: Not that I'm aware -- no, not that I'm aware of. Our reports are that no Americans were injured.

QUESTION: And you talked about additional security assets getting on the ground later today or early tomorrow. Is that a fast team? Can you give us any --?

MR. ERELI: I don't want to go into any detail about what it is. It would be both, I think, diplomatic security and DOD elements.

QUESTION: People?

MR. ERELI: People.

QUESTION: Okay.

MR. ERELI: Yes, Adi.

QUESTION: You said at the top that five armed men caused this. And then you later said that three of them were killed, two arrested. So therefore, do you believe that all the people who are responsible for this attack have either been killed or arrested?

MR. ERELI: I would say all the people directly involved in the attack -- all the people participating in the attack -- physically participating in the attack on the compound and who were on the compound are accounted for. There might be others who were not actually on the compound who were involved in the planning and execution of this who, I presume, will be the subject of follow-up.

QUESTION: And just a quick follow-up: The four Foreign Service Nationals who were killed, could you tell us exactly what their job responsibilities were?

MR. ERELI: My understanding is that most of them were -- that they were either in the General Services Office or the Motor Pool; General Services Office deals with maintenance and procurement and the physical plant for the embassy -- for the consulate; Motor Pool deals with vehicles and that sort of thing. So my understanding is most, if not all, were from that area.

Yes, ma'am.

QUESTION: Are the nationalities available?

MR. ERELI: We'll check. I think we want to first notify the families and deal with that before giving out too much personal information.

QUESTION: Are you seeing any similarity between this attack and some other attacks, such as Khobar in 1996 in Saudi Arabia?

MR. ERELI: As I said earlier, we're in just the few hours after the attack, so I think our experts and security experts will be studying this carefully. But I don't want to draw any comparisons or conclusions at this early stage.

Yes?

QUESTION: Just to clarify, this was a small staff there. Is that correct? It was still an unaccompanied assignment and non-essential -- non-emergency staff only for the consulate?

MR. ERELI: Without getting into specific numbers, the consulate was at its full complement. It was not under Ordered or Authorized Departure. It is, as you said, a non-accompanied post, so the dependents were not -- had not been present since August, I believe.

So it was fully staffed -- that our numbers have been fluctuating, but the numbers of permanent staff have been fluctuating, based on our assessment of what a reasonable security profile is. But at the time of the attack, the Consulate General in Jeddah was at its full complement, minus dependents.

Yes, Adi.

QUESTION: You said that the attackers tried to gain entrance to the residence of the Consular General. Is that right?

MR. ERELI: Did I say that? I didn't say that, I think -- the Office of the Consulate General.

QUESTION: The Office.

MR. ERELI: I'm sorry, the Consulate General building.

QUESTION: Okay. Where was the Consular General at the time? Was she --

MR. ERELI: The Consular General was in the building in her office. She heard gunfire near her office, and she is one of the officials, one of the members of the Consulate General staff who took the kind of smart, decisive, quick action, I think, that led to -- that helped save lives, alerting the Marines, alerting the staff, alerting the Embassy in Riyadh to the attack, and helping to get people into the secure locations within the consulate building where they'd be safe. But she was very much in the middle of it, in the front lines, as they say.

QUESTION: I'm sorry. The secure locations, is this a bunker? I mean, can you describe it at all?

MR. ERELI: The best I can do for you, frankly, is that these are areas within our diplomatic facilities where employees can go that provide added protection in times like these, added protection to deal with incidents such as these.

Charlie.

QUESTION: You mentioned some of the things that worked and a few of the things that didn't work. The attackers actually did breach the outer area of the compound. Can you talk about what that does and what that might cause in terms of a ripple effect elsewhere?

MR. ERELI: Obviously, we're concerned when armed intruders penetrate the defensive measures and enter a diplomatic facility. So we're going to be looking at exactly what happened and how it happened in order to sort of assess what the vulnerabilities were, and I think at this point it would be premature for me to speculate whether, you know, what the consequences of that are going to be.

But I would come back to the point I made earlier, which is that in spite of the fact that you had what has all the markings of a very carefully thought-out, carefully prepared and well-executed attack, the defensive measures and training provided to our diplomatic personnel and to our local employees responded in just the way that they're supposed to and prevented and frustrated what could have been a much more lethal attack.

We're trying to keep the proper perspective. Yes, there was an incident. Yes, there was a breach of the perimeter. Yes, that's going to be looked into. At the same time, we've got a lot of very brave, quick-thinking, intelligent, well-trained, cool-headed people who acted just the way they're supposed to, and I think chalk one up for us against the terrorists.

Yes, sir.

QUESTION: Just the same question I asked about the people who were killed, about the four service nationals who were injured. Did they -- were they in the same sort of vicinity where the four were killed?

MR. ERELI: I'll have to check. I don't know.

QUESTION: You don't know if it was a --

MR. ERELI: I'll have to check. I don't know that for a fact.

QUESTION: Adam, a lot's been spent over the last few years to beef up security at embassies around the world. Do you have any estimate of how much has been spent, I guess since the attacks in Africa in '98?

MR. ERELI: Billions. Safe to say billions. Well over -- well, several billion. And I would note that in this particular embassy there were a number of upgrades that had been done just prior to this attack, I think that helped foil it. There was a shelter for the guards outside the perimeter in which one of the guards acted to alert the local authorities. There were additional cameras installed around the embassy that will help us to -- or that gave us greater visibility on the attack as it was taking place and that helped, I think, helped manage the reaction to the incident. But I don't have, off the top of my head since 1996, a dollar figure on what we've spent on security.

QUESTION: Is it possible to get a -- I'm sure you don't have it in your head right now -- but a figure on this particular consulate how much has been spent, or generally for Saudi Arabia?

MR. ERELI: Let me see what I can -- let me see what we can come up with in terms of money. But I think that, you know, you can talk about money, but there's a lot, as I alluded to earlier, that is hard to quantify, the kind of training, the kind of situational awareness, the kind of clear thinking that people demonstrate in these kinds of crisis that I think is the mark of real professionalism.

Obviously, there are security enhancements at this embassy -- or, excuse me -- at this consulate, that were important in preventing the vehicle from getting on the compound. You know, it has been a State Department priority for a number of years to -- working with Congress to get the kind of resources we need to protect our people.

I think Congress has been very generous in providing dollars to the State Department for secure -- for hardened facilities as well as training and hiring of local guards. One of the local guard contractors who was killed is a reflection of that. So, I mean, this is a full-court press and I think, you know, when one looks back on this incident and reflects on it, they will see a lot of enhancements and a lot of contributions from a lot of different sources, congressional, budget and otherwise, that came into play here.

Yes, Saul.

QUESTION: You said the attack was well planned, carefully planned. If, as the investigation goes on, is there any focus on a suspicion that they may have got information from anybody who worked inside the consulate?

MR. ERELI: I'd leave it to the investigators to speak to that. I would presume they'll be looking at, you know, every relevant aspect of what happened to try to determine how, as I said before, potential vulnerabilities can be addressed.

Yes.

QUESTION: Following this incident, do you view the Saudi justice system as almost equal to ours? And do you think that you don't necessarily want to turn this into a show trial, but because these combatants ended up on our U.S. Consulate property, do they remain in Saudi Arabia, or do they, for instance, go to Guantanamo?

MR. ERELI: The attackers who were captured are in the custody of Saudi authorities. We will be working closely with the Government of Saudi Arabia as they conduct their investigation, and, as I said before, I think our counter terror cooperation with the Saudis to date has really been -- has been outstanding. There's a common understanding that these kinds of actions, these kinds of people, threaten not only the United States, but the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

I think it's important to remember that Saudi Arabia, the government, the people of Saudi Arabia have suffered losses as we have, at the hands of these terrorists, so we really have common cause in working together to fight them. And that's ultimately why we will prevail.

Yes, sir.

QUESTION: The local guard who was killed working for a private security company; do you have the name of the company?

MR. ERELI: I do not.

QUESTION: Do you know if it was an American company or a Saudi company?

MR. ERELI: I do not know.

Yes, ma'am.

QUESTION: Is there any particular reason to think that this facility, as opposed to other diplomatic facilities in Saudi Arabia, would be a target? Were there any threat warnings that were particular to this one before today?

MR. ERELI: No, I would refer you to our Travel Warning of October 26th, which is -- I'm sorry, October 27th -- which was the last time we talked about the threat information that we had. That's sort of our latest statement on the issue.

I think for some time in Saudi Arabia, we've been concerned about attacks on our diplomatic facilities. We've been very clear about that publicly. I'm not aware that there was any specific threat information regarding the attack that occurred today.

QUESTION: And can I just follow up and make sure I understand one thing about the particulars of what happened? You mentioned an attack on a particular building. Were any of the attackers ever able to get inside any buildings, or did this entire engagement take place outside?

MR. ERELI: There were two buildings that I mentioned: the Consulate General, and the building providing lodging for the Marines. There were no attackers that -- at no time did attackers ever enter the Consulate General building. I don't know if they ever entered the Marine House. As I said before, there was significant damage to the Marine House. I don't know whether that was the result of action taken from without or within.

QUESTION: And those are the only two buildings in play here?

MR. ERELI: That I'm aware of at this time, yeah. As I said, I preface this by saying it's still under investigation. I'm giving you the facts that I have right now.

Charlie.

QUESTION: Do you know if Secretary Powell, from his plane or his *Shannon -- I can't keep up with the schedules -- has talked to any Saudi authorities, or has Deputy Secretary Armitage?

MR. ERELI: No. No.

Okay. If we're done with Jeddah -- one more?

QUESTION: No, I'm going to change subject.

MR. ERELI: Okay, Saul.

QUESTION: Do you have anything to say about the news coming out of Iran? And that is that Iranian officials say, in fact, senior al-Qaida leaders who have been arrested have actually been tried, their verdicts have been handed down. This is something apparently that happened in the past. A) Do you have confirmation that that's happened; and B) are you satisfied that Iran has tried these people?

MR. ERELI: I don't have confirmation, so I can't say we're satisfied. I would reiterate to you what we've said before, which is that if Iran does indeed have senior al-Qaida operatives, then we believe they should be handed over either to the United States or to a country where -- a third country where they can be dealt with in a less opaque manner.

Yes.

QUESTION: Change subject?

MR. ERELI: Sure.

QUESTION: China. When Chinese Foreign Minister Li called Secretary Powell this morning, they said again to reiterate the consensus they reached, the two heads of state reached in Chile. Could anyone explain, what is the consensus, really, during the Sunday's meeting in Santiago?

MR. ERELI: I don't know what consensus, specific consensus you're speaking about. The Secretary did speak with Chinese Foreign Minister Li today. I'd refer you to the party for a readout of that call. I don't really have anything particular to offer you on it, and as far as the President's meeting with -- President Bush's meeting with President Hu Jintao, I'd refer you to the White House.

QUESTION: So you don't know if they talked about Taiwan or U.S.-China relations?

MR. ERELI: I'm sure they talked about U.S.-China relations, but on Taiwan, again, I just don't have a readout to share with you.

QUESTION: Okay, I have one more. The press reports out of Taiwan has said Taiwan Government tries to change their representative office name in New York and change it to Taiwan Mission.

MR. ERELI: Right.

QUESTION: Is there any implication? And what's the opinion from this Department on that?

MR. ERELI: There are reports of a number of sort of impending name changes. Our view on that is that, frankly, we're not supportive of them. As you know, the United States has an interest in maintaining stability in the Taiwan Strait. That's what we want to see, and we are therefore opposed to any unilateral steps that would change the status quo.

These changes of terminology for government-controlled enterprises or economic and cultural offices abroad, in our view, would appear to unilaterally change Taiwan's status, and for that reason we're not supportive of them.

QUESTION: Can I follow up?

MR. ERELI: Yes.

QUESTION: Did Taiwan discuss this decision with U.S. before?

MR. ERELI: I'm not aware of any such conversations. I'm not saying they didn't take place. It's just that I don't know about them.

Saul.

QUESTION: Still on this and on the North Korea angle of China. There was at least one meeting in New York between U.S. officials and North Korean officials last week. Now, was that something to talk about food, as you have done in the past, or was it to talk about getting North Korea to come back to the six-party talks?

MR. ERELI: There were actually two meetings. There was a meeting in New York on Tuesday, November 30th and Friday, December 3rd. The purpose of those meetings was -- let me first say what they were not, the purpose was not -- the premise was not to negotiate with the North Koreans. The purpose was to state to the North Koreans that the United States is ready to resume the six-party talks at an early date and without preconditions and that we want to resolve the nuclear issue diplomatically. And we told the North Koreans that the six-party process is the venue for resolving the nuclear issue and, just as we do publicly, we called on North Korea to follow through on its commitment to continue with six-party talks.

QUESTION: Who represented the United States? Who represented them?

MR. ERELI: I don't know who represented them. Ambassador DeTrani represented us.

QUESTION: And you say it wasn't about negotiations, so -- but it was about the talks. But why hold it at all? Those positions are very clear you say from the podium --

MR. ERELI: Right.

QUESTION: -- every day, we'll do both of those things --

MR. ERELI: It was felt that a face-to-face presentation of our publicly stated position might be effective.

QUESTION: And you --

QUESTION: Did they ask for it?

MR. ERELI: Pardon?

QUESTION: Did they ask for it?

MR. ERELI: I believe we did.

QUESTION: What was their response?

MR. ERELI: I don't have that.

Yes.

QUESTION: Another subject, on FYROM.

MR. ERELI: I'm sorry. Sure.

QUESTION: I assume that it's -- there are permanent staff at the UN that talk to --

MR. ERELI: That's usually who we meet with, but I just don't know which individual.

QUESTION: Okay.

MR. ERELI: On this subject?

QUESTION: Yeah. Was the two meetings, like, Mr. DeTrani participate both meetings?

MR. ERELI: I believe so. Let me check to make sure that that's the case.

QUESTION: Thank you.

MR. ERELI: Yes.

QUESTION: Did the message differ from one meeting to the next? I mean, why two meetings to convey what's already out there?

MR. ERELI: Whether it was, you know, presented and then response, it was just the way it was choreographed.

QUESTION: Any further bilateral meetings planned?

MR. ERELI: I wouldn't call this a bilateral meeting. I would call it a meeting through the New York channel. If you want to call it bilateral, I guess you could, but we're not -- basically, we see it as a very specific kind of meeting. Bilateral suggests that there's a whole sort of host of issues you talk about, which definitely is not the case.

But, you know, we have these meetings from time to time when there is a -- when they serve a useful purpose, to pass messages and to make points known. So I'm sure there'll be meetings in the future, but I don't -- I'm not aware of anything on schedule. For your information, and in case you didn't already know it, Ambassador DeTrani left today for -- I'm sorry -- left yesterday, on Sunday, December 5th, for Beijing.

He will be there to hold consultations on the North Korean issue and six-party talks. He will be meeting there with his Chinese counterpart, Ambassador Ning Fukai. Ambassador DeTrani, Special Envoy DeTrani, will be in Beijing until December 8th. And from Beijing, he will travel on to Seoul and Tokyo to continue these consultations. He'll be back in Washington on December 11th.

QUESTION: Have you used the New York channel to discuss the six-party talks before?

MR. ERELI: The subject has come up, but I said -- again, I would be careful about using the word "discuss the six-party talks," -- to make points about it. Maybe that's drawing too fine a point on it, but I just want to make it clear that these aren't negotiations.

QUESTION: So there have been New York channel meetings called specifically to deal with the new -- the six-party talks?

MR. ERELI: I'll have to check. I believe so.

QUESTION: Yeah.

MR. ERELI: But I'll have to check.

QUESTION: And can you check if it's the first time that you, the United States, have asked for such a meeting?

MR. ERELI: I'll check on that, too.

QUESTION: Thank you.

QUESTION: And Adam, if not the first, can you check on how many times this has happened in the past --

MR. ERELI: I may not, I'm --

QUESTION: -- I'm trying -- how unusual is this?

MR. ERELI: I don't think it's unusual, and that's what I'm trying to get is, you know, you guys always like to make a big deal out of the New York channel; whereas, for us, it is simply a way to pass messages, and I don't think too much, really, should be read into this.

The fact is you go up there, you sit down, you say what you have to say, they say what they have to say, you get up and you break. The real substance, the real engagement or the real diplomacy is conducted in multilateral venues because -- precisely because -- and this is what we said in the New York meeting -- this is an issue that needs a multilateral solution.

So I'll see what I can get for you more on the New York meetings, with the caveat that we really don't make as much of it as you guys seem to want to do.

Yes.

QUESTION: Change of subject.

MR. ERELI: I'm sorry. Still on this subject?

QUESTION: Yes. On Mr. DeTrani's trip to Seoul and Tokyo, do you have a detailed date which he will be in Tokyo and Seoul?

MR. ERELI: I don't have the specific dates -- between the 8th and the 11th.

QUESTION: Okay. And also, is there any plan to hold another trilateral meeting when he was in the region?

MR. ERELI: Not that I'm aware of.

Are we done with North Korean? Okay, because we have a FYROM question in the back.

QUESTION: Today at the UN, Greece and FYROM resume their talks over the name and I'm wondering if maybe you have anything to say on that.

MR. ERELI: We support the ongoing United Nations talks between Greece and Macedonia and we encourage both sides to find a mutually agreeable solution to the name issue, but I don't have any details other than that for you on those talks.

QUESTION: On Cyprus. Any readout about the recent trip to Europe by the Cyprus Coordinator Under Secretary Laura Kennedy, because it was dealing with the Cyprus issue with various capitals?

MR. ERELI: No, let me see if I can get you something on that.

QUESTION: Do you know if she's going to accompany Secretary Powell's trip to Europe?

MR. ERELI: With who?

QUESTION: If Mrs. Kennedy is going to accompany Secretary Powell's trip to Europe.

MR. ERELI: I don't believe so, no.

Yes.

QUESTION: It's a related question, in a way. You've made clear your support for Turkey's accession to the European Union. Do you think the EU should set a date for the start of accession talks, even if Ankara doesn't recognize one of the EU members, such as Cyprus?

MR. ERELI: I don't have anything really to add to that beyond what our long-stated position is, is that while we're not a member of the European Union, we do support European -- or Turkish accession to the European Union, and that's a matter that needs to be -- the modalities for that is a matter that needs to be negotiated between the European Union and Turkey.

Yes.

QUESTION: Change subject. Romania. There's a U.S. Marine who was involved in an accident; somebody died in the accident, a singer, I believe. And the Foreign Ministry has issued a statement saying it's upset that the Marine has been sent home. They are request -- can you confirm that they're requesting that he be brought back to Romania and that his diplomatic immunity be lifted? And then can you just answer how you're trying to defuse the anger at this?

MR. ERELI: Let me begin by saying that Romania is a valued partner of the United States. U.S. and Romania have excellent relations. It is our objective to ensure that those relations remain as cordial and productive as possible. As we work our way through this tragic incident, we're trying to keep that spirit of friendship and cooperation at the forefront of our actions.

Let me begin by expressing condolences on behalf of the United States Government to the friends and family of Mr. Peter, who was a Romanian citizen who was killed in an auto incident involving a U.S. Marine in Romania.

We deeply regret the death of Mr. Peter, as well as injuries to another Romanian citizen that was caused. Our Ambassador, Ambassador Crouch, has personally expressed our condolences to the son of Mr. Teo Peter.

We are fully cooperating with the Romanian authorities as they conduct their investigation into this accident. It is my understanding that the Marine Corps is also conducting an investigation.

As a member of the staff at the U.S. Embassy, the Marine in question has immunity from criminal prosecution in Romania, in accordance with the Vienna Convention. The Romanian Government has asked us to waive his immunity and we are reviewing this request.

Pending an investigation, as permitted under the Vienna Convention, the Marine departed Bucharest on Saturday, December 4th, and we will, as I said before, continue to work with the Romanian Government, I think, with sympathy for the loss of this citizen, and in a spirit of friendship and cooperation, which I think characterizes our overall relations.

QUESTION: Why did you bring him back if there's an investigation going on? Wouldn't it be useful for him to be there so that he can answer questions?

MR. ERELI: For that I'd refer you to the Marines and the Department of Defense.

QUESTION: There's a Romanian investigation obviously going on. There's a police matter. There's an accident. Someone has died. Don't they want to talk to him and that's why they're upset?

MR. ERELI: This is an action that is permitted under the Vienna Convention, my understanding, but for specific decision-making on this incident, again, I'd refer you to DOD.

QUESTION: Hold on. He's a member of -- his job over there was working for the embassy, right?

MR. ERELI: He was working for the Marines assigned to the embassy.

QUESTION: So he suddenly stopped working for the embassy. Why is that? Can he not carry out his duties because he's under investigation?

MR. ERELI: Again, he was involved in a criminal incident. He was returned here. For the decisions on why that was done, timing, et cetera, I'd refer you to the Department of Defense.

Yes.

QUESTION: Adam, change of subject. President Pervez Musharraf was here this past weekend. He conducted talks with Secretary Powell and then at the White House with President Bush. And over the border in Afghanistan, they're about to have elections, and would they have discussed, I think, a big sore point, which are warlord enclaves, where both U.S. Marines and Army, as well as even Afghani -- or sorry, Pakistani Army just excluded from that area, and that's up on the northern Pakistani border. And how's the situation currently?

And also, over the weekend, following these talks, there were more disturbances up in Kashmir in the area of Srinagar.

MR. ERELI: I don't really have much to add to what the Secretary said about his talks with President Musharraf over the weekend and to what was put out by the White House. There was a number of readouts, both on the record and on background given, again, over the weekend. I think those addressed the questions you pose.

I would take issue with, you know, the notion that somehow there's a big problem area. To the contrary, I think that we have high praise and great appreciation and respect and admiration for what the Pakistani forces are doing in the areas, in their territory, to take the fight to the terrorists in Waziristan and in the other parts of the country where terrorists are active. They have lost many of their own men. They are relentless and they are committed and they are making a difference.

There have been a lot of reports about things being at a pause or being toned down. I think those are speculation based on incomplete understanding and ignore the -- and neglect to -- and ignore the big picture, which is that Pakistan, under Musharraf, and the Pakistani people are committed and fully engaged in taking the fight to the terrorists.

QUESTION: Can I just follow up?

MR. ERELI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: Also, over the border in Afghanistan, you've mentioned, and I believe also Richard has mentioned, about the whole situation that farmers, and mostly anyone really, are turning back to the drug trade with growing poppies and so forth. How is reconstruction in Afghanistan? Is it -- I know you -- the highway was delayed that is being built for the development of --

MR. ERELI: The highway that you're talking about, the Kabul-to-Kandahar, was completed a year and a half ago or maybe a year ago.

QUESTION: Right. But there are other infrastructure --

MR. ERELI: Yeah, there's other infrastructure. Don't paint too bleak a picture. I think -- you're having the inauguration of a president tomorrow. That is a major landmark in the history of Afghanistan and the history of the region, and due note should be taken of it, what it represents in terms of political, social development that a country can go in a little more than three years -- three years, you do the math -- can do in a very short period of time from a feudal theocracy to a functioning democracy. And who

would have thought?

And it's the result of the strength and will, first and foremost, of the Afghani people, and, second, the support of the international community. So let's, I think, be appropriately -- let's -- appropriately appreciative of what's happening in Afghanistan.

On the issue of poppy cultivation, a major problem, clearly. Nobody is looking at this through rose-colored or opium-colored glasses. It's a problem. And as Assistant Secretary Robert Charles told you a few weeks ago, it's a problem that we are committed to addressing with Afghanistan and with the international community. We're looking at significant money to fight poppy cultivation because it threatens a lot of what has been achieved to date.

But again, when you write about Afghanistan, I think it's important to put things in a proper perspective.

QUESTION: Adam?

MR. ERELI: Yeah.

QUESTION: Can I ask the indulgence of colleagues? I don't know how many other questions there are, but we've got a walkout with the Deputy Secretary in about ten minutes and maybe the other questions could be asked at podium. Can we do that?

MR. ERELI: I will defer to you. If you want to stop asking, I'll stop answering.

QUESTION: Thank you.

(The briefing was concluded at 1:50 p.m.)

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