



THE WHITE HOUSE

PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH

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Press Gaggle with Ari Fleischer

Crawford Elementary School
Crawford, Texas

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2:20 P.M. CDT

MR. FLEISCHER: Good afternoon. Let's go right to questions. John.

Q Ari, regarding the Clinton pardons, **the Bush administration has widened the concept of executive privilege** to cover information the President may never have seen or known about. Is this administration working under the belief that past administrations were too cooperative in turning over information to Congress and, therefore, weakened the principle of executive privilege? Are you trying to right a balance here?

MR. FLEISCHER: No, this question deals with standard issues involving Freedom of Information Act, not executive privilege. In fact, if you look halfway through that article this morning, it made clear that the issue was about Freedom of Information Act provisions and the Exemption 5 under the Freedom of Information Act.

It is not about executive privilege. Even though the top part of the article curiously referred to executive privilege, the middle of the article said it deals with freedom of information, which is a different matter. In this matter, we are following a standard, straightforward case dealing with the Freedom of Information Act. The Department of Justice has concluded that the documents sought by Judicial Watch are protected under the laws dealing with freedom of information.

Mark.

Q Can you tell us about the **President's meeting with Prince Bandar**? And your favorite question, was Iraq mentioned?

MR. FLEISCHER: Prince Bandar and his family came to visit the President today at his ranch. It was both a social visit, as well as a business visit. The two met privately, along with Dr. Rice, for a little bit over an hour; and then the family stayed and they had lunch. And the President just now finished a tour

of the ranch with Prince Bandar and his family.

They discussed a variety of issues, including prospects of enhancing peace in the Middle East. They discussed the war on terrorism and Saudi Arabia's cooperation in the war. They discussed -- the President raised the issue of child custody cases in Saudi Arabia dealing with American citizens. Specifically, the President brought up the issue of Amjad Radwan's case in Saudi Arabia and asked for that issue to be resolved so she can be brought back to the United States.

Q Iraq?

MR. FLEISCHER: **On the topic of Iraq**, the President stressed that he has made no decisions, that he will continue to engage in consultations with Saudi Arabia and other nations about steps in the Middle East, steps in Iraq. And the President made very clear again that he believes that Saddam Hussein is a menace to world peace, a menace to regional peace, and that the world and the region will be safer and better off without Saddam Hussein.

Q Can you describe the Prince's reaction -- or the Ambassador's reaction?

MR. FLEISCHER: No. I let the Saudis characterize their own reaction to it. I don't think it would be appropriate for me to do so.

Q Can you say if the conversation, as quoted in the Saudi press, by the Saudi press agency today, is quoted accurately?

MR. FLEISCHER: The gist of the conversation is correct. I saw that -- there's been some, I guess you could call it a game of telephone as the version gets told and told and told to different parties. The original Saudi News Agency story did not have any direct quotes from the President. And then I saw in some American accounts direct quotes from the President. Those quotes are not accurate, they're not verbatim. They do have the gist of the conversation accurate, but none of those verbatim quotes are accurate, for what that's worth.

The President and the Crown Prince did have an 18-minute conversation yesterday in which the President spoke to him about overall U.S.-Saudi relations. They did discuss the recent defense board's statements that the President conveyed to the Crown Prince had nothing to do with the views of any senior level government administration officials, including himself, including the Secretary of Defense or the Vice President. And they also talked about path to peace in the Middle East. The topic of Iraq did not come up in the conversation with the two, with the Crown Prince and the President.

Ron.

Q Back on the custody case, did the President -- make sure the child is brought back?

MR. FLEISCHER: That's correct.

Q And what was the spelling of that name?

MR. FLEISCHER: Amjad Radwan. And the President cited in this case and in other cases the crying humanitarian concerns, the issues involving justice, and the rights of people to come back to the United States if that's their desire. And I will tell you on this, the Ambassador said he will relay the message back to officials in Saudi Arabia. But the President made a very powerful case, based on humanitarian

reasons, based on America's sense of justice, and based on what the President views is a matter of right and wrong.

Q -- Ambassador's response on that issue, but not on Iraq?

MR. FLEISCHER: Because this is a conveyance of information. The decisions on these things will be made by Saudi officials, and Saudi officials can inform you what the decision is. When it comes to a routine conveyance, I'm happy to pass that on to you.

Randy.

Q Did the discussion of oil come up in the meeting today?

MR. FLEISCHER: I don't have anything specific on that. I just know, as I indicated yesterday, the Saudis have a longstanding policy, which we have seen carried out in action in addition to rhetoric, about not using oil as a weapon.

Q -- (inaudible.)

MR. FLEISCHER: Nothing new.

Richard.

Q Ari, what is the latest situation on --

MR. FLEISCHER: Latest situation with what?

Q On the Congressional Budget Office projections on the deficit.

MR. FLEISCHER: The latest numbers from the Congressional Budget Office underscored the need for Congress to show restraint in government spending, unless we want deficits to come back bigger than they ever have before. These recent numbers confirm that, as a result of a recession and a war, the numbers in the deficit have increased. According to the CBO report, in August -- earlier in August, 80 percent of the change for revenues in the year 2002 stems from what CBO calls technical and economic concerns. In other words, the recession has caused revenues to fall short of their targets.

CBO has concluded that the tax cut -- that there would still be a deficit even if there had been no tax cut. And so what the President believes the lesson from today's CBO numbers are, that Congress needs to hold the line on spending. If Congress won't do it, the President will do it for the Congress.

Q -- said that it attributes a total of \$2.4 trillion of the decline since early 2001 to legislative action. Half of that is tax cuts and half due to new spending. So if you're calling for a restraint on spending going forward, would you not also call for a restraint on cutting taxes further, as the CBO says -- it gives equal weight to both of those factors for the decline in 2001.

MR. FLEISCHER: No, the President views the tax cuts as one of the reasons that the economy is coming back. The tax cut was well-timed to produce more growth. But the real danger to the budget comes from pork barrel spending by the Congress. And that's why the President, in effect, vetoed \$5 billion worth of congressional spending that Congress tried to label an emergency, that the President did not accept. The President will continue to protect the taxpayers' dollars.

Patsy.

Q Ari, can you give us some more color from the meeting, like how many children were there, what they had for lunch, did the President drive?

MR. FLEISCHER: Yes, I can do that. Lunch included grilled chicken, Mediterranean salad, fresh green beans grown locally, and biscuits. The Ambassador was joined by six of his eight children, and one of his children, of course, is a student at Baylor University. And three of the eight stayed for lunch; three others went back to Baylor. As I say, lunch lasted for about an hour. They were casually dressed, wearing jeans and blazers, or khakis.

Q We're the President's daughters there --

MR. FLEISCHER: No.

Q Did the President drive --

MR. FLEISCHER: And then the President, following the lunch the President took the Ambassador and his wife on a tour of the ranch. The President was driving his pickup truck.

Q Did the President address any of the Saudis' concerns about the September 11th lawsuit and the possibility of their assets here in the U.S. being freezed?

MR. FLEISCHER: No, that issue did not come up.

Q The lawsuit did not come up?

MR. FLEISCHER: Did not come up.

The question was, did the lawsuit of September 11th families come up, and the question did not come up.

Q Did at any time the question of a possible military attack against Iraq come up? And did the Prince --

MR. FLEISCHER: No, the President discussed Iraq in a general sense, because the President has not made a decision about the use of military action vis a vis Iraq. And so he discussed it in, as I indicated in the beginning, without that type of specificity because he's made no decisions.

Q -- opposition to any military action?

MR. FLEISCHER: Again, I think it's best to let the Saudis characterize their own answers.

Q Does the President feel that he made any headway in convincing the Saudis that regime change --

MR. FLEISCHER: Listen, I think it's fair to say --

Q Question?

MR. FLEISCHER: Did the President think that he made any headway in convincing the Saudis. Again, under the McClellan rule I will repeat the questions. I do note that Mr. McClellan will begin his gaggle

tomorrow. Today is my last day down here. I would urge, on a preemptive matter, that if Mr. McClellan refers to any of my gaggles or says anything in his statements, I will immediately be available for comment back in Washington. (Laughter.)

On the question of headway, I think it's fair to say that every time the President meets with foreign leaders and the topic of Iraq comes up, the President thinks it's a constructive exchange of ideas. He listens carefully to the thoughts that people have about how to deal with Iraq. He hears them say and agree with him that Saddam Hussein is a threat, that Saddam Hussein is a menace. And then the President makes his case about why the world would be better off without Saddam Hussein there.

I've said repeatedly the President has not made any decisions. The President is patient and the President will proceed at a timetable that he thinks is in the interests of our country based on intelligence information that he receives. And I think throughout this time period you will see the President continue to listen, to listen carefully, to explain his case. But again, the President is speaking in general terms at this time because no decision has been made.

I think it's fair to say that if and when the President makes a decision, the American public will be involved, the President will consult with the Congress, and the President will at that point have a strong case to make to other nations. And the President expects that he will be able to make a compelling case if it reaches that point.

Campbell.

Q Ari, why did the President bring up the child custody issue today? This isn't anything new, we've been talking about this for ages. Why didn't he raise it with the Crown Prince when he was here?

MR. FLEISCHER: The issue has repeatedly come up at multiple levels of the government. I know the State Department actively has been pursuing this issue; it has come up before. And the President thought it had reached the point now where it was appropriate to be brought up at the highest level.

Q Why now, though? What's changed?

MR. FLEISCHER: Because not enough progress has been made. Because people who should be allowed to come back to the United States have not been able to. And so the President thought, after allowing it to proceed up normal channels, it was appropriate now to elevate it to a higher level. And that's an expression of the depth of concern that the President has about this, again from a humanitarian point of view.

Q -- for one --

MR. FLEISCHER: The President raised the issue of these cases in general.

Q -- again, besides raising the issue, is he calling for any Americans in custody, American children in custody --

MR. FLEISCHER: He asked for the cases to be resolved, and for the one case I mentioned, for Amjad Radwan to be brought back to the United States, and he urged resolution on all these cases. Many of them are similar in nature.

Dana.

Q Ari, would you say that Bandar was agreeing that Saddam Hussein is a menace? And can you say for sure that there was no discussion of over-flight rights, bases, any particulars like that?

MR. FLEISCHER: No, again, the President did not get into that type of specific level of issue because the President hasn't made a decision that would involve any of those issues.

Q But Bandar was agreeing that Saddam Hussein is a menace?

MR. FLEISCHER: Saudi Arabia's position has long been, if you have listened to Adel Al-Jubir, for example, that Saddam Hussein is a threat.

Q Was there any discussion about the Saudis taking some of their investment monies out of the United States in recent weeks?

MR. FLEISCHER: Condi gave me the briefing on it and she did not mention anything about that, so that was not brought to my attention.

Q The President is frequently making the case that Iraq needs to make a transition to a democracy. Did he also make the case here to Prince Bandar that Saudi Arabia needs to make a transition to a democracy?

MR. FLEISCHER: Again, I've given you the briefing that I've gotten from the National Security Advisor.

Q No --

MR. FLEISCHER: I've given you the briefing I've gotten from the National Security Advisor.

Q Ari, yesterday you said there is an important difference between preemptive attack and preemptive doctrine. Can you explain what that difference is specifically?

MR. FLEISCHER: Preemptive doctrine, of course, as laid out by the President at West Point and as expounded upon by the Vice President yesterday, says that time is not on America's side. And, unlike the world we faced when we had rational enemies, when mutually assured destruction did indeed serve as a deterrent to war, as a way of preserving the peace; that we now are in a different era, an era in which nuclear bombs can be brought to the United States in suitcases, dirty bombs; and that the threat from terrorists who have no homeland to defend, who have no interest or little interest in defending any people, their whole mission is, as terrorists, to inflict maximum damage on the United States and on other democracies. We don't have time to wait for them to develop these weapons and attack us without any warning.

And therefore, the doctrine of preemption, as the President laid it out, is a way to continue America's efforts to promote peace around the world by denying them the ability to inflict damage on us.

Q Does the doctrine of preemption encompass as a possibility preemptive attack? Or does it preclude a preemptive attack?

MR. FLEISCHER: No, the President -- the President at West Point made the case, it includes the case for preemptive attack.

Q One other follow-up. The Vice President yesterday talked a lot about preemptive action. Aside from the possibility of a military attack, is there other specific action that the United States can take preemptively towards Iraq, and what is that action?

MR. FLEISCHER: I'm not going to speculate about any individual possibilities. The President has said that he has a variety of options that he will consider.

Q Is the White House releasing any photos of the meeting?

MR. FLEISCHER: Yes.

Q And why was there no media coverage given? As you said yesterday, Prince Bandar is affable and speaks excellent English.

MR. FLEISCHER: Because, as I -- when I announced the meeting on Friday, I said there would be no press coverage. And the President, when he has meetings with ambassadors, does not have press coverage.

I mean, I know it's Crawford and it's August and it's the only game in town in Crawford in August for the President. But that's part of the White House policy; we typically do not have coverage of meetings with ambassadors.

Q Ari, in his speech yesterday, the Vice President seemed to say -- said that the Israeli/Palestinian situation would probably be easier to work with if Iraq were dealt with. Are you signaling that the **Middle East peace process** is in any way put on hold until you've settled the question of Iraq?

MR. FLEISCHER: No, clearly, when the President and the Ambassador today talked about peace in the Middle East, Saudi Arabia continues to play a constructive role in helping bring about peace in the Middle East and reform of Palestinian institutions. No, they both are important.

One other point I should bring up, too, in the meeting that did come up, and this is vis-a-vis the war on terrorism and the reconstruction of the Afghanistan government, the President did remind Saudi Arabia, as he does other nations, about their responsibility to meet the pledges they have made in the reconstruction of the Saudi [sic] government. Many nations around the world have pledged to contribute money for the reconstruction of the Afghani government and very few nations, including Saudi Arabia, have met their commitments. The President urged Saudi Arabia to meet their commitment. It's important to the future stability of the Afghanistan government. Saudi Arabia is not alone in being a nation that had made an oral promise to the people and to the government of Afghanistan, as well as to the United States and to the ISAF nations and it's very important to provide stability for Afghanistan that these nations meet their financial commitments.

Q -- a reaction to that?

MR. FLEISCHER: Again, I will allow the Saudis -- I think it's their place to characterize reaction.

Q Ari, when you said that the President and foreign leaders typically agree that Saddam Hussein is a menace when they meet, was that agreement also expressed today with the President and Prince Bandar?

MR. FLEISCHER: Well, I got that question earlier. And, again, I'll let the Saudis characterize their own answers. I'll just tell you, it is the position of the Saudi government, as expressed by Adel Al-Jubir that

Saddam Hussein is a threat, and then the other thoughts that the Saudis have about what that means. But they have clearly expressed that.

Anything else? Holly.

Q Heidi.

MR. FLEISCHER: Oh, Heidi. I did that yesterday, too. Strike this transcript.

Q Anthony Zinni just came out and criticized any attack on Iraq. Do you guys have comment on that?

MR. FLEISCHER: Again, the President has made no decisions and the President will continue to be deliberative, be patient. As the Vice President said yesterday, we will not underestimate this risk.

Q Was Mrs. Bush there for lunch?

MR. FLEISCHER: She was.

Q Were either of the daughters?

MR. FLEISCHER: No.

Q Any plans by the President to talk about Iraq in his speech in Arkansas on Thursday?

MR. FLEISCHER: I'm sorry, the question is what will the President's speech in Arkansas be about?

Q Will it be about Iraq?

MR. FLEISCHER: No, I think it will be about domestic issues. Mr. McClellan will be able to fill you in closer to the date.

Q On the topic of presidential speeches, it now looks like Secretary Powell is going to talk about the Middle East at UNGA. Can you say what date the President is going to speak to the U.N. General Assembly and generally what topics will --

MR. FLEISCHER: No, I will have more to say on that closer to the U.N. General Assembly. That's not until September 12th.

Dave.

Q There's indication one of the people the FBI wanted to talk to, whose name was al Rajid, whose name was found on that disk in Afghanistan, has now returned to Saudi Arabia. It's not clear whether the FBI will have access to him. Did this subject come up in the President's --

MR. FLEISCHER: Condi did not brief that to me.

Anything else? All right. Let me just say one final note -- and this is my last gaggle here before I return to D.C. tomorrow, and I want to say this. I just want to thank the people of Waco and the people of Crawford for all their hospitality down here, and for the school for allowing us to use their facility. I just think it's -- they're wonderfully hospitable people, very kind. And I think everybody that comes down

here really enjoys their month of August here, and I know I do. It's been a great 10 days down here.

And so I just want to say thank you to all the people who helped make it possible for those of us who visit you from Washington. Thank you. (Applause.)

END 2:40 P.M. CDT