



Daily Press Briefing  
**Sean McCormack, Spokesman**  
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10:40 a.m. EDT

**MR. MCCORMACK:** Good morning, everybody.

**QUESTION:** Good morning.

**MR. MCCORMACK:** I don't have anything to start off with, so we can get right to your questions.

**QUESTION:** We have two unrelated matters.

**MR. MCCORMACK:** You do? Okay.

**QUESTION:** One: Is there any truth to the weekend reports that Secretary Rice is – has talked to or has any interest in being president of the San Francisco 49ers? (Laughter.) And then we're going to talk about Syria.

**MR. MCCORMACK:** Okay. She has not been in contact with the 49ers. I saw these – I saw the press reports. Look, she's going to head back to Stanford. You know that she'll – what she's going to be doing. She'll probably end up writing a book, do a little speaking, and pursue other activities, particularly in the area related to education and underprivileged children. So I think that's going to be the focus of her efforts.

You know, of course, once she's in private life, I have no idea what sort of interest there may be in terms of the NFL and NFL teams, but at this point, there hasn't been any contact between her and the 49ers.

**QUESTION:** Or any other NFL team?

**MR. MCCORMACK:** Or any other NFL team, no.

**QUESTION:** Thank you. And to go to the next thing, Syria: Obviously, you are well aware of the reports --

**MR. MCCORMACK:** Sure.

**QUESTION:** -- that surfaced over the weekend.

**MR. MCCORMACK:** Sure.

**QUESTION:** One: You know, are they true? Did the U.S. military have any involvement on a raid inside Syrian territory? And secondly, did the Syrian Government call in the U.S. Chargé d'Affaires? Did she go see them? What was the message?

**MR. MCCORMACK:** Yesterday, the Syrians did call in, at the level of the Vice Foreign Minister, our Chargé d'Affaires, whose name is Maura Connelly. She went in. She listened to the Syrians. They brought her in there to raise with her these reports of activities in Abu Kamal, which is close to the Syrian-Iraqi border. But beyond that, I don't have any comment for you.

**QUESTION:** You can't even say whether you regard the reports as having even a scintilla of truth to them?

**MR. MCCORMACK:** I've offered what I'm going to offer on it.

**QUESTION:** Can you spell her name?

**QUESTION:** Do you expect any protests?

**QUESTION:** Spell her name for us.

**MR. MCCORMACK:** Connelly, yeah: C-o-n-n-e-l-l-y, first name Maura, M-a-u-r-a.

**QUESTION:** Can you give us an update on the situation on the border, what kind of problems the U.S. has been having with infiltrations by Islamic militants and other groups?

**MR. MCCORMACK:** Probably the best people to give you an update on that are either my friends across the river at the Pentagon or MNF-I in Baghdad. They're -- they get these -- they're either on the ground there and can give you firsthand accounts or they're the ones receiving the firsthand accounts.

**QUESTION:** You can't give us something a bit more general for now?

**MR. MCCORMACK:** No, I think -- I think they're in a better position to do that.

**QUESTION:** Sean, would you describe the Syrians as protesting a certain --

**MR. MCCORMACK:** They called her in. They delivered a demarche.

**QUESTION:** Right, okay.

**QUESTION:** What kind of demarche?

**MR. MCCORMACK:** Oh, what kind of demarche?

**QUESTION:** Yeah, was it --

**MR. MCCORMACK:** It was -- it was concerning the reports of activities near Abu Kamal.

**QUESTION:** So they're not happy about the reports, right?

**MR. MCCORMACK:** I'll let them characterize how they see things.

**QUESTION:** Do you deny that there was a U.S. involvement in the --

**MR. MCCORMACK:** I don't have any comment beyond what I've given you.

**QUESTION:** She wasn't able to give them any reassurances? Is there -- do you expect any other steps beyond -- beyond that --

**MR. MCCORMACK:** We'll let you know if there's anything else.

**QUESTION:** I'm sorry?

**MR. MCCORMACK:** We'll let you know if there's anything else. Okay. Anything else on this?

Samir.

**QUESTION:** Are you satisfied with Syria's help to prevent fighters to go to Iraq?

**MR. MCCORMACK:** Well, look, I think I will – I guess I'll respond to Lach's question a bit here. I'll let the folks at the Pentagon describe in any detail how they view the situation. I think it – there was – there has been, over the years, a changed situation. We read a lot about infiltration over the Syrian border into Iraq quite a bit three, four years ago, a couple years ago; less so now. That doesn't mean that it's not – there aren't continuing issues in that regard.

**QUESTION:** Just so we're clear, I mean, when you're saying that you read less about this now --

**MR. MCCORMACK:** Mm-hmm.

**QUESTION:** -- are you implying that there is less such activity now?

**MR. MCCORMACK:** Well, I'm trying to – trying to get around commenting on intelligence reports. You read less about it in the newspapers; that isn't to say that it – there aren't continuing issues there --

**QUESTION:** Okay.

**MR. MCCORMACK:** -- in terms of people coming over the border.

**QUESTION:** Can you just say it's -- more simply, though, that it still happens, just not at the level of several years back?

**MR. MCCORMACK:** Well, let me leave it to the Pentagon folks to describe that definitively.

**QUESTION:** Had --

**QUESTION:** Has there – go ahead.

**QUESTION:** Sorry, had the Administration been giving any consideration to a greater outreach to Syria – I know you have diplomatic relations with – obviously --

**MR. MCCORMACK:** Mm-hmm.

**QUESTION:** And we haven't had an ambassador there since Ambassador Scobey left. But had the Administration, prior to these weekend reports, been giving consideration to reaching out more to the Syrians?

**MR. MCCORMACK:** Well, there had been, periodically, over the past few years -- I can speak to Secretary Rice's tenure – she has had interactions with the Foreign Minister. The most recent one I think she talked about was within the past, you know, month or two. And I know it was on the margins of the --

**QUESTION:** UNGA?

**MR. MCCORMACK:** UN General Assembly, the dinner, breaking fast. And then David Welch, I think, had some follow-up – had a follow-up contact after that. I can't – it was several days after that. Those are the – those are the contacts that I can relay to you immediately. I'm not aware of any others beyond that.

Look, Syria knows what it needs to do in order to play a different role in the region. It has taken some steps in a positive direction. I would note, for example, their decision to establish diplomatic relations with Lebanon. It's a positive step. And of course, their decision that they took with the Israelis to have contacts via the Turkish Government about coming to a peace settlement. So those are certainly positive steps, but again, there's still a ways to go.

**QUESTION:** Does it not create, at a minimum, a public diplomacy problem for the U.S. Government that there are reports -- multiple in the case of Pakistan -- of U.S. military activities not at least publicly sanctioned and, in fact, publicly rejected and protested against by the Pakistani authorities -- U.S. military actions inside Pakistani territory?

Here you have a series of reports which you do not appear to be in a position to deny, suggesting U.S. military activity again inside the territory of the sovereign, you know, country. At a minimum, surely, this is not helpful from the point of view of American public diplomacy in the Arab and Muslim world for there to be reports that you don't deny of U.S. military forces attacking inside other country's territory.

**MR. MCCORMACK:** Well, look, going all the way back to 2001, the United States and its friends and allies around the world have been – had to do difficult things in the war on terror. This is a tough fight requiring responses across a variety of different areas from diplomatic, to political, to military, to security, to intelligence-sharing, and as well as public diplomacy.

And we've learned a lot and we have made really important strides in the struggle. And I expect that that's going to continue over the years. It's going to continue on into the next administration. They will take decisions about how they counter violent extremists all around the world. But however they decide to proceed it, is a task that will be important for the security not only of this country, but other countries around the world.

And so while I can't comment on any specifics or specific operations, I can say that this is a – it's a tough fight, certainly a tough ideological struggle, the fight with violent extremists. And like I said, you have to come at the problem on a variety – across a variety of different fronts.

**QUESTION:** Sean, can you --

**MR. MCCORMACK:** Yeah.

**QUESTION:** -- say whether the matter of foreign fighters going to Iraq came up during the Secretary's last meeting with the Foreign Minister or during

Welch's follow-up meetings?

**MR. MCCORMACK:** I'll check for you. I'll see if it did.

**QUESTION:** But it did come up in a meeting with Assistant Secretary Welch and – while --

**MR. MCCORMACK:** I haven't talked to David about the contents of his meeting. You know, you may be ahead of me. I haven't talked to him about it.

**QUESTION:** And who did he follow up with? When you said that he followed up to the Secretary's discussion, do you know --

**MR. MCCORMACK:** Yeah, I – you know, I don't have the details. I'm just operating off my memory from a month and a half ago. And as we get farther into this Administration, my memory gets less and less good -- (laughter) -- as sort of the accumulation of sleeplessness and stress takes hold.

Oh, no, we have one back here.

**QUESTION:** North Korea? Another subject?

**MR. MCCORMACK:** Sure.

**QUESTION:** Kim Jong-nam was recently interviewed on Japanese television. Apparently, he was in Paris, and it seems that he was asking doctors at a hospital about his father's health. So just have the usual questions: Did you know he was in Paris? Do you have any updates on his father's health? And does this indicate that he's the currently anointed heir to the throne?

**MR. MCCORMACK:** In terms of comments on Kim Jong-il's health, I don't have anything for you beyond what we have already said about Kim Jong-nam's location. I had no idea that he was in Paris. And what was the last one?

**QUESTION:** Does this indicate he's the current heir to the throne?

**MR. MCCORMACK:** You know, the decision-making process in North Korea is opaque to us.

**QUESTION:** Thank you.

**MR. MCCORMACK:** Yes.

**QUESTION:** Can you confirm that Chris Hill is going to have a meeting tomorrow in Washington with his South Korean and Japanese counterparts?

**MR. MCCORMACK:** I believe he's going to have a meeting with his Japanese counterpart tomorrow.

**QUESTION:** Not --

**MR. MCCORMACK:** Not South Korean, no.

**QUESTION:** And Saiki?

**MR. MCCORMACK:** No. The – his – gentleman's name is Director-General Akitaka Saiki, S-a-i-k-i. Apologies if I have pronounced it incorrectly.

**QUESTION:** What's it about?

**QUESTION:** What is it about?

**MR. MCCORMACK:** About the Six-Party Talks, where we stand, moving the process forward, consultations.

**QUESTION:** Is it going to focus at all on if and when the Japanese might – if, when and how the Japanese might contribute to assistance to North Korea either in the form of the HFO or equivalent or in some other form?

**MR. MCCORMACK:** I think first on our list is going to be talk about the abduction issue and reiterate our support to the Japanese Government and the Japanese people for seeing that issue resolved. I'm sure they'll talk about – touch on heavy fuel oil, making sure that the Six Parties, in some way, shape or form, meet their obligations, and as well as how to move the process forward. What we have – next steps in the process are to have a head of delegation meeting at which we would get Six-Party buy-in and approval of the verification regime that was negotiated.

**QUESTION:** Any date for that?

**MR. MCCORMACK:** None yet. I know the Chinese are still working on it.

Yeah, Sylvie.

**QUESTION:** Do you – yes, would you have any detail on this Iranian American feminist who has been arrested in Tehran?

**MR. MCCORMACK:** Yeah, I've seen the news reports. Let me see if we can find out more information for you.

**QUESTION:** Okay. There was also last week questions about North Korean defector. Do you have anything on that?

**MR. MCCORMACK:** No, I don't have anything on that. I'll see if --

**QUESTION:** Has --

**MR. MCCORMACK:** I mean, we don't typically talk about those kinds of issues, but I'll check to see if there was anything that we would add on it -- on this one.

**QUESTION:** Also on North Korea, there was something about a delegation from North Korea coming to New York November 7<sup>th</sup>. Would they meet with any Americans?

**MR. MCCORMACK:** Just so what, one of these so-called track two kind of efforts?

**QUESTION:** UN.

**QUESTION:** Apparently, they're meeting with NGOs. You guys put out a TQ about it last week --

**MR. MCCORMACK:** Right.

**QUESTION:** -- and I think it said that, at that point, there was no decision yet made on whether there would be --

**MR. MCCORMACK:** There you are. That guidance --

**QUESTION:** Still no decision?

**MR. MCCORMACK:** Still no decision, I guess. Yeah.

**QUESTION:** Sean, have you been able to have another consular visit with the American \*citizen in Pakistan?

**MR. MCCORMACK:** In Pakistan? Let me check for you. 0 for 3, 0 for 4 here. Yeah.

**QUESTION:** After the decision of Tzipi Livni to call for a new election, what hope do you have to move forward on the peace process?

**MR. MCCORMACK:** Well, we're still committed to the Annapolis process and the -- and its goals. You still have Foreign Minister Livni, who is the lead negotiator for this process, who is committed to it. Her government is the government -- the current government is committed to it, as are the Palestinians. And you still have international buy-in to this process. So what we have here is the best opportunity to try to reach a negotiated settlement between the Israelis and the Palestinians in terms of this process, and that is the ultimate goal of this process is to see a negotiated settlement soon.

So we're going to continue working on it. I expect that the parties will continue working on the various aspects of this -- political, the institution building, improving the situation on the ground, as well as maintaining that important international regional support for the process.

**QUESTION:** But how can you have an agreement if there is no government?

**MR. MCCORMACK:** Well, clearly -- look, clearly the possible Israeli elections complicates the issue. But when has this process not been complicated? What is important here is that you have a process, a process that is yielding results in terms of the parties working on all the hard issues that are between them and making progress on all of those hard issues. That's on the political front.

You also have a process in which there's international buy-in to helping to build Palestinian institutions that will form a foundation for a future Palestinian state. And there's been progress in that regard. We see news reports talking about Palestinian security forces being trained, equipped, and deployed, and doing their job on the ground. You have the work of General Fraser, which he has passed on to his successor, of improving the situation on the ground. In terms of -- on the Israeli side, security, ensuring security on the Palestinian side, easing some of the daily plight of the Palestinians; removing roadblocks, checkpoints, et cetera, making those things work better.

So there's been a lot of progress that's been made in the context of this process. And you have buy-in by all the parties. And there's no alternative to a negotiated settlement between the Israelis and the Palestinians. And I think you have acknowledgement of that by all the parties.

Yeah, Libby.

**QUESTION:** I wanted to ask about -- it was on the same topic?

**QUESTION:** Still on this thing.

**QUESTION:** Yeah, go ahead.

**QUESTION:** But let me (inaudible) estimate. Is it a new year's eve kind of thing? You know, the deadline that Secretary -- that the President outlined was the end of this year. And I wonder if -- it wasn't the end of his term, you know, January 20<sup>th</sup>, but the end of this year. And if you don't actually succeed in the, you know, two months and change left, can you shed any light on when you're going to make that determination and how you might try to preserve the process so that we don't have -- and I realize the underlying circumstances are completely different --

**MR. MCCORMACK:** Yeah, right.

**QUESTION:** -- than eight years ago. But on the other hand, at some point, you've got to start thinking about how do we hand this over so that there isn't an eruption.

**MR. MCCORMACK:** Right. Well, that's what we've been talking about for some time, that we are going to continue to push the process forward, seek out opportunities where they exist, but keeping in mind overall that we are the stewards of our national interest. In this case, we are stewards and part of this process, and making sure that the process is such that it will yield the desired end result: a two-state solution. And those are judgments that you

make along the way, when to try to seize opportunities and when to know when to take a process and hand it over to others.

So at this point, I would say that we are still committed to that process and its goals, and that we are going to continue to try to push it forward.

**QUESTION:** But when you say you want to hand it over to others, you – it means you accept the fact that you won't have any agreement?

**MR. MCCORMACK:** No, no. You know, Arshad asked a legitimate question about when do you make determinations about – to paraphrase his question, to be fair to him -- to trying to make progress, to seize opportunities and when – and know when to try to hand over a process that works for all parties. We are now at the point where we are still working on this process. We are still trying to move it forward. You have Foreign Minister Livni, who's the lead negotiator and who's still committed to this. You have President Abbas, who's still committed to it, as well as a number of regional states and an international community that is committed to this process and making it work. And we're going to still try to make progress where we can.

**QUESTION:** Is the Secretary still planning to go out there before the end of this year? And do you expect – do you have any concerns about possible unrest because of this now lag that will probably occur before there's any clear outcome? And also can you tell us a little bit about General Fraser's successor and what --

**MR. MCCORMACK:** Well, I haven't had --

**QUESTION:** -- will be done?

**MR. MCCORMACK:** I haven't had a chance to speak with General Silva about what he's been working on. I know that he has made trips out to the region, and there was a good handoff period and handover period between General Fraser and General Silva.

In terms of the Secretary's travel, I have nothing to announce at this point yet. But will she be out there before the end of the year? Yeah, she will be out there before the end of the year, most certainly, if not once, more than once. We'll – I mean, we'll see.

I think that was all of your questions.

**QUESTION:** The possibility of unrest or anything because of the lag, because of this --

**MR. MCCORMACK:** Well, the --

**QUESTION:** They're not going to be able to make much headway in this situation --

**MR. MCCORMACK:** Well, you know, let's not discount their ability to continue working on the process. You know, it's going to be up to the two sides and the two parties.

In terms of security and unrest, you know, I suppose that's always a possibility, whether you don't have negotiations or have negotiations. There are always groups or individuals who are determined to try to thwart any attempt at negotiations or to exploit the fact that there aren't negotiations. We do have a process now that is moving forward, and everybody is very attentive to the priority that we and the Israelis and the Palestinians all place on security.

**QUESTION:** Did you – were you encouraged at all that one of the reasons that Tzipi Livni was not able to form a government was because Shas demanded that Jerusalem be taken off the table and she said you can't do that?

**MR. MCCORMACK:** I'll leave it to the Israeli politicians and the Israeli Government to comment on their politics.

**QUESTION:** But just to follow up on that, surely since Jerusalem is a final status issue, you would support the fact that Livni is keeping that open for negotiation?

**MR. MCCORMACK:** Look I'm not going to insert myself into Israeli politics, thank you very much.

**QUESTION:** But I mean, when you're talking about this whole idea of, you know, trying to encapsulate the progress that you've made or memorialize it or hand it over, whatever you want to call it, how does the political situation in Israel affect what you're able to do by the end of the year in terms of – you say that Foreign Minister Livni is – you know, obviously, she's the lead negotiator. But given the situation right now, does she have the authority to sign off to anything you would want to put on paper, or whether you call it an agreement or --

**MR. MCCORMACK:** No, I hear you. I can only say how we view this process. I will leave it to Foreign Minister Livni and the Israeli Government to talk about how they view the process and their plans to move forward.

**QUESTION:** I just wanted to ask about updates on the transition plans.

**MR. MCCORMACK:** Yes.

**QUESTION:** Are you still expecting the briefing books to be turned over November 6<sup>th</sup>\*, I guess it is, the day after the election?

**MR. MCCORMACK:** Absolutely. We're – they'll be ready to hand over. I would expect that there will be several iterations of these as – you know, there'll be an initial set talking about the State Department and, you know, some of the basics and fundamentals for anybody coming in here. And as the transition process is underway, I would expect that there's going to be interaction. The incoming team is going to have questions. They're going to have priority areas that they want to focus on. They're going to have questions about various issue areas that perhaps we didn't anticipate or, you know, they want to emphasize more. And of course, the transition team is going to be responsive to any of those kinds of requests.

In terms of transition planning, I don't think there's much more to update you on. I do know that the leads of the transition team asked all of the assistant secretaries and assistant secretary equivalents around the building to designate for each of the offices working under them professional government – career government employees, either Civil Service or Foreign Service, that would head up those offices once the lead political appointee in those entities

leaves.

**QUESTION:** So that's all been done already this month?

**MR. MCCORMACK:** That has been done. Yeah, the deadline, I think, was the 24<sup>th</sup> on Friday to make sure that those people are designated. And that just gets to a point I was trying to make in my initial comments about this. We want to make sure that there are career professionals who are going to be here who will keep working on the policy issues that are of vital national interest to the United States Government while the new administration staffs up the State Department as well as other U.S. Government agencies.

**QUESTION:** And what was the deadline for that? Sorry.

**MR. MCCORMACK:** That was the 24<sup>th</sup>. It was on Friday.

**QUESTION:** Sean, just so I understand, you said each office --

**MR. MCCORMACK:** Yeah.

**QUESTION:** -- but I assume you meant -- you're talking about bureaus and other offices like the Coordinator for Counterterrorism?

**MR. MCCORMACK:** No --

**QUESTION:** You're talking about office directors?

**MR. MCCORMACK:** Office directors, yeah.

**QUESTION:** That far down?

**MR. MCCORMACK:** That far down. Because very often -- I mean, I'll use my bureau as an example -- you have some political appointees who head up offices that are office directors, so you want to make sure that for each office you don't leave any orphans out there, that there is somebody that is charged with the responsibility of making sure that office runs, making sure the issues that that office has responsibility for are responded to, and that as the team gets staffed up they know who is going to be running those offices and they will have an opportunity, obviously, to make decisions once they get in place about who will be running the place.

Gollust.

**QUESTION:** Sean, kind of old business from Friday. Sergey Lavrov expressed some irritation about the sanctions that the United States imposed against that Russian export firm Rosoboronexport or whatever.

**MR. MCCORMACK:** Yeah.

**QUESTION:** And he said that it was a case of unilateralism vis-à-vis Iran and that this will cause Russia to sort of approach the P5+1 process with diminished zeal. And I was wondering, have they communicated that to you?

**MR. MCCORMACK:** I don't know, Dave. I don't know if they've communicated directly. I know that we -- with the Russian Government, we have been in contact specifically with respect to this designation. Yeah, and as for the Russians' devotion of energy to the P5+1 process, look, this isn't -- as I've said before, this isn't a favor to us. You know, Iran having a nuclear weapon isn't in Russia's interest. It's in nobody's interest. So working diplomatically to see that they don't have the abilities and the know-how and the technology and the hardware to solve some of the toughest problems that could lead to a nuclear weapon is in Russia's interest.

**QUESTION:** Thank you.

**MR. MCCORMACK:** Okay.

(The briefing concluded at 11:06 a.m.)

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