



THE WHITE HOUSE
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GEORGE W. BUSH

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Press Gaggle by Tony Snow and Assistant to the President for Homeland Security and Counterterrorism Frances Townsend

White House Conference Center Briefing Room

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MR. SNOW: Good morning, everybody. Good to have you here on such a lovely day. Let me begin with the President's schedule.

The President had his normal briefings early this morning. He met with the Secretary of Treasury at 9:00 a.m. At 11:00 a.m. he will meet with the Emir of Kuwait, there will be pool coverage at the bottom. Also there will be a working lunch with the Emir afterward. At 1:20 p.m. there will be remarks on the global war on terror, and we will talk in some length about that in just a minute; Fran Townsend is joining me to go through that.

In addition, a personnel announcement: Mark McClellan, who is the Administrator for the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services, is announcing his resignation. He'll be missed by the President and the entire administration. He's been talking for some time about wanting to get back with his family -- no, this isn't one of those cheesy excuses; it's the real thing. The President has the highest regard for Mark McClellan and appreciates the work he's done for the administration, first as FDA Commissioner and most recently at CMS. He's led the successful modernization of the Medicare prescription drug benefit and worked to modernize Medicare and Medicaid in ways that will help seniors and other beneficiaries get better health care at a better price.

We will not be doing a televised briefing, mainly because we've got all sorts of scheduling conflicts today. However, I think you'll have the President on camera for enough to take care of your video needs for the day, and audio needs, as well.

Q No briefing?

MR. SNOW: No, no on-camera briefing.

Q You're going to the lunch?

MR. SNOW: I'm going to the lunch, that's why we're not doing the briefing -- because after that, then we get into trying to do a briefing at 4:00 p.m., and that's not going to work for us.

A couple of other things. One story that made several broadcasts and also the news, and I thought I would go ahead and respond to it, is a letter that was sent to the President by Democratic leaders in the House and Senate, by about 10 of them. In one sense, we welcome the letter because it actually serves as a reiteration and ratification of many of the things the administration is doing. Now, what happened is that the 10 members urged four courses of action for the President. I will list three of them at the outset.

One, transitioning the U.S. mission in Iraq to counterterrorism training, logistics and force protection. Second, working with Iraqi leaders to disarm the militias and develop a broad based and sustainable political settlement. And, third, convening an international conference and contact group to support a political settlement in Iraq. I've left out some of the verbiage, but you've all seen the letter.

Those are all three things that we've been doing, and I will give you a little bit of chapter and verse in a moment. There is a fourth condition, which was beginning the phased redeployment of U.S. forces from Iraq before the end of this year -- I'll get to that in a moment. But let me give you a little bit of detail on the first three.

Beginning with transitioning the mission in Iraq to counterterrorism training, logistics and force protection -- that, in fact, is precisely what we have been doing. When you talk about training Iraqi forces, Iraqi forces are engaged primarily in counterterrorism. We've seen them taking the lead in some of the fights in Baghdad and elsewhere. One of the reasons is it's well-known that Iraqis sometimes are going to get better intelligence than Americans and they're going to be effective at doing counterterrorism and force protection action.

For the last three years we've seen substantial success in training up those forces, and it's increasing. As a matter of fact, one of the reports mentioned by the Democratic leaders, the Defense Department report to Congress, "Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq," mentions the training successes, and I believe General Casey had some fairly optimistic things to say about the training last week.

In addition, when it comes to counterterrorism operations, it also reflects the fact that we understand that Iraq is a central focus to the war on terror. And I think that's also something that is implicit within this letter, that it's absolutely vital to win the war against terror. And you do that, first, by allowing democracy to stand up in Iraq.

The second point, working with leaders to disarm militias and develop a broad-based and sustainable political settlement -- again, implicit in that is the importance of a successful democracy. But also, we have, in fact, been working with the Iraqi leaders to disarm militias. That is something that was mentioned when we made our trip to Baghdad. It's also something that Prime Minister Maliki has made one of his key priorities.

In addition, the Prime Minister has talked about political reconciliation. There are two ways of dealing with counterterrorism. One is to say to terrorists, you've got to make a choice. You can take the violent path, or, you have the opportunity and the option, as well, of going the political route. And there has been every opportunity -- or there's been a continuing effort to make sure that the political path has been made available to one and all.

As for amending the constitution, which was one of the recommendations, that's something the Iraqi people can do. There's the suggestion of amending the constitution for equitable power-sharing. Prime Minister Maliki, again, has talked about that. There's an amendment process, and the Iraqis will move forward on that.

Finally, in terms of "new direction," talks about convening an international conference and contact group. Return again to the trip to Baghdad, where it was announced that there would be an international compact between Iraq, with the mediation of the United Nations to get other nations in as donors and supporters of Iraq, not only for economic investment, but also rebuilding infrastructure and creating some of the basis for a stable and successful political regime and democratic political regime.

So having said all that, the new directions document really does, in fact, support what the President has been saying. And I'm glad that the leaders have taken notice of this.

As far as the phased redeployment of U.S. forces from Iraq before the end of the year, I'm looking at my watch and it says it's September 5th. Anybody who understands the way redeployments go understands if you're talking about a phased redeployment, at least according to these folks, they'd have to start cutting orders yesterday. But, in fact, a phased redeployment doesn't make sense unless you have a reason for doing so.

We want to see the troops come home, but we want to see the troops come home under the proper circumstances, which is successful completion of the task of helping the Iraqi democracy stand up, defend itself and sustain itself.

One other note, this does not apply to all the signatories of the letter -- but it is interesting to note -- and I think it provides an opportunity for Democrats to express themselves on how we move forward in the war on terror, and that is going to be something that we're going to be discussing throughout the week.

There have been some in the Democratic Party who have argued against the Patriot Act, against the terror surveillance program, against Guantanamo. In other words, there are some people who say that we shouldn't fight the war, we should not detain -- we shouldn't apprehend al Qaeda, we shouldn't detain al Qaeda, we shouldn't question al Qaeda, and we shouldn't listen to al Qaeda. In other words, they're all for winning the war on terror, but they're all against -- they're against providing the tools for winning that war.

And we think it's a perfect opportunity for Democratic leaders to say, no, we are serious about winning the war. We have now reiterated some of the basic precepts of administration policy and also the policy put together by generals over the months of the engagement in Iraq. And we look forward to working with members of Congress to figure out how best to prevent terrorists from coming here, but, more importantly, how to defeat terrorism. And we're going to talk with Fran about that in a minute.

Finally, one other point, which is, there is a reiteration of a call to replace or have Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld stand down. The President strongly supports the Defense Secretary. It's not going to happen. Creating Don Rumsfeld as a boogeyman may make for good politics, but would make for a

lousy strategy at this time. And, furthermore, if you listen to the speech that Secretary Rumsfeld gave last week, it was not only thoughtful, but comprehensive about trying to frame the ongoing war against terror, and also the war going on in Iraq and Afghanistan.

So this, again, is something that the President would love to see members of both Houses of Congress returning to that sense of cooperation we had after September 11th, where the real goal was not to try to hand out pink slips at the Pentagon, but instead to win the war on terror in a way that is going to make not only America safer, but also the rest of the world safer so that democracy can take firm root throughout the globe.

Having said that, let me just mention -- and you have all received PDFs, and we're going to try to get your hard copies of this, which is the National Strategy for Combating Terrorism. Just a couple of brief notes, then I'm going to ask Fran to come up and answer questions because she has much more specific and comprehensive knowledge than I. But this is a follow-on document to one that was originally published in February of 2003.

Since February of 2003, obviously, we have come a long way in the war on terror, and the enemy has also responded in numerous ways. To the charge that somehow this administration is staying the course, we are going to be laying out ways just to remind people that, far from staying the course, we have been trying to respond vigorously, aggressively, with ingenuity and with determination, using any and all means at our disposal, and also cooperation with members of the international community, to foil terrorists who constantly change their tactics, change their aims and even change some of the arguments that they have educed for trying to go after people who are guilty of committing the sin of trying to live in free societies.

This document lays out a long-term strategy which is democracy and freedom. It also lays out short-term strategies, in terms of going after the lifeblood of terrorism. That includes the ideological battle, where the Internet and the media are central battlefields, where there's an attempt to try to shape public perceptions of what's going on, and also to build adherence throughout the world. There is finance, where we have been working to sort of choke off the ability of terrorists to gain the finance that they need to go ahead and commit acts of terror.

It means going after some of the ideological presuppositions -- make the argument -- have it so that people around the world are going to say, no, we don't want you anymore, we don't want you here. We've already seen the people of Iraq do it with an election. We do not want to make the argument that there are people who will always and eternally be our enemies. We have seen Iraq and Libya in the last few years move from the terrorist watch list to being some of our aides and supporters in conducting the war on terror, and we invite one and all to join not only the war against terror, but for democracy.

There are many more nuances to the report, but rather than going through them all -- and I think most of you at least now had an opportunity to take a look at it, I'd like to invite Fran up. Here's how we're going to work it, I would like to have questions directed toward Fran on this, exhaust all the questions, and then we'll move on to other topics that are of interest to you.

Fran.

MS. TOWNSEND: I thought I would take a moment to sort of set the stage of what you can expect in the President's speech this morning -- this afternoon.

You will hear the President talk about the goals, the objectives and the strategic intent of al Qaeda, in their own words and the way they describe their strategic intent. The President will address both the issues of Sunni extremism -- we talk about al Qaeda, but al Qaeda is one and probably the most prominent example of the Sunni extremist element, but they have their affiliates and there are others. So the President will talk about Sunni extremism. He will also talk about Shia extremism.

Let's remember that Hezbollah, prior to September 11th, was responsible for the deaths of more Americans than any other terrorist group. There's the '83 Beirut barracks bombing, which was responsible for the murder of 241 United States Marines, and then the '96 attack on Khobar Towers, killing 19 American military. And so the President will talk about that.

He will talk about state sponsorship. We have less state sponsors of terrorism today than we did at the beginning of the President's first term. That said, the state sponsorship of terrorism as a tool to execute and implement foreign policy objectives is unacceptable, and the President will speak to that.

We have enjoyed many successes in the war on terror. We've heard the President say often that we are safer, but not yet safe. We are denying terrorists safe havens. We have captured and killed their leaders. We have disrupted finances. We've made it difficult for them to move, to travel, to communicate. We've taken advantage of their travel and communications. They can no longer operate freely.

But there is a great deal left to be done, which bring us, really, to the point of looking at the strategy. Tony quite rightly said that the enemy has evolved, and we define the enemy and the strategy as a transnational terrorist movement of extremist organizations, networks and individuals, including their state and non-state supporters, which have two things in common -- first, that they exploit Islam; and, second, that they use terrorism to achieve their ideological ends.

We look at -- we talk about both the long-term and the short-term? The long-term you heard Tony allude to about the long-term antidote to terrorism is freedom and democracy. But how do we attack it, how do we defeat it in the short-term. There are a number of things laid out in the report -- I'd summarize this in a way, of course, our first priority is to prevent attacks. But how do you do that? Well, what you look at is, what is the terrorist organization's vulnerabilities? Well, their vulnerabilities are those things that they absolutely need to operate and survive. We break that down: You need leadership, you need foot soldiers, you need money, you need communications, you need weapons. And so what you do is you look for various ways to attack their vulnerabilities.

And on defense, we have established the -- the President and the reorganization of the federal government, established the Department of Homeland Security. We have -- one of their critical responsibilities is to defend targets. We have put all sorts of measures in place to make it more difficult for them to not only travel around the world, but certainly to enter the United States. We have

undertaken efforts to protect critical infrastructure.

And on the weapons front, the report talks about, in greater detail than I think we've made public before, our efforts to deny terrorists access and use of WMD, and the importance of that strategy -- to deter their use, to prevent an attack, to deny them access to materials, to disrupt their ability to move those materials about.

And then, lastly, really, is the denial of sanctuary and support; that is, we cannot let a terrorist organization take control of a country again, like happened in Afghanistan. We cannot -- and we must hold responsible those who not only would give them such safe haven, but those that would provide sanctuary from which a terrorist can operate. And the President has been clear that we will hold those who provide them sanctuary responsible just as we do the terrorists, themselves.

Now, safe havens come in many forms. I think mostly we think of them as being physical, but they are not just physical. We must look to eradicate legal safe havens -- that is where there are legal regimes, we must work with those host governments. We must deny them the uncontested use of cyberspace and the Internet. And we have made great strides in denying them use of international financial systems.

So you've got the document. You will hear the President's speech later today in far greater detail than I've given you. But with that I think I'll turn it over and take your questions.

I should tell you, I also have with me my deputy for combating terrorism, Juan Zarate, and Senior Director, Dr. Michele Malvesti, both of whom worked with me on the report.

Q Ms. Townsend, is Osama bin Laden still considered a threat? I didn't read his name in the report.

MS. TOWNSEND: The greatest threat to us is this ideology of violent extremism, and its greatest public proponent is Osama bin Laden. Bin Laden remains the number one target, in terms of our efforts, but he's not the only target. We care about others who advocate the use of violence to reach ideological objectives, like Dr. Zawahiri. Zarqawi is no longer with us, so he's off that list. But I give those to you as other examples.

Yes.

Q Can you discuss any domestic efforts to reach out to the Muslim community here in order to try and prevent some --

MS. TOWNSEND: You know, Elaine, I, myself, have gone to the Washington Islamic Center and come to really appreciate how much, from those visits, just listening -- not talking, but listening to those in the American Muslim community can provide. I know Juan Zarate has done the same thing. I think what you'll find is there are efforts throughout the U.S. government. I know my colleagues in the FBI have enormous outreach programs through their field offices. And I think that there have been real efforts throughout and across the government, almost in each place you would imagine any American to

come in contact with their government, we've made outreach efforts.

I would say to you that that's not limited, though, to the federal government. And perhaps most importantly, I've been impressed at the state and local level with police departments. A good example is the NYPD, which is the one I'm most familiar with, and their outreach efforts, which are actually quite extensive and very impressive.

Q What about the President's Islamo-fascism? The president of the Islamic Society of North America, the new president, said last week she didn't think that was particularly helpful.

MS. TOWNSEND: What the President was trying to capture was this idea of using violence to achieve ideological ends -- and that's wrong. Regardless of what label you pin on it, it is this form of radical extremism that really wants to deny people freedom and impose a totalitarian vision of society on everyone, that we object to.

Q Who coined the Islamo-fascist slogan, and what does it mean --

MS. TOWNSEND: I'm not sure I could tell you who coined it --

Q -- in this administration?

MS. TOWNSEND: I'm not sure I could tell you if there is a single author or who coined it. And again, Helen, I guess what I was saying to Elaine is, it's meant to try and capture what is objectionable about the ideology; that is, the use of violence to achieve these ideological ends.

Q Well, why that -- why Islamic? Does it make it a religious connotation?

MS. TOWNSEND: Absolutely. There are many peace-loving Muslims around the world.

Q So it is a religious war?

MS. TOWNSEND: No, I didn't say that. It's not a religious war. What this is about is there is a battle within Islam, itself, for -- in terms of what the ideology is, and there are many devout, pious Muslims, many of whom I've met in my travels around the Muslim world, who are deeply offended by this advocating of violence --

Q But why can't you explain the --

MS. TOWNSEND: Helen, we're going to give somebody else a chance.

Yes, sir.

Q Thank you, Ms. Townsend. Over the weekend we saw the film clips of al Qaeda Adam Gadahn for

the fourth time in a broadcast. Last time I checked, he's still an American citizen, he has not renounced his citizenship. If he were to be apprehended, would he be tried for treason in this country?

MS. TOWNSEND: I'm not going to -- because I'm no longer with the Justice Department, much as I loved my time there, I'm not going to do a hypothetical and try to commit my colleagues at the Justice Department as to whether or not they believe they've got sufficient evidence. I will tell you, the reason Adam Gadahn can make video statements and have them broadcast around the world is because he enjoys freedom of speech, which is part of a democratic -- it's interesting, al Qaeda sees democracy as a huge threat, as we know from their statements. But they're willing to take advantage of democratic freedoms to espouse their hateful ideology. Adam Gadahn is one example. His statement, as you point out, is not the first, and I doubt it will be the last, until he is brought to justice.

Q Well, when you say, "brought to justice," then, is he on the list of wanted, along with some of the other names that are mentioned in the report?

MS. TOWNSEND: I can't -- if he was and it was not made public, I couldn't comment on it. And so I'd refer you to the FBI in terms of what their investigative efforts are related to him.

Yes, sir.

Q Can you say in what ways the National Strategy has changed or progressed since your last publication?

MS. TOWNSEND: One of the things I think we've found is that we now believe it's not just a single, centralized organization, but it's this network. That's why you heard me say it's this transnational movement of organizations, networks, and individuals. We find that as we've enjoyed some success in the war, the enemy has evolved. And so you see we have a growing concern over what has -- I find it a somewhat unfortunate term -- homegrown extremists. We try to address that. We want a strategy that addresses that, no matter what the form it takes.

The other thing I would say to you is I think you'll find that it's far more detailed in terms of our efforts related to WMD.

Q Following on that, you said that the report talks in greater detail than made public before about efforts to deny WMD. Given that there's been a concern within the administration about revealing to the terrorists your methods for capturing them and for thwarting them, why are you making this detail public now?

MS. TOWNSEND: Well, the report talks at a strategic level. What we don't do is go into tactical details of implementation and execution. There is a classified National Implementation Plan; there are supporting -- classified supporting agency plans. And we will not go into those details.

Q But why the emphasis in this report on that? And, also, is there anything else in the report that you think of as especially new and noteworthy?

MS. TOWNSEND: Well, we do talk about -- I think it's the way we framed it that is the -- I'm trying to think of how to describe it -- that makes it different. What we've talked about is giving you a better framework, I think, based on our understanding, and all the things we've heard and seen from al Qaeda and their reactions to the war effort, the framework in which we attack this, how we view their vulnerabilities, and the priority with which we take in terms of attacking them.

Q Along with the rise in the term "Islamic fascism," I noticed in the Salt Lake speech the President did not use a term he'd used many times before, that these terrorists had hijacked a great religion, that that was missing. Given the two, can you see where some folks might believe the administration is going after Islam directly?

MS. TOWNSEND: You know, if people have got a concern about Islam being sullied -- frankly, a great religion being sullied, it's an anger that ought to be directed at the terrorists. This is not an effort that we focused on the great religion of Islam. This is really a fact of us targeting those who would kill -- murder innocent women and children because they believe that they have an ideological objective that justifies it, and we just fundamentally disagree.

Q Ms. Townsend, you say that it's no longer a centralized organization. Is this to suggest that there are a lot of freelance, if you will, cells out there that are not taking orders from a specific entity?

MS. TOWNSEND: I think you've got to be careful. I mean, I think -- the tendency, in asking the question, is to ask, it's either, A, a very centralized organization, or it is, B, that is, a disaggregated group of otherwise not tied together individuals. I don't think it's either/or. I think it can be both. And I think we see, as we progress through the war, we see instances of both.

Q Is Osama bin Laden still capable of giving orders to his followers?

MS. TOWNSEND: He certainly inspires like-minded individuals around the world. And in terms of his ability to give direct orders, I would decline to answer it, only because of ongoing investigations.

Q Thank you. The report talks about a need for new thinking about deterrence of -- state sponsors of terrorism and WMDs going into the hands of terrorists. Where are we in that process? Does the United States, as of today, have a new deterrent policy towards, say, Iran and Syria? Could they expect massive retaliation if they were found to be behind this --

MS. TOWNSEND: The counterterrorism strategy builds on the National Security Strategy, which was issued in March. This is not meant to contravene existing U.S. policy, particularly in regards to deterrence.

Yes, sir.

Q Can you say whether al Qaeda is less of a threat or more of a threat to the United States today than it was five years ago?

MS. TOWNSEND: I think it would be fair to say to you that there should be no question in anybody's mind that they continue to this day to obsess about killing mass amounts of Americans and mass amounts of our allies around the world. So their commitment to murder and their commitment to terrorist acts is not any diminished.

We work against it every day, and we have -- I think where we have been most successful is in undermining the capability for them to execute those attacks and make good on those intentions. And so in that regard, yes, I do think we're safer, but there's more to be done, and they are very determined.

Q Over the weekend, Michael Scheuer, the former bin Laden guy at the CIA, talked a lot about this recent tape with the American on it and suggested he felt like that was a very ominous sort of harbinger, that there could be an attack in the works because of some -- requirements, warn your enemies, seek to convert, and that sort of thing. Can you give any sense of the U.S. assessment of those tapes? Do you share that concern that this could be an early warning of the --

MS. TOWNSEND: I think the basis of his statement, it is correct to say that bin Laden was criticized throughout the Muslim world for not giving, based on -- and I am not an expert in Koranic law, in sharia -- but bin Laden was criticized for not giving people the opportunity to convert before attacking the United States on September 11th.

This is not the first time we've seen a tape where Americans, in particular, were encouraged to convert. It is the first in which we've seen Gadhafi go on at this length and devote an entire tape to it. As you recall, his October of '04 tape was quite bloody, in terms of the rhetoric and the hateful speech. But what I would say to you is there is always concern when we see these tapes. We don't see evidence the tapes -- the release of tapes are directly tied to the timing of an attack. But we look for clues, frankly, and we look to exploit what's -- the tapes, themselves, and what's in them and their timing whenever they come.

Q Fran, a follow-up on the al Qaeda threat question. Some experts on al Qaeda say the U.S. isn't defending well enough against their play book. They go back to the same terrorist attacks beginning again, such as the train bombings in India and London; the liquid explosives plot is also from their play book. Is the administration doing enough to counter their known tactics?

MS. TOWNSEND: Well, let's talk about what we know -- they do go back to -- particularly to failed targets, in particular. But we know that they have particular interest in going back to known techniques. What they do over time is they adjust those techniques to get past our defenses. We've made enormous strides in aviation security at every level. It's an entirely layered approach -- from curbing cockpit, you'll hear us say.

There's no question that they continue to be obsessed with the aviation target. And that's the reason that we've banned liquids. We watch very carefully what their tactics and techniques are, and how they're evolving. And, frankly, the U.K. bomb plot is a good example of how we've stayed ahead of them as opposed to being reactive.

Q Has the President been apprised of any clues from the tape that you've received, you know, from analyzing the --

MS. TOWNSEND: The analysis of the tape is continuing. The President is obviously aware of the tape. And the analysis is continuing.

Q Five years removed from 9/11, as you go about your work, do you sense a complacency in the American people about the possibility of attacks?

MS. TOWNSEND: Thank you for asking me that. People often will ask me what I think the greatest threat to the American people is, and putting aside the quite obvious threat from Islamic extremism, I do worry about complacency.

Look, I think we should be very -- we should take great pride and satisfaction in the fact that we've not seen an attack in the last five years, and that's a result of both our offensive actions overseas -- a combination of the offense overseas and our defense here at home. But we should not take that to mean -- and it would be tragic for us to take that to mean that we have been wholly successful, and that we will not see another attack.

The best recent example we've seen is this U.K. plot, which was absolutely intended and designed to be an act of mass murder, a second September 11th. And so there should be no doubt in anybody's mind, while we have enjoyed safety over the last five years, there has been a lot of work and a lot of effort gone into it by men and women whose faces and names will never be known, and this is a long war. This is a long effort in which we need not just the federal government, we need our state and local partners and the American people to sustain it.

Q How does complacency makes your job harder?

MS. TOWNSEND: Well, I will tell you, you look at -- if you go back to the facts of the September 11th case, and you realize these were people who lived in our communities, who worked in our communities, who traveled on our streets, the most likely contact -- if there's an enemy inside the United States, the most likely contact is going to be with the American public first and with state and local law enforcement second. So you need people to be alert and aware of suspicious activity. You need them to work with authorities to protect the American people.

Q The report talks about (inaudible), and the importance of (inaudible) in the fight against terror. And (inaudible) and conspiracy theories that it mentioned in the report. How do you address the large, wide perception in the Middle East that the unconditional support of the United States to Israel, especially in the recent war in Lebanon -- how do you address it as a component, when the (inaudible) by terrorists to rally people around and to justify the war against American interests in the region?

MS. TOWNSEND: Well, there's no question that our enemies will take some discreet facts and turn them and try to make use of them. But there should be no -- we've been quite clear: Israel was unprovoked in the war against Hezbollah -- I'm sorry, Lebanon permitted the use by Hezbollah of their territory, and Hezbollah used that territory to provoke Israel with the kidnapping of two soldiers. The

fact of the matter is, Israel has been a friend of the United States; it is a democracy and a model in the region. And so our support for that democracy is just that: it's a support for the freedom and the democracy and those principles in the region.

There should be no question that what we're standing for is a fundamental principle of freedom and transparency, and the ability to use that in the battle of ideas, to really make the case that it's that transparency that will win the day and allow people to make good choices.

Thanks, Tony.

MR. SNOW: Thank you. Okay, let's move to other questions. Deb.

Q Tony, neither one of you have addressed the political motivation of these speeches. I mean, this issue has become a big part of the campaign, and we're heading into the final stretch right now. Is there -- you know, is there skepticism that the President is engaging in a PRESIDENT offensive here on this issue? Is there no political motivation in these speeches?

MR. SNOW: Let me put it this way. If it's a political motivation to try to put forth a thoughtful document that lays out in a comprehensive way the way in which we intend to win the war on terror -- and I defy you to go through this document and look for political red meat; it's not there -- then, okay, we'll plead guilty to politics.

But if you take a look at what you've been writing and what the people in this room have been writing and reporting for the last two months, what's the primary topic? It's the war. If you look at what Democratic leaders did over Labor Day weekend, that would be a political act. What the President -- what this is, is a document that has been months in the preparation, and it is one that lays out for the American people a thoughtful way of thinking about the most important issue of our time. I think it belittles it by trying to dismiss it as politics.

And, again, I'd encourage you to read it, because this is not -- this is not something that was timed to coincide with a letter from Democratic leaders. It, in fact, is -- it's timed to coincide with the fact that the report is done. It was an interagency process that took a long time to do.

Now, I will tell you this --

Q But the timing is suspect, because today is the beginning of the last final stretch of the campaign.

MR. SNOW: Do you think it's suspect to discuss in the final stretches of the campaign the issues that are foremost in the mind of the American public? I don't think it's suspect at all. I don't recall somebody calling up Harry Reid and saying, this letter is suspect; Nancy Pelosi, this letter is suspect, why are you doing this now? Instead -- and I would encourage you to take a look at the speeches that are delivered this week, and take a look at the documents that will be presented. And I think what you're going to find is an attempt to be thoughtful, to be as comprehensive as possible, and, furthermore, there will be an open invitation for people on both sides of the aisle to roll up their sleeves, because the war on

terror is real, it's important, and we've got to win it.

But it's also, as Fran just pointed out, a long war. One of the things that you can sort of read into the document today is also -- and you'll hear it in the President's speech later today -- what al Qaeda wants. And if you think of what might happen if the United States were to leave the Middle East without having completed the mission of supporting a successful democracy in Iraq, and also pursuing the goal of a two-state democracy with the Palestinians and the Israelis, what you have is the prospect of failed states with large oil supplies in a region where they can become launching pads for terrorist organizations that are going to try to do what al Qaeda says it wants to do, which is to create a (inaudible) that stretches from Asia to Andalusia. And this is something that's of significance and importance.

So certainly it's an issue of political importance. Both political parties are going to talk about it. It would be irresponsible not to talk about it. But, also, the President's view is, talk about it in a serious way. And that's why we're going to be supplying you with a lot of information; you can do with it what you will.

David.

Q Hey, Tony, how are you?

MR. SNOW: Okay.

Q The President, in his last speech, made very clear that the American people have a choice -- right? -- in the way forward in the war on terror, which suggests, by definition, that he is trying to frame the political debate for the midterm election when it comes to national security. Is that fair?

MR. SNOW: I think both parties -- if you take a look again at the letter --

Q But I'm asking about the President. I'm not asking about Democrat -- you don't speak for Democrats. I'm asking about the President.

MR. SNOW: Well, but I'm trying to answer, because there are two parts of this equation, David. There seems to be a presumption that if Democrats make political points the President shouldn't respond because that would be political. The President -- these are important issues, and you can call it politics, you can call it whatever you want, but the most important thing to do is to provide a basis for people to take a look at the facts and reach thoughtful conclusions.

We do have a choice to make as a country: Are we going to acknowledge that this is a long war, analogous to the Cold War in the sense that we have a dispersed ideological following -- this is not one where, like in World War II, or other wars, you have a grounded political enemy --

Q I'm not asking for the major points. I understand that. I'm asking --

MR. SNOW: Well, it's important to talk about the major points --

Q Right. But you don't disagree that he's trying to frame the debate for what is an important political choice?

MR. SNOW: Absolutely. Of course, of course.

Q Okay. There's so much emphasis by the President on his resolve and on the consequences of failure, which seems to dovetail to the political strategy of casting the vote as not a referendum on his leadership or his conduct in the war on terror, leading the war on terror, but on a choice between two parties and their visions. And I'm curious whether, in this document, there's any reflection on the fact that this White House, this administration failed to anticipate a violent terrorist-based insurgency in Iraq, and also failed to adapt once it learned of its presence? And shouldn't that be put before the voters this fall?

MR. SNOW: I think you've admirably expressed the Democratic point of view, but I don't think --

Q Actually, Tony, I don't think that's fair, if you look at the facts. If you look at the facts.

MR. SNOW: Well, I do, because -- no, because, for instance --

Q No, no, no. No, I don't think you should be able to just wipe that, kind of dismiss the question --

MR. SNOW: Well, let me --

Q It's not a Democratic argument, Tony.

MR. SNOW: Let me answer the question, David.

Q But hold on, let's not let you get away with saying that's a Democratic argument.

MR. SNOW: Okay, let me -- let's not let you get away with being rude. Let me just answer the question, and you can come back at me.

Q Excuse me. Don't point your finger at me. I'm not being rude.

MR. SNOW: Yes, you are.

Q Don't try to dismiss me as making a Democratic argument, Tony, when I'm speaking fact.

MR. SNOW: Well, okay -- well, no --

Q You can do that to the Democrats; don't do it to me.

MR. SNOW: No, I'm doing it to you because the second part was factually tendentious, okay? Now, when you were talking about the fact that it failed to adapt, that's just flat wrong. And you will be -- there has been -- there have been repeated attempts to try to adapt to military realities, to diplomatic realities, to development of new weapons and tools on the part of al Qaeda, including the very creative use of the Internet. So the idea that somehow we're staying the course is just wrong. It is absolutely wrong.

So that's why -- I apologize for interrupting, but I think it's important to challenge that presumption. Now, did we fully anticipate --

Q If you want to challenge that presumption -- no, no, wait a second. If you want to challenge that presumption, why don't you describe in some detail how you accurately anticipated the insurgency, and what was done to deal with it at the time.

MR. SNOW: I was just about to go back to that part.

Q Okay.

MR. SNOW: See, there were two assumptions. I was taking --

Q No, you described me as rude in making a Democratic argument and said --

MR. SNOW: Well, that's because I kept trying to answer the question, and you kept jumping in. We need to come to an accommodation, because I'm perfectly happy to take on both sides.

It is accurate to say that nobody fully anticipated what was going to happen. However, you also -- if you go back to the days right after the end of major combat, there was concern about the so-called dead-enders. You may recall the Defense Secretary -- you may recall that Defense Secretary Rumsfeld at the time was asking pointed questions about, what does this mean? Are we creating enemies? You may recall that that was one of the very early stories.

It does not serve our purposes to take a rosy-eyed view about what's going on. It's irresponsible. What you have to do in a situation like this is to realize that in any conflict there are going to be things that you don't anticipate. It's just -- it's humanly impossible. And, furthermore, there weren't a lot of people on Capitol Hill or elsewhere. And in a time of war, you're not -- you do have to acknowledge in the sense of going ahead and tackling problems that you didn't anticipate, and trying to respond to new realities.

Part of what's going on in this report today -- and you missed Fran's presentation -- is that this is a discussion about evolving strategies and dealing with an evolving enemy. This is not a static picture; never is, never will be. And so I think that you find that there are a lot of different moving parts here.

You have diplomatic efforts that involve the government of Iraq and governments throughout the region

and governments throughout the world. You have cultural angles where you're trying to make the argument about -- you know, there was a debate here just a couple of minutes ago about the term "Islamic fascism," or so on. This is not a slur against Islam; it's a slur against people who try to use Islam as a shield for killing people and suppressing human liberties.

You have efforts to go after it financially; you have efforts to try to deny safe haven. In other words, it's a huge task with a lot of different moving parts. And it would be unreasonable to expect that something is going to be perfect throughout it, but it would be reasonable to expect -- and this is what we've been trying to do -- is to respond as the situation changes, and to find ways to deal effectively with old problems and new ones.

Q Just one final point.

MR. SNOW: Yes.

Q Is it fair, in the context of this report that you're putting out and the argument about the consequences of failure in Iraq, for voters to judge this party which supported the war, and this President, on how he has managed, and this government has managed, the war in Iraq?

MR. SNOW: We're perfectly happy to let people take a look not only at how the government has managed the war in Iraq, but the other thing is to keep in mind that both parties supported the war; 73 members of the Senate voted for the resolution -- or was it 72? Knoller, you usually know this stuff. Is it 72 or 73? It was a large number. You had large majorities in the House of Representatives. You've had significant support at various junctures for different parts of it.

I think it's important -- I think it's important, constructive and necessary for us to debate not only the past conduct of the war, but the future conduct of the war. So, no, I think it's absolutely legitimate to have people draw conclusions based on this. As I said earlier, you've got to ask which way of approaching the war on terror is going to be more effective at guaranteeing American safety and security, and also, in the long run, is going to create the kind of planet, the kind of world in which people are going to be able to live in greater harmony in the long run. So, yes, those are legitimate questions.

Q Tony, this report and these speeches not only coincide with the kickoff of the election season, but also with the run-up to the 5th anniversary of September 11th. That is a day that many Americans feel should be reserved for solemn remembrance of those who died. Are you not concerned that, in effect, the President is open to charges that he is politicizing that day?

MR. SNOW: I don't think so -- no, I don't think so, because you'll have to listen to what the President has to say on September 11th, won't we? But I think --

Q But in the run-up he's coming just up to the edge of it, and will take a momentary pause.

MR. SNOW: Well, do you think it's -- why would it be exploiting on the President's half, and not

exploiting when people are criticizing him about the very same issues? No, there's a debate. I don't think it's exploitative. The one thing that September 11th taught us is that not only is evil present in the world, but terrorists mean business. And both parties want the same thing, I believe -- certainly they say they do -- which is to have an end to terror, and also to have American troops back after you've got a successful conclusion in Iraq. The question is, which way is going to lead you to those goals? What's the most effective way to approach those? That is going to be a critical issue in this election.

Far from besmirching the memories of September 11th, I think it's a way of saying we're serious. We're serious about making sure that, to the best of our ability, this never happens again. As Fran said, we're safe -- we are safer, but not safe. But that we ought to devote every ounce of our energy and will toward preventing repeat acts of terror on our shores, but also for going after the terrorist network that openly espouses it, has organized it, has tried to conduct it and has hit other countries around the globe. That, to me, seems to be not only an effective way of remembering those who died, but also to say that you will not have died in vain.

Q And, finally, what's the big new thing in this report? What is new about this report?

MR. SNOW: Read it. I will challenge you --

Q You've read it --

MR. SNOW: Well, no, it --

Q -- you tell me what you think is new.

MR. SNOW: The fact is that the world has changed considerably since February of 2003. And what you have here is a comprehensive but not nuts and bolts look -- again, we're not going to give away sources and methods, it's not operational, but it is strategic. And it tells you all the various different ways in which we are trying to fight the war on terror, and the philosophy behind it -- not only the short-term strategies but the long-term goals, and how we think it is best to pursue and achieve those things.

Q I'm looking at the priorities -- I think there were four priorities or so listed -- and it doesn't seem like there's anything so groundbreaking there that couldn't have been written in February of 2003. So --

MR. SNOW: Well, no, actually -- no, no, because not only do you have WMD, you also have -- look, at this time, in 2003, at this time in 2003, we had not, in fact, completed restructuring our government in response to the challenges raised by September 11th. We have done considerable work, and it's described in here, in trying to reform our intelligence apparatus, our military apparatus, to try to reform the way in which the government goes about the business of trying to intercept and to foil terror plots.

A considerable amount of things have changed. I mean, I suppose you could say it hasn't changed, the principle is we want to stop terrorism. That's true. But I think you will find that the look here is far more comprehensive because they have more experience now. And also what's happened is that the enemy has evolved. And I daresay that we will continue, and we do continue each and every day to try to

revisit what's going on and, as David pointed out, what succeeds, what fails, and how to move forward effectively.

Okay, a couple more and then I've got to go to the Oval. I apologize.

Q Tony, isn't it a little contradictory to say the President wants Republicans and Democrats to return to that spirit post-September 11th, in the days immediately afterwards and then have the administration officials continue to try to paint the Democrats as the "cut and run" party?

MR. SNOW: You haven't heard it from this podium. I think what you're reflecting is some of the back and forth with members on the Hill who do that. You know, it's an election season and they're going to do that. But, look, we'd be perfectly happy -- there's one thing that we will not accept, which is the notion of a phased -- it's not -- what term did they use in the letter? I'll have to pull the letter out --

Q A phased redeployment?

MR. SNOW: A phased deployment -- no, you do a redeployment when the job is done, when it's appropriate to do it. You don't do it according to a timetable, you do it according to realities on the ground. Again, those are -- but the President, I think, and we're going to have opportunities to talk about this in coming days, how do you best foil them. How do you conduct surveillance? How do you deal with some of the thorny issues of dealing with terrorists? And we will be discussing those. And there will be opportunities for both parties to work together.

Q What's the President's itinerary for next Monday?

MR. SNOW: I don't think we're quite -- are we ready to announce it yet?

Q Is he doing a prime-time speech, Tony?

MR. SNOW: We will be -- at this point, we haven't made any requests of networks. We will let you know as the week proceeds.

Q But he will go to Shanksville and the Pentagon on Monday?

MS. PERINO: He'll visit all three sites.

MR. SNOW: Yes, he's going to visit all three sites, so he'll be all three places. He'll be in New York, Pennsylvania, and the Pentagon on Wednesday -- I mean on Monday.

Q Tony, just to follow on Elaine's point here, very briefly. I mean, you have Secretary Rumsfeld's comments last week. You have this whole debate about are people appeasing the latest in a long line of totalitarians, and the Vice President has been out there, rather active in suggesting about this sort of "cut and run" implications to opposing the administration's efforts. So you're calling for this moment on September 11th of national unity, this squandered chance, and yet look at the run-up and the context,

it hasn't just been laid maybe not at this podium, but certainly from the White House.

MR. SNOW: Well, look, there has been a lot of -- there has been a lot of conversation along those lines both ways, and there has been a lot of attempts to make political hay with. I think what you try to do -- the President, as leader, is going to try to reach and see what we -- there is important business to be done, and he's going to hope for Democratic support.

As far as the Rumsfeld speech, I've got it here. And what's interesting about the Rumsfeld speech, again, it's a thoughtful speech that talks about the hard nature of realities on the ground. What he talks about is some of the questions you have to ask, and I'm not going to go through it because I don't have time right now, but you and I can chat if you want to call, or anybody else wants to call today.

But the fact is, the Rumsfeld speech, I think, is one of those that has been singled out for criticism, quite often not fully in context. And I saw Defense Secretary Rumsfeld's speech as something that is not an attempt to be sort of calling out or picking fights, but to raise some thoughtful questions about what goes on, on the ground.

Finally -- okay, one more for Olivier, and then we'll go.

Q Thank you. Tony, the report warns, as the administration always has since 9/11, that those who support and harbor terrorists, there will be no distinction between them and the terrorists. Another thing that hadn't happened. The last time you put out a strategy like this was the Palestinians hadn't yet elected Hamas, a Hamas government. Where are the Palestinian people now on this spectrum of --

MR. SNOW: Well, again, you know, it was interesting because the Hamas government was elected on a non-corruption platform. As I pointed out before, what the Palestinian voters did was sort of ratify the President's decision not to meet with Yasser Arafat because he was stealing his people blind. And Hamas still has to make a choice about whether it wants to pursue a political or a terror path.

And there have been -- as you know, there have been efforts on both sides. And I think a lot of Palestinians are looking for a two-state solution where they can live peaceably with the Israelis, and we hope they succeed and we encourage all those efforts.

All right, thanks all.

END 10:51 A.M. EDT

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