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PRESS BRIEFING

BY

TONY SNOW

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MR. SNOW: All right, lacking anything new, we'll go straight to questions. Terry.

Q Russia's Defense Minister says Moscow has sent air defense missiles to Iran, and that if Iran wants to buy more, they'd be happy to take care of them. Do we have any objections to this?

MR. SNOW: I don't know where that report -- I'll get you some detail on it. I'm unaware.

Q Has the administration been in contact with Prime Minister Maliki since the speech?

MR. SNOW: Well, yes. I mean, the Ambassador has spoken with him on a regular basis -- on a number of occasions. Has the President had a direct conversation? No.

Q Why not?

MR. SNOW: I don't know, he just hasn't. On the other hand, there are regular conversations, the Prime Minister -- certainly we've communicated through our Ambassador, which is the standard and normal process. Usually, as we've pointed out, every couple of weeks the President speaks with the Prime Minister. Also, a lot of times you just have a schedule matter, which is trying to carve out time. One of the things that we prefer to do when possible is by secure video teleconference -- you get a better sense of intimacy and interaction than on a phone call.

Q Does the Ambassador talk to him once a day?

MR. SNOW: Pretty close. I mean, he talks to him regularly.

Q Here's what I'm wondering -- could you sort of address this sense that's hanging out there that perhaps the Iraqis and Prime Minister Maliki are not on board as supporting the President's plan in the way that you would need to have a productive partnership?

MR. SNOW: I just don't think -- yes, I'd be happy to address that, because I think -- there was a lot of reporting last week, "why did it take you 48 hours?" And the fact is, the Prime Minister, at a scheduled speech where he has spoken publicly in support of the plan, the Vice President has spoken in support of the plan -- the President and Vice President have spoken in support of the plan. You've got all the key members of the Iraqi government speaking out in support of it, not merely in terms of building strength and reinforcing U.S. efforts in Baghdad and Anbar, but also the key ingredients when it comes to political reconciliation.

It appears, for instance, that there is going to be a cabinet vote quite soon, maybe this week, on hydrocarbon law. They're working pretty aggressively and assertively also on other reconciliation efforts, including revisions to the de-Baathification law and the election law.

But, you know, I don't -- you've had the Prime Minister spokesman, at his regular meeting last Thursday, speaking in favor of this. So I think what's happening is he may not be using the formulations that people here would want, but they've been very supportive.

Q Tony, on the same subject, can you just give a better sense of what you're watching for? There are no specific dates, they don't have a vote on this hydrocarbon law at a specific date. So is it just a sense that the Iraqis are doing their part, that you're watching?

MR. SNOW: No, I think -- what we take a look -- for instance, I've mentioned maybe the most important part right now is the hydrocarbon law, because that's one that takes the considerable revenues from oil and natural gas and distributes them equitably across the country. They're

moving pretty rapidly toward passage of that, and that is enormously significant because it says to everybody, you've got a financial stake in the success of this country.

You have also had the Prime Minister and others make it pretty clear that they support efforts to modify the de-Baathification statute so that people who are not, in fact, part of Saddam's terror apparatus, but did have Baath party cards, can be reintegrated into the economy and into the political structure. And, similarly, at the local level, Sunnis who sat out the prior election at the local level can, in fact, have an opportunity to have local representation that is roughly proportional to their population.

So all of those -- those efforts are ongoing. I don't think there's any sense that the Iraqis, and particularly the government of Prime Minister Maliki and the council of representatives -- I don't think there's any sense that they're dragging their feet on these; they're moving pretty quickly.

Q I'm not really saying they're dragging their feet, but just, what you're watching? I mean, do this many number of troops have to be in place by then, or do they just have to be started - I mean, there's just no date --

MR. SNOW: Well, as you know, there's already movement amongst Iraqi brigades that are making their way toward Baghdad. So we know that those are going on.

Rather than trying to say you sort of have to meet this benchmark, yes, you want to see progress and you want to see it soon, and we're starting to see signs of that.

Q So it is just sort of a sense that they're moving in the right direction, and not --

MR. SNOW: It's not merely a sense, it's hard evidence that things are proceeding.

Q Tony, on the security side, I mean, today you have that terrible bombing at Baghdad University -- I guess more than 60 killed, 110 wounded. Is the President satisfied that Maliki is true to his word that he is addressing, that the troops that are in that area are free to move around, that they are able to --

MR. SNOW: Yes. Yes, those are rules of engagement. But the other thing you've got to keep in mind, Suzanne, is that terrorists really do have the ability to carve out what they would consider a victory with a very difficult, sometimes, to stop terror bombing if somebody, in fact, is willing to take their own life so they can kill others, that's a tough thing to bring down. But the real key is to go after the organizations that recruit, train, supply, encourage this kind of behavior. And it means going after them, as you saw last week with the operations on Haifa Street.

Certainly, this government -- that is, the Iraqi government of Prime Minister Maliki -- has been more aggressive in going after bad actors within Baghdad. And also, the Prime Minister has made it very clear that if militias are part of the violence against civilians, they're going to go after them; if Saddam rejectionist groups are part of the problem, they're going to go after them. In other words, they need to go after those who are trying to bring down the government, and also to foment sectarian strife. They have to do it in an even-handed and aggressive manner.

Q So this is part of what the President referred to as the increase in violence that he was predicting last week?

MR. SNOW: Well, you know, there's also going to be an increase in violence when you have direct engagement with forces. That's also part of what's going on. Because when you go into neighborhoods where some of these people are dug in, you can expect that they're going to fight back. So that's part of what the President was telling people to expect, as well.

When you have Iraqi brigades coming in and U.S. battalions then following in, in support of them, and they're working jointly to go after, district by district within Baghdad, the problems -- as well as going district by district to build a sense of confidence, by going door to door and introducing themselves and that kind of thing - - you can expect when they run into trouble that, in fact, as I said, the bad guys are going to shoot back.

Q Is there any reason to doubt this U.N. figure of 34,000 killed in --

MR. SNOW: I don't know. Again, I don't want to get into the position of trying to quibble with the methodology of a report that we really haven't had a chance to study. It is clear that the level of violence in Baghdad and throughout Iraq is not acceptable. It's one of the reasons why the President has spent a considerable amount of time working for a more effective way forward, because our attempts during the summer last year just didn't work.

So I don't think anybody is going to deny the reality of violence within Baghdad and sectarian violence that was spawned in large part, or ignited in large part by the Samarra mosque bombing, seemed to gather momentum through the course of the year. And it is also obvious that the Iraqis are going to have to take the lead role -- they're the ones who are going to be able to get that kind of on the ground intelligence, they're going to have a better feel, neighborhood to neighborhood, of where the danger spots lie. And it is our approach to build capacity and capability among the Iraqis not only by training and equipping, but also passing on matters of doctrine and doing it in real time. But the Iraqis are the ones who are going to be in the lead of these operations.

Bret.

Q Tony, is it fair to say the President wants to implement this new plan as quickly as possible, right?

MR. SNOW: Correct.

Q So what is taking so long to get General Petraeus' paperwork finished, the --

MR. SNOW: That should be -- well, paperwork sometimes takes time. We think it's going to get up to the Hill today.

Q You think it's going to get up to the Hill today?

MR. SNOW: I think so.

Q So when do you think General Petraeus will be on the ground in Iraq?

MR. SNOW: Well, we'll find out. As you know, that's -- the President is not in a position to dictate the calendar to Capitol Hill. But we hope that Capitol Hill -- and I think we feel confident that the Senate is going to look at this pretty quickly; they understand how important it is.

Q Okay. The sense in the Senate, this non-binding resolution, perhaps, that's going to move forward this week -- can you give a White House take on what that means, if the votes are there, that --

MR. SNOW: Well, look, they're claiming the votes are there. Again, the question you have to ask yourself is, do you understand what possible ramifications are? In an age of instant and global communication, what message does it send to the people who are fighting democracy in Iraq? And, also, what message does it send to the troops?

But, you know, the House and Senate are going to do whatever they do. What the President is determined to do is continue moving forward in a way that creates conditions for success in Iraq, which means an Iraq where the Iraqis are going to be able to keep the peace themselves, they're going to have a functioning and effective democratic government that provides political protections for all, economic opportunities for all, and a reason for Iraqis to pull together.

David.

Q Can I just follow on that, because in the run-up to the campaign in the fall, if you were a Democrat who supported troop withdrawal, then you were branded -- from this podium and by the President -- as basically supporting terrorists; that if you made that statement, then "the terrorists would win and the U.S. would lose." That's a direct quote from the President.

Then there's an election where the American people, the President acknowledges, speak out against the war. Democrats get power, they're making a move to send a political statement that says we're opposed to this troop increase. And you're saying now the ramifications of that are is that it sends a bad signal to the enemy and to our troops.

So what is an appropriate way to dissent?

MR. SNOW: No, I said, you just take a look at what ramifications they may have. That's all I'm saying. I said that they have to make a calculation. I don't -- you can go back and look at the transcript, but there's no direct -- there's --

Q But aren't you suggesting that there's a negative ramification?

MR. SNOW: I'm suggesting that they need to think it through. And it is certainly appropriate for people to dissent. There's going to be a lot of dissent, we have acknowledged that all along. And, as a matter of fact, it's important to debate this and also to debate the proposition if, as most Democrats who have visited the President and most we've heard from, want to succeed in Iraq, if you think there's an alternative way to do it, you can really help your country by putting it forward. Because the President has invited all points of view, and we understand that in the process of winning in Iraq you have to have public support, it is helpful to have political unity and it is essential to have a full and informed public debate.

Q Just to be clear, do you believe that a non-binding resolution that opposes a troop increase, does that provide comfort to the enemy?

MR. SNOW: I don't know. I think -- the question again is, does this send a signal that the United States is divided on the key element of success in Iraq. And I will let members of Congress express themselves, because I'm sure they're going to say, no, we're committed to success, and then they can elucidate on that point.

Q Doesn't the President acknowledge that the country is divided and --

MR. SNOW: The President of course -- yes, absolutely.

Q One final one on this. What role do 2008 politics play in the maneuverings on both sides in this debate?

MR. SNOW: You know, that's probably better to ask people who may have aspirations for 2008. I think --

Q You're a seasoned --

MR. SNOW: Yes, I know, I'm a seasoned wise man. (Laughter.) I actually think it's a little early for 2008 to figure large in this. I think some people are sort of making statements within their caucuses. But, for instance, when you're talking about this debate about a resolution, I think that happens in absence of a 2008 debate. This is something that a lot of Democrats feel strongly about, including -- and the people who have been in the forefront of this are not people who are running for President.

I think presidential politics obviously is going to grow larger, in terms of its influence on the debate, both with Iraq and domestic policy as we get toward the end of the year and as we really get toward the primary season. But at this point, I don't think it's a huge factor.

Ann.

Q To what extent does the President stand before Congress next Tuesday, a week from tonight, and say to them, you haven't thought this through, a resolution on Iraq would not be helpful? And what portion of the State of the Union does he have to address to Iraq?

MR. SNOW: I'll let the President -- you'll hear the State of the Union in a week. Iraq, certainly, is going to figure into it.

But, look, we are very serious about trying to work with both Houses of Congress. And so I think the message is, let's figure out how to work together around the common goal of success. And to say, you know, we are working here not merely because, you know, Americans certainly want to succeed, but the costs of failure in Iraq are enormous, they would haunt not only this, but future generations, they would extract enormous costs, not only in terms of blood and treasure, but also our possible economic security in the future. And it is important to acknowledge and figure out how best to deal with this threat now, before it metastasizes into something far worse.

Q Democrats have just named someone to do the response next Tuesday night whose main platform has been against the war. What portion of the address will -- and where is the President in the preparation? Is he reviewing new drafts of the --

MR. SNOW: We're in the early draft stage. I mean, there's a whole lot of stuff still going on. But, Ann, frankly, it's too early to give you any kind of readout. Let me be honest with you, I'm not going to give you a whole lot, in terms of percentages and all that, before the President gives his speech. It's sort of like the way forward speech the other night. There's a limited amount that I'm going to be able to --

Q -- hundred percent on Iraq?

MR. SNOW: So there's a limited amount I'm going to be able to share with you, but I'll share with you what I can. But he certainly will be talking about Iraq, but there are going to be other priorities, obviously, within the context of a State of the Union speech that he's going to be spending time on, as well.

Q Tony, there were reports in the Israeli press by Akiva Eldar that between 2004 and 2006 there were back-channel discussions going on between Israel and Syria, and they were at the point that they had a draft agreement for the two countries to sign, but pressure from the United States led to the Israelis backing down from that, and subsequently to the attacks into Lebanon. If that, indeed, is the case --

MR. SNOW: Wait, you're saying that the failure to talk with Syria led to the kidnapping of an Israeli soldier, which then produced attacks?

Q No, what I'm saying --

MR. SNOW: I'm just -- well, spell out the causality.

Q What Akiva Eldar is saying is that the Israelis and the Syrians were on the brink of an agreement to resolve the differences between those two countries, and that pressure from the United States kept them from actually moving in that direction.

MR. SNOW: Honestly, I haven't seen the report. It sounds -- I'm a little dubious about it, but rather than sticking my neck out and trying to be definitive, give me some time to look into it, and I'll give you a straight answer. Call me this afternoon.

Q Okay. And, secondly, with regard to the urban legends, everything that's going on in Iraq, the deployment of two battle groups, allegedly there are also four submarines in the area, the tougher language being used --

MR. SNOW: You have submarines as part of carrier battle groups.

Q But they're in the area. And you have tougher languages coming from the Vice President and others with regard to Iran, not so much on the nuclear program, but with regard to their operations in Iraq. Everything is indicating to people here in this town that there's something going on --

MR. SNOW: And let me just reiterate what I said from the podium -- we're not planning --

Q And the protests seem to be like "he doth protest too much," with regard to what's going on there, that that --

MR. SNOW: How the hell can it be, "he doth protest too much" when I say it's not true? Do you want me to say, well, it's kind of not true, it's almost not true, it's sort of, kind of not -- it's not true. I'm trying to give you a straight and clear answer.

Q We're looking at two things -- one is the words, one are the deeds. And the words seem to say, no, we're not going to do anything provocative against Iran, but the deeds are saying something is going on.

MR. SNOW: Two things. When you talk about provocation, the movement toward the development of a nuclear program with the public pronouncements of President Ahmadinejad, those are provocative. When you have been traveling the world and talking about killing large masses of people, that's provocative. When you have the presence

of Iranians on Iraqi soil killing Americans, that is provocative.

What the United States is doing in Iraq is protecting -- is doing force protection; we're protecting our people, which is not only what you'd expect, it's the smart and wise thing to do. But as for the -- your suspicion, I believe -- I don't want to read anything into it. Do you suspect that we are planning to invade Iran?

Q I suspect that there is some move to try and create some kind of a conflict with Iran where the U.S. could move --

MR. SNOW: No. As a matter of fact, the strategy with Iran is --

Q Not only me, I mean --

MR. SNOW: Well, okay, let me reassure you and everybody else: We're not planning on invading Iran. Instead, the strategy continues to be the use of diplomacy as a way of putting pressure on the regime in Tehran to do some things that are going to be very good for it and its people, which are going to be good economically, they're going to be good in terms of relations with people in the neighborhood. They offer also reassurance to the Iranian people that this government has a lot of respect, admiration and affection for the people of Iran. So those are all things that you need to keep -- you need to take into account.

When it comes to people on Iraqi soil trying to kill Americans, trying to move arms that are going to be used to kill Americans or innocent Iraqis, it is a matter of military necessity to confront them and take them on.

Q Tony, do you believe they're making IEDs in Iran, where there are training camps for people to go into Iraq?

MR. SNOW: That's an intel question that I'm not going to try to answer from here.

Q Reports from London? Are you going to be able to be categorical about whether or not the President had been persuaded by Tony Blair to agree to greenhouse gas emission limits?

MR. SNOW: Look, we'll have a State of the Union address in a week and we'll lay out our policy on global warming.

Q So that's not the same kind of denial that --

MR. SNOW: That's because -- you're confronting me with another report I haven't had time to test out.

Q That's the one we were talking about this morning --

MR. SNOW: If you're talking about enforceable carbon caps, in terms of industry wide and nationwide, we knocked that down. That's not something we're talking about.

Q Can I just follow up my own question?

MR. SNOW: Yeah, sure.

Q I know you won't talk about intelligence matters, but one would assume since you're finding IEDs produced in Iran -- in Iraq, that somehow they were in Iran being produced -- if there are, in fact, IED factories or IEDs being made there that harm U.S. soldiers, or there are training camps for people going into Iraq to --

MR. SNOW: As I said --

Q -- why not go after them?

MR. SNOW: As I've -- I'm not going to try to debate the proposition, I'm just -- I've told you what the policy is.

Q Thank you, Tony. One question with two parts. With regard to your statement, "border guards must obey the law, too," question, now how have so many millions of illegal aliens been able to enter our country if the President and his predecessor were seriously enforcing border and immigration laws?

MR. SNOW: Well, obviously there was a point where, in fact, it was not enforced seriously. That's why the President has committed more resources than anybody in history and has made further commitments about border

security in the future, not only in terms of personnel, but also technology, and has made a -- and, furthermore, has been far more aggressive than anybody -- I think you'll agree with this, Les -- in terms of what we call interior enforcement, going after employers in a way that nobody else has done before to send a clear message that if you're hiring illegals and you're doing it all -- if you're hiring illegals, we're going after you, and especially if you're doing it in a way that you have people who are here illegally who are also taking jobs that Americans might want to have.

Q That was a good answer. And I just have one further.

MR. SNOW: Oh boy. (Laughter.)

Q One further. Why do you believe the primary problem with the border and immigration policy has not been the result of non-enforcement of existing laws largely by the executive branch of the government?

MR. SNOW: Huh? Run that by me again. So what you're saying is -- in other words, what you're saying is, immigration is simply a result of not sufficiently --

Q Of the government, yes.

MR. SNOW: No, I think it's far more complex.

Q Millions of illegal aliens have come in here.

MR. SNOW: You know, yeah. The President not only acknowledged that, but tried to deal with it. And as far as we can tell, that they'd indicate that that flow has, in fact, ebbed substantially but not sufficiently in recent months in response to things we have been doing.

Paula.

Q Last year in the State of the Union, the President called for an entitlement reform commission that hasn't been established yet. Today, there was a bipartisan bill reintroduced that would call not only for forming entitlements (inaudible). What is the White House view of --

MR. SNOW: I haven't seen the proposal. The President believes that the entitlement system and the tax code both could use some work.

Q And I have another question. It was reported today that the administration has been cutting back on climate research both at NOAA and at NASA. And I just wondered, given that part of the White House policy is that there is still scientific uncertainty with respect to the cause of climate change, why are you cutting back?

MR. SNOW: Well actually, it's only half right. NOAA funding is going from \$753 million to \$867 million -- so an increase of over \$100 million in the NOAA budget. There is a decrease for climate science of \$17 million within the NASA account. So there are actually going to be increases -- and also, within the climate change account specifically, there's an increase this year for research.

What's happened is, NOAA, which has the lead on these issues, is getting more funding.

Q Was it accurate to say, though, that there's somewhat of a shift in funding priorities at NASA because of the administration's goal to have (inaudible)?

MR. SNOW: I don't know about that, but the fact is what we are doing is -- to answer your original concern -- we're not only putting more money into it, but we're also trying to figure out ways to use technology so that you can handle the complex business of trying to measure and characterize changes in global temperature to try to figure out what the precise causes are, where the -- where you're having the most effects, and how you deal with it from a scientific standpoint. There has always been complaints about the roughness of the data. And, therefore, we're spending more money, through NOAA principally, to try to do that scientific work.

Ken.

Q This is an important day for the U.N., with new leadership, and with whom the President is meeting today, a new U.S. Ambassador heading up there. I'm going to try this on a multiple choice basis: At this time, does the President believe the U.N. is beyond repair, in need of

major overhaul, in need of minor tweaking, or no changes needed?

MR. SNOW: The President knows that reform is important. It is certainly -- if it were not -- if it were beyond repair, he would have said so. It is not beyond repair. The United Nations can play a constructive role, but it needs some work. I mean, reform clearly is a priority, and the President will discuss that today, but also there is a full docket of items where the U.N. can play and needs to play constructive roles in building peace around the world.

So let me put it this way: We intend to remain engaged with the United Nations. The United States is the single largest contributor to the United Nations, and we think there's a lot of important work to be done.

Q Does that mean a major overhaul or minor tweak --

MR. SNOW: I don't know. There's got to be some middle ground.

Q Well, I gave you the choices.

MR. SNOW: Well, I get to play teacher here. I'll take B-and-a-half. (Laughter.)

Q What are some of the subject areas he will speak to the Secretary General --

MR. SNOW: I think there have obviously been some concerns about the way in which the United Nations spends money and also handles its accounting. That clearly was one of the conclusions that the Volcker commission came to and I think it's worth taking a good, close look at the recommendations, and also the findings of the Volcker commission to figure out how the United Nations can do a better job of making use of the money that American taxpayers are putting into it each year.

Q One last one. In the current troubled international climate, is the U.N. a net positive or a net negative?

MR. SNOW: I think it's a net positive. It's very important -- think of some of the things that have been

going through the U.N. Security Council in the last year: action on North Korea, and also a venue for sort of working through the six-party talks. You've had United Nations Security Council resolutions on Lebanon and also on Iran. The United States has found it as a venue that is important in building international consensus on a lot of issues, of working with our allies to not only send a concerted message, but also to work on concerted forms of action, like the Chapter 7 resolution recently adopted with regard to Iran. It gives the United States and its allies some important tools for dealing with our concerns with the Iranians about the prospects of working toward a nuclear weapon.

April.

Q Tony, a year-and-a-half after Hurricane Katrina and still slowness in rebuilding and finding (inaudible). Why is it not going to be a major part of the State of the Union next week? And where does the fault lie now --

MR. SNOW: Well, April, I'm not going to give -- there's been enough blame. I think it's important -- there are tens of billions of dollars available for reconstruction in Louisiana, Mississippi, and elsewhere, and it's important to make sure that people not only take the steps so that they can make that money available to people, but that you get to the business of rebuilding New Orleans.

I'm not going to -- I know you're going to want me to say, we're at fault, they're at fault. Not going to do it. There clearly are different paces of reconstruction going on in different states and jurisdictions, and we will do everything we can to encourage and support local officials. The federal government has made a sizeable commitment in terms of funds, and there is still a lot of that available for local use.

Q Okay, on the issue of funds, only a little less than a hundred people have received a stipend a year-and-a-half later --

MR. SNOW: You're talking about in New Orleans. I think the figure in Mississippi is in the thousands.

Q But, still, isn't that still slow, even --

MR. SNOW: It is slow. It's absolutely slow. And as you know, that's been a matter of some concern politically down there.

Q So where does the fault lie in (inaudible)? Is it (inaudible), is it the LRA, is it the Shaw Corporation? Could you put the finger on the head?

MR. SNOW: No, darlin', I can't. (Laughter.)

Q On this informal Middle East summit announced by Secretary Rice, how involved will the President be, or will Secretary Rice carry the water? Has the President changed policy --

MR. SNOW: "Carry the water"? I'll tell you what's going on, is that Secretary Rice is going to hold consultations with President Abbas and Prime Minister Olmert, taking a look at sort of the political horizons when it comes to the situation there. This does not mark a departure from the road map, it doesn't change, sort of, the things that need to take place, but it does provide a forum where both sides can continue to work toward progress on a comprehensive peace.

Meanwhile, also, this does not get in the way of -- you know, they've got ongoing bilateral talks about aid and humanitarian issues, so there's still a lot going on that the Israelis and the Palestinian Authority are working through, as well.

We agree with -- the President has always thought it a priority to try to work toward a peace in the region. He thinks it's possible if you can get the basic conditions, which, of course, are for the Palestinians to adopt the Quartet conditions, and for the Israelis to work with that government so that you can provide secure borders for both sides and political sovereignty for the Palestinians. That continues to be an area of interesting concern, and we do think that it can have positive effects throughout the region, as the Baker-Hamilton commission noted.

Q Will President Bush change policy in any way regarding the most controversial issues, Jerusalem, settlements, the Golan Heights, and so forth?

MR. SNOW: Well, again, the President has always said that those are final status issues that the parties are going to have to negotiate.

Q Tony, you mentioned that the President and the Secretary General will discuss the new way forward in Iraq. Is there anything in particular that the U.N. can do to help the new way forward?

MR. SNOW: Well, ultimately, the Iraq Compact is going to offer United Nations members and others an opportunity to invest in Iraq in such a way as to help build economic vigor within that country, which are going to make it -- which will help make Iraq not only more stable, but also provide reassurance to everybody in the neighborhood. So those are the kinds of things that you're likely to talk about.

I think much of the conversation at this point is prospective, and also the President will, I'm sure, be speaking to the Secretary General about our thinking about how the way forward in Iraq ought to work. I'm sure there'll be questions.

Q Thank you. I have two questions if I may. Both on Venezuela. Is the administration concerned about the new alliance between Venezuela and Iran? Is he going to do anything to try and limit Cesar [sic] Chavez growing power and influence?

MR. SNOW: Look, Venezuela is a sovereign government. We hope that its people are going to get the freedom and democracy we think they deserve.

Q Is the President going to do anything to protect American investments in Venezuela now that Cesar [sic] Chavez is threatening to nationalize U.S.-owned investments?

MR. SNOW: Again, that's something I can't comment on yet. We've heard the reports, but I don't have any detail for you on that at this point. It's still prospective.

Q Thanks.

MR. SNOW: Thanks.

P.M. EST

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12:41