

TRANSCRIPT

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Q: Unless you have any brief, and I respectfully underscore the adjective "brief" opening remarks, we'll start out with Sue Plumming from Reuters. Sue, and then Michael Sirac and Tom.

A: No opening remarks.

Q: The Iranian President today said that in their answer that they're going to be giving you they will not [inaudible]. Which is probably to be expected. But I wonder whether you can state what's going to happen next and what kind of question the United States is [inaudible]. [Inaudible].

A: I haven't seen Ahmadinejad's comments, but they're not surprising. We've been waiting for a response since June 1st when his offer was made that we, the [inaudible] three, the United States, Russia, China--would be willing to sit down and begin negotiations with Iran. But the condition is that they suspend their enrichment processing activities at their plant at Natanz. So they've known for two and a half months what the score is and what the condition is. Unfortunately, when Javier Solana had [inaudible] meeting with Ali Larajani, the Director of the Iranian National Security Council, they didn't come close to [inaudible] to the [inaudible] June 1st. They said they'll provide the answer on [inaudible] August 22nd. And Ahmadinejad is saying today that he's going to continue enrichment, that's just not going to be good enough.

The Security Council crafted a resolution, as you remember, in the late part of July which says very clearly [inaudible] that Iran must suspend its nuclear programs, that is the enrichment-related reprocessing [inaudible] at Natanz. And that if Iran does not do that then the Security

Council is going to take up the action by August 31st. The Security Council is going to take up its responsibilities under Article 41 of the [inaudible] Charter. Article 41 is the [inaudible] that pertains to the use of sanctions against a member state, which means Iran.

So I don't think it's a question of what the United States will have to do to pressure countries. We have an agreement with Russia and China and with the other members of the Council that we will go to Chapter 7 sanctions. So should Iran not comply in full with what the Security Council [inaudible], we're heading to that kind of debate and decision in New York in the first part of September.

It's very clear what Iran needs to do.

Q: So you said the first part of September there will be--

A: We would want to move very quickly. In the event that Iran does not give an answer to the Security Council and does not comply with the conditions clearly enunciated, I think we'll want to move very quickly in the first part of September [inaudible]. And they would be well deserved because this has gone on a long time.

Think back just the last 12 months. The IAEA Board of Governors passed a resolution on September 23rd asking Iran to suspend its nuclear program. [inaudible] Natanz. On November 24th the IAEA Board of Governors asked again. On January 4th Iran took the safeguards off its plant at Natanz and said it was going to further increase its enrichment [inaudible]. On February 4th the IAEA Board of Governors passed another resolution that said suspend your nuclear activities. On March 29th the UN Security Council issued a presidential statement saying suspend your nuclear activities. This has been going on a long time. We've given Iran every opportunity to comply. It's not a mystery what has to happen.

So I think Iran should know exactly what's going to happen. We indicated that in late July when the Security Council passed [inaudible].

Q: In January [inaudible]. I'm wondering if there has been any decisions made as to whether the US will provide [inaudible].

A: We have been talking to Libyans. In fact our Assistant Secretary David Welch [inaudible] in touch with the Libyans about a variety of issues pertaining to normalization of our relationship now that Libya has done what we have asked it to do. I can't answer your question specifically about [inaudible]. I can certainly direct you to [inaudible].

Q: Do you know at this point, can Libya qualify for some foreign military [inaudible] if it wanted to recapitalize some of their military equipment, [inaudible]? Is the US to a point with the [inaudible] relations that Libya [inaudible]?

A: I don't believe we've entertained that possibility yet. We're at the stage now where we're trying to normalize the diplomatic relationship. So you start [inaudible]. And of course we're working [inaudible] variety of issues. [Inaudible] bilateral relations, some [inaudible].

I don't believe we've taken that step. I'll take your question.

Q: [Inaudible], you set up an office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization. [Inaudible] to work with DoD [inaudible]. Can you tell me where that's at [inaudible]? [Inaudible] dollars [inaudible]. What's [inaudible]?

A: Thanks. Actually [inaudible] question, we've been meeting on that over the last week. Just yesterday [inaudible]. This is a very innovative program where State and DoD support each other in trying to push the State Department through our SCIS office, [inaudible], to put American diplomats and AID officials on the ground to avoid having to use military forces for that purpose. The idea is that after a conflict, a civil war or war, instead of putting civil affairs officers on the ground from the Pentagon, State Department officers who are expert in reconstruction and [inaudible] can do that job.

The Pentagon has been willing to set aside roughly \$100 million in authorizations to support these activities and we're currently looking at projects [inaudible]. I think the first two significant projects that might take place [inaudible] taken the step of actually asking the Pentagon to transfer the money yet, but we're in the planning stages [inaudible]. [Inaudible] is quite new. We're right now looking at what we can do both in the short term [inaudible] rebuilding, long term reconstruction process. But it's a promising program. We're very grateful to the State Department and the support that OSD and JCS have given us on it.

This particular office is headed by a guy named John Curtis, a former Ambassador [inaudible]. Rather newly arrived in May. He works very closely both with Admiral Giambastiani and the [inaudible] as well as Under Secretary [inaudible].

Q: [Inaudible]?

A: I don't know if it's going to be possible since we're bumping up against the end of the fiscal year to actually transfer money this year or whether we'll have to wait until the new fiscal year. But the projects are now being studied by both departments. It's a very promising program and it has the strong support of both Secretary Rice and Secretary Rumsfeld.

Q: Good morning. I wanted to ask about the [inaudible] [Unifill], using both your current policy hat and your former hat in NATO. Help us understand what capabilities that reinforce [inaudible] will have to have to be successful. What kind of ROE should they operate under? And I'll get my follow-up in now, are you sure you're going to use the word robust about ROEs? What does

robust mean? [Laughter].

A: First of all we were pleased to see the statement by [inaudible] be willing to take the lead until February 2007 on this force. Obviously as you look at the resolution passed, the one by the Security Council on Friday, this is a key part of [inaudible].

The only way the IEF, in our view, is going to leave southern Lebanon entirely is to have this international force deployed south of the border, the blue line, alongside of the Lebanese army. It wouldn't make sense for the IEF to leave otherwise, because then it would mean that 30 days of fighting [inaudible] because Hezbollah [inaudible] the IEF.

One of the achievements of the IEF in our view during the last 30 days was the fact that it was able to dismantle an extraordinarily complex, dense military fortifications that Hezbollah had built up between 2000 and 2006, right along the border, say a kilometer or two inside the Lebanese border. The IEF had some success from that.

The value of this international force would be to occupy a zone in southern Lebanon south of the [Khani] River with the LAF whereby that kind of rebuilding fortification along the border should not [inaudible] take place, and whereby the current station of rocketry platforms, especially for longer range rockets of the Iranians. The Syrians have supplied Hezbollah [inaudible]. We don't want to see war repeated. We obviously want to see conditions [inaudible] towards long-term stability [inaudible] as possible. So this is a critical element to sustain the peace. So we're looking for a force of upwards of 15,000 people. While it is not [inaudible] Chapter 7 force, for those of you who have some experience with the UN peacekeeping forces, this will have all the requirements and the look of a Chapter 7 force in its mission mandate and in its very strong, aggressive rules of engagement.

This conference, the meeting in New York today that the United Nations is hosting for potential troop contributing countries, those that support this operation will be represented by our Assistant Secretary of State for Political/Military Affairs, John Hilling. He'll have with him a large delegation from the US government.

As you know, the President has said on a couple of occasions recently, the US would lend military support to this although, of course, we're not concentrated, we're not planning at all US troop support. So military support could mean logistics or communications, that kind of thing. We'll have to wait and see what the force contributors would like and what they need. Certainly that kind of support, we'll give it our strong [inaudible].

The force would have to be very large. It's going to have to be a strong force. It will have all the requirements that a Chapter 7 force normally has, although it will not technically be a Chapter 7 force. And it's got to deploy with the Lebanese armed forces.

What you're seeing here with the news overnight is that the Lebanese armed forces have begun their deployment southward. That is understandably a very tentative deployment southward into positions that the IEF really need to give up in the northern part of the [inaudible]. If the IEF continues to make it clear, [inaudible] the government makes it clear, that it will not regard [inaudible] until the international force comes in. So there will be a strong emphasis here on a fast deployment of that force. That's going to be difficult. It's a large force.

Q: Are we going to see armor? Are we going to see light infantry, air mobile? What are the capabilities that we should be looking for to guarantee success?

A: [Unafill] now as presently constituted is a very weak force--2,000 people. Just shy of 2,000 people, lightly armored. It does not have an aggressive mandate or [inaudible]. So in the course of our negotiations and the resolution over the last few weeks we made it very clear we, the United States, and we received very strong support in this from Kofi Annan, who by the way played a critical role in achieving this [inaudible]. He played a very positive role.

We made it clear, and everyone agreed with us, the French government, Kofi Annan and others, that this force will be strong, it had to be heavily armed, it had to have rules of engagement that would allow it to defend itself should it be attacked or provoked. And it should be able to carry out the mandate that the Security Council has written for it. That mandate is to make sure there is no armed force in south Lebanon besides the newly constituted armed force of the government of Lebanon, the Lebanese Armed Forces. That would argue against the refortification [inaudible]. If Israel is to be secure, the one million Israelis who had to live under these rockets in the last month [inaudible], then that will need to take place and that's very important for us as we begin [inaudible].

I hope that answers your question.

Q: Mr. Burns, you mentioned this US humanitarian [inaudible]. What would that mission do and when might it begin?

A: We were actually the first country in humanitarian aid I think about two and a half weeks ago. We delivered \$30 million worth of assistance, mainly through DoD assets, US naval assets to support Beirut. We delivered at that time when there was this very significant refugee problem. Medical kits for 10,000 people, blankets, plastic sheeting [inaudible] in this type of refugee [inaudible].

Secretary Rice pledged an additional amount of money and she and President Bush would have talked about that on Monday when they met over at the State Department.

We're now planning two-tiered US assistance [inaudible]. Additional humanitarian aid will go to Lebanon to support the UN [relief] agencies and NGOs [inaudible] over the next few weeks.

There will be a conference in Stockholm August 31st by the Swedish government focused on these short term humanitarian needs. We'll be a major contributor to that process.

In the longer term the World Bank and other leading governments like ours will be pledging potential assistance and [inaudible] towards the longer term infrastructure. This would get to the permanent reconstruction [inaudible] and some of the other infrastructure that was destroyed [inaudible].

I think you'll see unfolding two things. We were first in two and a half weeks ago with our humanitarian aid and we want very much to support the Lebanese government. Part of the effort here is to support [inaudible] and to see and to help them grow the country as fast as possible so that the refugees can return home. There are upwards of a million refugees.

Q: What's the next step?

A: the next step is unfolding as we speak. We continue to plan and deliver humanitarian aid week by week to Lebanon.

There are other problems that we're working on. For instance, the last two weeks there were no oil shipments by sea into Beirut. The hospitals and major institutions are down to a couple of days energy supply. The American University of Beirut, which is the flagship American institution, was under threat of having to close down its hospital which is one of the main hospitals of Beirut. So we worked very hard [inaudible] as well as the Lebanese government to try to get some ships in there. A ship arrived yesterday. There will be more ships coming in.

So I think the energy situation should begin to return to normal. Paying attention to that problem and I think focusing on the short term needs of the refugee population. There's a bit refugee population to the south, there's a larger population south of Beirut. A lot of people moved south towards Beirut. The Shia population. Those people want to go home but they can't go home in many cases until bridges are repaired and roads [inaudible].

Q: I wanted to ask you, Nick, about the mechanics of disarming Hezbollah. It's presumably going to go beyond no more fortifications along the border, no more rocket [platforms]. There's a report this morning I think that the Lebanese army's moving south based on an arrangement that they can't look too hard for buried weapons and casualties.

How do you see the multinational force dealing with this issue? Will it be negotiated diplomatically or will it be enforced if necessary? What arrangements do you foresee?

A: Thank you. I saw the same report you did about the [casualty] decision. I've not been able to get hold of our ambassador so I don't want to really speak to that. I don't have enough information on it. But obviously we'll be looking at [inaudible] closely.

You know that, and Secretary Rice said this in her press conference on Friday, the UN Security Council Resolution does not ask the international force to disarm Hezbollah. We're trying to follow in Lebanon the precedent of some other situations around the world, specifically Afghanistan, where that is an obviously very important question which is left to be worked out domestically by the government itself. In Afghanistan when the United States military came in, when NATO came in, it wasn't the US military or NATO that tried to disarm the militias in the various parts of Afghanistan. President Kharzai worked out programs for the dismantling of the various militias and as you've seen in places like Karachi and others, it worked rather well. In other places it hasn't. [But it's extensive].

It's going to have to be a national process the Lebanese government works out [inaudible] for the disarming of Hezbollah. Secretary Rice made that clear when she presented our [inaudible] Security Council Resolution on Friday.

It's very important that in the border areas Hezbollah does not reconstitute itself in terms of its fixed military positions that I talked about, the border fortifications and the rocketry. There is a provision in 1701 which essentially states that there shall be no armed forces besides the Lebanese armed forces. There's also an [inaudible] that prohibits the entry of arms into the country. So there will have to be an effort made by the international force which will be deployed to the south to make sure that those arms aren't coming in and the forces aren't being reconstituted.

There's also going to have to be a real effort made on the Lebanese/Syrian border, at the nine border crossing points that are wide enough, say, for a missile to be transported and restructured, for [Unifill] and the Lebanese government to set up a border mechanism that will monitor those shipments and ensure that large-scale shipments are not coming in.

You all know about our concern about how [inaudible]. It was the army [inaudible] Iran and Syria. That continued through the war. The Israelis of course knew about that and there were lots of Israeli army strikes on some of these transports as those transports came across the border into Lebanon. That is a real concern for us. We hold Iran and Syria obviously responsible for what happened since they're the ones, Iran is the country that created Hezbollah and has financed it since 1982 and has armed it. So they stoke these flames. They bear a large share of responsibility. It's the responsibility of Iran and Syria now, if they wish to contribute to a peaceful situation in Lebanon and to a peaceful Lebanon/Israel border, they shouldn't be transporting large arms shipments and rockets into Lebanon from both of their countries. That's a very important concern of ours.

I can tell you that the activities in Iran and Syria have been a major concern to many of the Arab countries of the Levant and Gulf. They are a major concern to the United States as well as to the European allies. It's something that's going to have to be watched very very carefully. But those

governments bear the responsibility to act in a way that will reinforce the peace and not detract from it. So the spotlight is going to have to be on Iran and Syria as we go ahead.

Q: Any change by them since the ceasefire?

A: Well you saw that absolutely venomous speech given by President [inaudible] about Israel, about generational conflict, [inaudible] Israel. And you've seen similar speeches by Ahmadinejad over the last year. If we are to take them seriously, both of them, if we are to accept what they say as their government's policy, neither government has given us any indication that they're willing to live with Israel in peace and they're willing to accept Israel. In fact as you look at their actions, they're the ones that provided the rocketry that changed the strategic dimensions of the war and that forced a million Israelis, roughly in the northern third of the country, to live in bomb shelters and basements over the last 30 days. So they bear a large share of responsibility.

Countries, many many countries are concerned by this [inaudible] to stability in that part of the world.

Q: Mr. Secretary, you talked about humanitarian assistance for Lebanon, but the country is going to take a long time to recover. A lot of homes destroyed and businesses. Senator Durbin and Congressman LaHood have asked the administration to extend the visas of any Lebanese in this country so they won't have to go back to a country in conflict. The conflict may be over but the situation may not be.

Do you know whether the administration is prepared to do that? Normally [inaudible] DHS immigration. You folks would have to make the decision.

A: Actually it would go under DHS. The State Department makes decisions on the issuance of visas overseas, but it's DHS that has responsibility for [inaudible] of foreigners in this country about their visa status.

I've not actually seen that [inaudible] so I'd rather not comment either way. I'd want to look at the [inaudible] first.

Q: I want to get back to the issue of the composition, [inaudible]. You spent a lot of time on it when you were in NATO, a lot of political will for [inaudible], but when it comes to actually stepping to the plate and providing forces [inaudible] and what not it's more difficult. Can you speak to any indication of the countries that are likely to provide? Are you comfortable with, I know force generation is just starting, but are you comfortable that we'll get the number of 15,000?

And as a corollary, can you [inaudible] as to why the US won't send forces? There's been a lot of speculation that it's over-stretched in Iraq and Afghanistan, it's the legacy of the Marine bombing

in Beirut. Can you [inaudible] decided not to [inaudible]?

A: I shouldn't be the one that announced countries' troop contributions before they announce it themselves, so I'll decline [inaudible]. But we've actually been encouraged over the last two weeks or so by the number of countries not just [inaudible], several West European countries and several other countries from South Asia and [inaudible] that have told us privately they intend to contribute troops to this effort. We're encouraged by that.

We hope that we'll be able to reach the level of 15,000. We believe that is roughly the size of the force that's going to be required. It's going to be a very labor intensive force given the functions that [inaudible]. It's going to have to cover a rather large area. In our sense it will have to be there for a very long time. So we've been encouraged by the number of countries that have come forward. There are a large number of those countries that are present [inaudible] at the meeting [inaudible]. We'll be at that meeting as well.

Obviously any force like this has to have a strong lead nation or a core of countries that are willing to lead it. That's why we were so encouraged by the statement that [inaudible] made yesterday. And I think the French have not yet announced exactly how many troops they'll contribute [inaudible].

I think the President answered the question a week ago Friday that it's his decision, our decision, not to deploy American troops to Lebanon given the nature of the conflict there, but we'll be happy to provide framework military support. Again, as I said before, it's hard to know exactly what type of material or logistical or communication support will be provided to the effort, specifically [inaudible] and the core group of countries [inaudible].

Q: He and the Secretary both said the decision had been made not to [inaudible] troops. I don't believe they'll let anyone [inaudible] that. Can you go into that in any depth? A lot of speculation about overstretch, about [inaudible]. Can you give any insight as to why that decision was made?

A: I think it's essentially because of the nature of that particular [country] and the fact that it has raised so many passions among the Lebanese public. And given the history of our involvement in that country I think it's our [inaudible] that we're best contributing military framework support [inaudible] troops on the ground. And it's also true we are engaged elsewhere in the world, in Afghanistan and Iraq, in the Far East. There are a significant number of American troops deployed overseas. We're certainly doing our share for global stability and the way the United States and Europe tend to work together, all of us feel a responsibility to help provide for stability. The United States has provided the major share of [inaudible] to Afghanistan and overwhelmingly so in Iraq, so I think the European countries, there has been I should say no pressure whatsoever from the European allies that America [inaudible] Lebanon. They understand that given our commitments in Afghanistan and Iraq it's going to be their responsibility, some of the countries [inaudible] South and East Asia to produce this force and

man it and they're ready to do so.

Q: Sir, I want to try to link some of your opening remarks about sanctions [inaudible] which [inaudible]. At this point do you think that world opinion and that the United Nations [inaudible] to impose sanctions on Iran because of their perceived role in Lebanon [inaudible]? Is that [inaudible]?

A: I think our [hand is constrained]. Looking at the impact that the Lebanon war has, will have on the Security Council debates and the Iran nuclear issue, I think there is greater concern about the role of Iran in the Middle East than there had been before. Most of the international [inaudible], and rightly so, because they've given [inaudible] IAEA [inaudible] which proceeded to build this facility in Natanz without any regard for international red lines, the red lines that have been put down. But I think now there's broadened concern about the very nature of Iranian foreign policy. It's a country that's attempting to flex its muscles in the region. A lot of people believe Iran wishes to be the dominant power in the region which is one reason [inaudible] nuclear weapons capability. And there is no question that Iran has pushed, has strengthened Hezbollah through the provision of these rockets, thereby providing a significant threat to the state of Israel. In talking with the Arab governments in the Middle East, and certainly the European allies, there is increased concern about the destabilizing policies of the government of Iran in the Middle East. Iran is not a force [inaudible]. It's the reverse. So I think that's going to reinforce the effort to hold Iran accountable in the Security Council should they not provide the kind of clear answer to the offer that was made on June 1st [inaudible].

Q: Are there one or two nations you can point out that might have been reluctant to impose sanctions a month ago that may be more sanguine to do it because of Iran's [inaudible]?

A: Go back to late July to the Security Council Resolution on Iran, it was 14 to 1. I believe the only country that voted against it was [inaudible]. But Russia, China, the US and all the other countries voted for it. That Security Council Resolution is very clear. It says should Iran not comply with the conditions of suspension of its nuclear programs we will then turn to Article 41 measures for sanctions. [Inaudible].

I just think the will of a lot of the countries has been strengthened after having watched the Iranian government try to destabilize both Lebanon and [Israel] over the last [inaudible].

Q: Sir, a question about South Korea. There's talk in that country about setting a timetable for them to seek wartime control of their own military in 2009 or 2010. What's the US position on that? What kind of risks would that have for that region?

A: We have a [inaudible] coming up in Washington in mid-September. Obviously that issue will be on the agenda. Our position has been that this is going to have to be worked out by both governments. It's been an issue [inaudible] over the last couple of years, [inaudible] the last

couple of weeks. But we'll look forward to discussing it with the South Koreans when they come. I want to reserve specific comment [inaudible]. Let the President of the United States, the Secretary of Defense, state our position on that [inaudible].

Q: Can you talk more generally about the kinds of risks it poses?

A: I'd rather not go into it too much. I would just say that obviously it's a very important alliance [inaudible]. We both face a threat from North Korea. So I think the point we'll try to emphasize to the South Koreans is that reviewing their own [inaudible] unpredictable government [inaudible]. We saw what that government is capable of doing back on July 4th and July 5th. There is a Security Council Resolution passed unanimously that warns North Korea against further tests, [inaudible] missile tests. And now it's time for South Korea and the United States to focus on [inaudible]. Not just the six-party talks but maintaining a strong defense force in South Korea to be able to [inaudible].

Q: We're coming up on the fifth anniversary of 9/11. In talking to a lot of counter-terrorism experts here and around the world about how we're doing in the effort, the global war on terror the thing that keeps coming up is their notion that the radicalization of the Muslim world is increasing, and that sympathy for the ideology of bin Laden is increasing. They point to polls that show that, suggest that 200 million Muslims think that bin Laden can be counted on to do the right thing more than President Bush. They point to networks that are funneling jihadists to fight us in Iraq. They point to home-grown cells that are cooking off all around the world, and not just basically embracing the ideology and taking action.

Do you sense this? How worried is the State Department? You deal with these countries. And what can we do about this radicalization? Because it seems to be one front in this war that a lot of people think we're losing.

A: We just marked the eighth anniversary last week of the East Africa bombings. We had a ceremony in the State Department with some of the people who survived the bombings in Dar es Salam and Nairobi. We had some of the family members whose loved ones died then. The fifth anniversary, of course, of 9/11 is coming up too.

I think that the actions the British took last week to foil the plot to bomb the airlines has reignited concern around the world about this type of terrorism and the threat that it poses to all of us around the world. It's a global concern. So frankly, I guess I'd turn your question around and I'd answer it differently than maybe you expected me to and say that at least in terms of governments, we deal with governments around the world. There is heightened concern that we've all got to redouble our efforts to prevent this type of terrorism from occurring and to face these terrorist groups and defeat them. The London plot was a dramatic example of the type of catastrophes that could occur if we're not successful and if we're not effective.

So from a government point of view, and I'm talking not just about the US and Europe but our Asian allies, Middle East governments as well. There's a realization that we have to have a multiplicity of efforts, not just use of military force but the use of intelligence and of diplomatic coalitions and of judicial action, [combined] judicial action coordinated, I should say [inaudible] action, to get at these terrorist groups and to stop them before they commit terrorist acts.

So I actually see on a governmental basis the impetus flowing towards stronger action and not the reverse.

Q: Do you not hear this from Muslim governments and Arab governments in particular, that American foreign policy, and certainly Lebanon unfortunately, played right into this agitation in the Muslim world, obviously, that our foreign policy and the way it's conducted is agitating the situation? You never hear that?

A: Our foreign policy, particularly our policy in the Middle East, is predicated on trying to preserve stability. We have a friendship with Israel and that friendship is worth defending. When Israel was attacked, as it was by Hezbollah, illegally, across the international boundary, then of course we have an obligation to defend Israel's right to defend itself.

We certainly don't want to see two countries, Iran and Syria, be allowed to think that they have the right to finance and arm terrorist groups who would then kill not just Israelis but kill other people and destabilize a country. Lebanon is just now returning to democratic rule. So if anything, the United States is an agent that stands for stability in the Middle East. It's Iran and Syria that are provoking instability.

So I actually think in conversations with Arab governments that they understand the threat of this type of terrorism, al-Qaida terrorism and other terrorist groups as directed at them as well. And that they see their association with the United States as critical to facing that threat. I'm just speaking about how governments relate to each other and the type of policies governments commit to.

There are lots of different polls out there. I don't know what polls you're speaking of so I don't want to [inaudible]. But governments have to act in the best interests of their people and we think we're doing that by the policies that we've put in place, obviously.

Q: Following up on what James said, one of the criticisms that you all have gotten is that, and I'd like you to respond to it, that the United States didn't do enough to support the [Cedar] Revolution, didn't do enough to make sure that the Lebanese government had the resources and the legitimacy to win over people in that area which allowed Hezbollah to continue to [inaudible].

A: Who is criticizing us? Who's saying that?

Q: Analysts. I don't have a name. I think it's a reasonable criticism. If you think it's not, please tell me why you think it's not.

If you can also talk about this notion of the reconstruction package that the United States is putting together now. One of the lessons from Iraq has been that these macro programs are good in a large sense, in a long term sense, but not in a short term sense. We read yesterday in the Washington Post how Hezbollah has already done their rebuild. And while you talk about the government to government approach in fighting terrorism, one of the other lessons of Iraq is that you have to drain the swamp and you have to take away the support from the lower levels to the people that would be terrorists. It doesn't seem like the macro response that you're talking about is [inaudible].

A: I know of very few people who say that between February of 2005 and the summer of 2006 the United States was insufficient in support of the [inaudible] government, the [Cedar] Revolution. We're the ones who helped lead the effort at the United Nations to force Syria out. Syria was [inaudible] Lebanon. We have given substantial support, political and material, to the government of Lebanon. We've been a very close friend of that government. So I think it's very hard to argue that somehow a deficiency on the part of the United States to support, or France. We've been [inaudible] France over the last 18 months. That somehow led [inaudible].

What led to the conflict is that Hezbollah decided to cross the international boundaries into Israel, kill several Israel soldiers, take others hostage, and start a war. That led to the conflict. We didn't start the war, Hezbollah did. And Iran and Syria supplied the money, obviously, to support Hezbollah, and the long-range rocketry to attack [Israel].

So you have to look at things squarely and clearly. Now we're trying to be a good friend to Lebanon by arguing that Lebanon should not be victimized by the creation of the [inaudible] state [inaudible]. So our reconstruction efforts are going to be aimed at helping the people of Lebanon, the government of Lebanon, to surmount incredible [inaudible]. And it's not easy.

It's no surprise that Hezbollah was first out in the streets of south Lebanon because that's where they live. That's where--many of the people of south Lebanon are [inaudible] to Hezbollah. There's no secret about that. But over the course of time as Lebanon rebuilds I think several months from now people are going to have to ask was that war worth it to the people of Lebanon? Certainly not. It was started by a group that is a member of the government of Lebanon, but they didn't inform the Prime Minister of the country or the Cabinet that they intended to start the war. They just started it. So they have a lot to answer for.

As Lebanon reflects on this experience [inaudible] Hezbollah acted in a way contrary to the interest of the [inaudible] Lebanese.

The United States has been a good friend of Lebanon [inaudible]. I think, I don't know who these analysts are, but I don't think they've got much to [inaudible].

Q: There's been some speculation that the strikes against Hezbollah are a prelude to what could happen to Iran next. I'm wondering if you could comment on that and just talk a little bit about under what circumstances we would pursue military against Iran?

A: I think I'll decline.

[Laughter].

A: Under the circumstances.

Judge us by our actions. And Iran should judge us by our actions. Since February 2005 when Secretary Rice announced that we would support the European effort to negotiate with Iran over its nuclear future, we have assembled an international coalition that has given Iran one message. That is we don't want you to achieve a nuclear weapons capability and we'll take actions, in this case, diplomatic, to prevent that from happening. So Iran knows what it needs to know. It's very clear what Iran has to do and it's going to have to make a decision. That decision will come in the next two weeks and we'll see what their true intentions are.

It's not just the United States laying down this red line. It's Russia and China, it's the Security Council. If you go back to that February 4th vote in the IAEA it was Brazil and Egypt and India and Sri Lanka and Ecuador and Japan and Australia that also voted with Russia and China and the United States to say to Iran, none of us want you to acquire nuclear weapons. What does Iran do? It's simply disregarded it. And if you look at what Ahmadinejad has said over the last couple of weeks, I assume that they intend to continue their original program. There will be an answer. They'll be at the Security Council. But I'm not going to speculate beyond that on what we may or may not do to stop the Iranian government. We're focused on diplomatic play here and we've got a lot of strength and support from around the world. So I really think Iran is quite isolated.

Q: Nick, under what circumstances would the US be prepared to [inaudible] non-democratic Iraq? Can you see any scenarios where if there was stability in the region the US might be prepared to live with that?

A: When [I was] State Department spokesman ten years ago, Barry [inaudible], taught me never to answer a hypothetical question. [Laughter]. I remember that lesson. I learned well at the foot of the master.

Listen, Prime Minister Maliki was here a few weeks ago. Obviously we are giving him and his government our full support and we are not willing to say that that's an effort that the Iraqis [inaudible] stable government, a democratic government over time. We're not willing to say that

that can't occur. We've put too much effort, human effort, and we've made too many sacrifices to simply walk away from it. The President has been very [inaudible].

Q: It seems like there has been a shift in terms of what people are discussing that at least acknowledges the possibility of a non-democratic Iraq where a couple of years ago--

A: Who's speaking?

Q: A number of analysts, analysts are citing sources inside the government saying that.

A: I don't know who the analysts are in looking at people inside the government who are never on the record. I can just tell you that I think the President's been as clear as he can possibly be that we're not going to give up supporting the Iraqi government, and we shouldn't. It wouldn't be right after having spent so much time and effort over the last four years in trying to [inaudible]. It's very tough [inaudible], no doubt about it. But because we face tough challenges doesn't mean we give up [inaudible].

So if you, I can just tell you in the councils of our government, in the meetings that are held on Iraq policy, there is no one saying we should somehow give up or stop the effort [inaudible]. Everyone is focused on trying to do the job the right way, and [inaudible] the kind of policies that can help the Iraqis achieve some measure of greater stability, greater strength, and greater order inside. It's a tremendous challenge. We [inaudible].

Q: Remember, it's the last question that [inaudible]. [Laughter]. So we'll take one more question. So please don't take this [inaudible].

The description I've heard in the last few weeks from the US government of Lebanon boggles the mind. It doesn't match my understanding of the Lebanon certainly since the [Maranites] lost control, since [Jamail] was assassinated. You have Hezbollah in the government, you have ministers that are beholden to Syria, you have no history of them ever being willing, and you know, [inaudible] perhaps, willing to take on militia [inaudible]. I've tried to track the administration's conversation. I don't hear any more, never did, that Hezbollah has gone out of business. I've just heard they have to choose between politics and [inaudible]. I don't hear you saying disarm. I hear you saying not rebuild fortifications. That's a little less onerous on Hezbollah.

What makes the administration think that Lebanon will suddenly find this new nerve to do the right thing or what you perceive to be the right thing? And that right thing seems to be redefined in ways that are not quite the end of Hezbollah.

Syria will be bouncing right back in, won't it?

A: I don't think so. Let me just answer in two parts.

First, I would say that Lebanon, you gave us a historical framework at the beginning of your question, all the way back to [Jamail] and the [Maranites]. I would say in a relative sense Lebanon has a greater capacity to build a democratic government, free of large-scale foreign interference in their country, a greater possibility now than at any time over the last three decades. They were occupied for like 29 years by the Syrian army. You and I went into Beirut in 1995 and '96 and '97. I remember we drove with Secretary [inaudible] from Damascus to Beirut and there were several thousand soldiers protecting us, with soldiers that army belonged to. The Syrian army in Lebanon. All the way into Beirut for the meetings that we had with [Nabibari] and the others. That was ten years ago.

There was an extraordinary degree of control by the Syrian intelligence apparatus, the people who many people believe had something to do with the assassination of Hariri, as well as the army over the affairs of Lebanon. The great product of the [Cedar] Revolution is that the Syrians were driven out.

Now they clearly have a considerable number of challenges inside the country just in forming a government that can be stable, in preserving the interests of the people, and in dealing with the Hezbollah question. But I would say in a relative sense, Lebanon has a greater potential to assert its own sovereignty and independence now than any time since the mid 1970s. First.

Second, on Hezbollah. Hezbollah is many things. It's a social movement. It's a social welfare organization. It's a political movement. It also has a military and terrorist wing, and I use that word advisedly--a terrorist wing to it. So we've never believed that it's possible to somehow destroy Hezbollah completely or to see Hezbollah disappear from the scene because it is a strong force in the social and political and social welfare sense. What you saw with the Hezbollah coming in to give aid yesterday and the day before is the strength of that organization.

But clearly Hezbollah is going to have to make a decision. Is it going to embroil Lebanon in wars with Israel and destabilize the country as it did over this past several weeks? Or is it going to decide it wants to live in peace with Israel? It has to make a choice. That's not just rhetoric on our part. If it doesn't make that choice then obviously it would stand in opposition to the US and to the great majority of the countries of the region who don't wish to see Lebanon dismembered by Hezbollah or by Iran and Syria. So it does have to make a choice. And Iran and Syria have to make a choice. And it is not true that we are saying that there will be no disarmament. What I said was that the Security Council Resolution 1701 doesn't provide for, doesn't ask the international force to carry out that disarmament, just as the NATO force and the US doesn't do that in Afghanistan. It does ask that, there is of course a clause on disarmament. It asks the Lebanese government and national authorities to do that. It's going to be extraordinarily difficult, but it's not--

Q: [Inaudible].

A: A difficult process for the Lebanese, but it's one they have to face and one they'll have to carry out.

In the mean time, the primary purpose of this force is not just to sit [inaudible], it's to prevent the rearming, if you will, or refortification of the war so that Lebanon might attack Israel again. All of us have an interest in seeing that not happen and seeing a change in the equation in south Lebanon that would give you a reasonable expectation of stability on the border. That's what we'd like to see, and that's the reason why we supported this international force.

So the force has to be a very ambitious force. It's got a tall [inaudible] here of challenges and responsibilities it's going to have to meet. That's why we want it to be a large force, heavily armed, and this gets back to Tom's question, what kind of force [inaudible]. With very aggressive rules of engagement. That's the position we'll be putting down in New York today when we speak at this UN meeting and how [inaudible].

Q: Thank you very much.

END TEXT

