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MR. BOUCHER: Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. I am very sorry I'm late. I guess I was slow getting ready, because I haven't done this for a long time. But I'm happy to be here, back to answer any and all of your questions for as long as you like.

One thing I'd like to note off the top, we put out a little notice yesterday. We'll have a briefing in this room at 10 o'clock on Monday morning by Assistant Secretary Beth Jones, Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs. She has recently returned from a trip to the countries of Central Asia, and she will talk about the situation out there, and the situation with regard to our relations with those countries Monday morning at 10 o'clock. That will be on the record, but off camera.

And with that reminder, I would be glad to take your questions.

QUESTION: Richard, as I presume you're aware, the International Committee for the Red Cross is the guarantor of the Geneva conventions, and they have taken a pretty dim view of the President's determination that was announced yesterday.

What do you say to the ICRC, and do you think that they are no longer in a position to be the neutral guarantor of this treaty?

MR. BOUCHER: Well, what we say to the ICRC is we have talked to the ICRC. We have seen the Reuters report. Our Ambassador in Geneva spoke directly with ICRC President Kellenberger today.

QUESTION: That's the only report you've seen? There are others, you know.

MR. BOUCHER: Well, we have seen the reports from various wire services. Kellenberger has told us that the news reports misconstrued the ICRC's position. So I assume if that applies to this one report, then that would apply to the reports of other wires services as well. So you're all wrong, according to Mr. Kellenberger. (Laughter.)

He further indicated --

QUESTION: Next time I'll keep my mouth shut.

MR. BOUCHER: Yes. (Laughter.) He further indicated the ICRC is still studying the President's decision and will come to us with their views in due course.

QUESTION: So -- but, the report that I'm referring to; I haven't seen the report that you referred to. The report that I'm referring to says that -- it quotes a spokesman as saying that the ICRC's position is that all people taken captive in an international conflict are prisoners of war unless decided otherwise by a tribunal. You are saying that what you have been told is that that is not --

MR. BOUCHER: We understand from the ICRC that those news reports misconstrue the ICRC's position, and we will await any judgment until we hear from the ICRC on what their position is.

QUESTION: Richard, regardless of what the ICRC may or may not have said in Geneva, how do you get round the fairly clear language in the Convention, which does require a competent tribunal to determine the status of individuals who have fallen into custody as a result of --

MR. BOUCHER: Well, Jonathan, we don't get around it. But what we do do is we read the whole sentence. You will see that in those clauses, the Geneva Convention says that if there is any doubt, then a competent tribunal should be convened to review these things. We don't think there is any doubt in this situation.

The White House, in their announcements yesterday, I think, made quite clear why there is no doubt about Taliban people involved. All of these people have been screened several times before they were taken, and after they were taken to Guantanamo, and we don't think there is any doubt in these cases.

QUESTION: You mean that your interpretation is that it's only doubt in the hands of the captors, the capturing party, and not doubt in the minds of anyone else? Is that your interpretation of it?

MR. BOUCHER: I think it's quite clear that if there is any factual or reasonable basis for doubt, then of course we would be willing to review this. But at this point, we're not aware of anything in all these interviews that raises any doubt about these people.

QUESTION: Now, wait a minute. I mean, the Europeans -- lots of people have doubts. So there are doubts out there. Are you saying that --

MR. BOUCHER: Well, they have not been involved in the interviews and discussions and examination of this situation. But as I said, if there is any grounds to review that, there will be -- we would be willing to review it.

But as far as we are concerned right now, we have examined the facts of the matter carefully, and we don't think there is any doubt that these people don't qualify for prisoner-of-war status.

QUESTION: Richard, can I just follow up on that? You said we "would be willing" to review it. Can you say under what circumstances you would be willing to review it?

MR. BOUCHER: I don't want to try to speculate on this. But as I said, we think we have ascertained properly the facts of the situation, both in general terms, as well as through the discussions that we have had with these people. There was nothing in that examination of the facts of the situation that raises any doubts that would lead us to believe that they might qualify, and therefore we believe firmly that they don't. Now, should something come up that would change that, I'm sure we would review it.

QUESTION: Aren't you sort of asking to have it both ways? Because on the one hand you're saying you've ascertained the facts of the situation, and on the other hand, though, the facts of the situation have been concealed from not only the press, but a lot of other people who have asked about the identities and everything else of the prisoners. I mean, can you sort of square the circle? I mean, how do you expect to convince the international community that you have made a sound judgment when a lot of the information regarding the people in Guantanamo has not been released at all?

MR. BOUCHER: Well, because I think all the information, or much of the information, about who these people are, what they were doing, the danger that they have posed to the international community, the kinds of activities that they were involved in, the lack of any criteria that meet the standards of the Geneva Convention -- remember that the White House went through, I think in the statement yesterday, some quite specific criteria about wearing insignia, operating in formed units, carrying your weapons openly, not mixing in, not hiding yourself among the civilian population. It's quite apparent, I think, to anybody who examines the situation of the Taliban against these criteria that these people don't qualify.

QUESTION: Well, I want to ask specifically about that, because that's one paragraph, but another paragraph, talking of a selected quotation of the Convention, just says this, "Members of regular armed forces who profess allegiance to a government or an authority not recognized by the detaining power." Nothing there about uniforms, nothing else. Just that. That's all they --

MR. BOUCHER: What is a regular armed force? It's what is described --

QUESTION: Are you saying they're not regular armed forces?

MR. BOUCHER: It's what is described in the language above. So I think that the Convention is quite specific in defining who is covered and who is not, and we think there is no question that these people don't meet that standard.

QUESTION: Richard, if you're certain that there's no doubt, why won't you release the findings of the Red Cross investigation -- the Red Cross interviewed these people and made a report to the host government, which is what they do. And this is supposed to inform you what their view is of what they found. Why don't you release that?

MR. BOUCHER: I don't know. That question hasn't come up. I'll have to look at it.

QUESTION: I asked about this a couple of weeks ago. I asked you to release the report of the Red Cross that was made to the United States. And you said that it was -- your reply came back that it's confidential, and that it's made to us, and that it won't be released. And I'm asking you why won't you release it?

MR. BOUCHER: That's the normal practice. That's the normal practice. Let me see if it --

QUESTION: (Inaudible) release it. I mean, if they -- it's made to you, and if you want, you can keep it secret, and if you want, you can release it.

MR. BOUCHER: I'll check on it for you.

QUESTION: Thank you.

QUESTION: Different subject? Mr. Boucher, the Mexican Government released last night a general who was in jail for eight years. I just wondered if the US Government has any comment on that, taking the fact that in the past the State Department has been calling for his release?

MR. BOUCHER: Well, we think the decision underscores President Fox's longstanding commitment to the protection of human rights and to the observance of rule of law in Mexico.

QUESTION: That's it?

MR. BOUCHER: That's it.

QUESTION: And do you have any comment about the Inter-American Court of Human Rights' decision to continue with the case of General Gallardo (inaudible) in Costa Rica? What is your opinion of that?

MR. BOUCHER: I don't think I have any comment on that one.

QUESTION: Can I follow up on Latin America?

MR. BOUCHER: Yes.

QUESTION: In Venezuela, there have been some massive demonstrations against Chavez, led by a colonel. Does the United States have any comment on the situation in Venezuela?

MR. BOUCHER: I don't have any particularly new comment. I think we have commented, the Secretary has commented recently on the situation there. We have had some concerns about political developments, about the pressure being placed on the opposition about some of the violence that has been directed at opposition members, particularly about the situation with regards to the press. So we would hope that things would proceed -- we certainly believe in the democratic institutions of Venezuela, and would hope that they would be respected by all sides.

QUESTION: Do you believe that Mr. Chavez has stepped beyond the pale, as far as being a member of the democratic community of the Americas?

MR. BOUCHER: I don't think that's quite a judgment that we can make. The view would be that he needs to respect the democratic institutions, as does everybody.

QUESTION: On the Middle East? Can you comment on a report that the US is against a French and European proposal to have elections held in the Palestinian territories? An anonymous State Department official is saying that Secretary Powell was not against it, while the French Foreign Minister on the record said that he was not enthusiastic.

MR. BOUCHER: Well, the State Department is saying we're not against it; the French Foreign Minister is saying we are not enthusiastic?

QUESTION: (Inaudible) not exactly for it.

MR. BOUCHER: So we're supposed to be somewhere between not against and not exactly for, is that the idea?

QUESTION: No, I want you to say on the record what you are.

MR. BOUCHER: Okay, that's a good -- that's an interesting way to ask the question.

Let me try to address this in the broader sense. I think, first of all, you know where we are in the Middle East. And that is where we want to remain, that is where we look for other countries to support and work with us -- as indeed many have supported and worked with us, from Europe, from the Middle East, from Russia and elsewhere. And that is to keep the focus right now on the need for Chairman Arafat to take steps against the violence, to confront violence and terror in a very serious manner, sustained manner; to account for the Karine A affair by taking immediate steps to ensure that incidents like this are not repeated.

That has been the view that we have maintained with others. We have made clear that our vision of the possible future for both sides, a possible better life for both Israelis and Palestinians, and a return to negotiations. The view of how that needs to be obtained remains to proceed with the recommendations that George Tenet and George Mitchell have made. And again, there has been a lot of international support for that course.

So I think we would say that remains our focus, and that's where we think the international focus should remain. So we don't -- without saying something particular about these ideas, I think we always felt that introducing other elements that divert the attention from this focus don't really move the situation forward.

QUESTION: So that is a way of saying that you are against the proposal?

MR. BOUCHER: It is a way of saying that we think the focus needs to remain where it is, and as various other things have come up at one time or another over the last several months, we

have always tried to make clear that we think the effort is well designed, well planned, and needs to be executed; and that having international support is important if we stay focused.

QUESTION: I have a follow-up: but there is more and more talk about maybe talking to somebody other than Arafat, also in this building. This seems to be what the French and European proposal may be leading towards. Can you say anything about that? About talking to other members of the Palestinian Authority?

MR. BOUCHER: I guess you're sort of -- first of all, I don't think there is a European proposal. What I have seen reported is a French proposal.

QUESTION: They refer to it as French and European.

MR. BOUCHER: Well, I don't see anything that indicates the European Union, for example, might have endorsed it.

But I have seen this characterized in different ways. At some points it was characterized as a proposal for elections, which I don't think the Palestinians exactly jumped on, and various other pieces. But again, I think the international community has acted strongly together, and I think we will continue to work closely together.

Certainly we have consulted intensely and frequently with our European allies. The Secretary is constantly on the phone and talking to European High Representative Solana. He has been on the phone frequently with various European foreign ministers -- Foreign Minister Fischer, Foreign Minister Straw, from time to time Foreign Minister Vedrine -- we saw him in New York last Friday, was it? And in the last day or two, he has spoken to Foreign Minister Pique of Spain from the airplane yesterday, because the European Ministers do have meetings coming up to talk about the Middle East.

He spoke this morning to Foreign Minister Van Aartsen of the Netherlands. So we try to coordinate very closely with them, and keep the international focus on the fundamentals. The steps that need to be taken now are steps by Chairman Arafat to stop the violence.

QUESTION: Richard, has Prime Minister Sharon asked President Bush to add additional Palestinian groups to the terrorist list, such as Al Aqsa Brigades and other groups under Arafat's control? And if so, are you considering that?

MR. BOUCHER: I don't know. I wasn't there. And I think the White House will have to do the readout of the meeting. But I think the Israelis would have to do the readout of the Israeli position.

QUESTION: You are the keeper of the -- the State Department is the keeper of the terrorist list. Are you --

MR. BOUCHER: That we are.

QUESTION: Are you considering --

MR. BOUCHER: We are always looking at other groups that might potentially be added.

QUESTION: Does that mean you are looking at Palestinian groups that might --

MR. BOUCHER: I will have to check and see if I can mention any specific groups that we might be looking at at this point. But other groups, including Palestinian ones, that might need to be added.

QUESTION: It wasn't really spelled out yesterday, or at least on the record. I wondered if you could do it. What exactly is the US view of Arafat at the moment? Does he remain the elected leader, and is he the person you are looking to on all things Palestinian?

MR. BOUCHER: I think what the President did make clear yesterday is that he hadn't changed his approach, he hadn't changed his policy. That's a shorthand way of not having to repeat everything every day. But if you want to ask specifically about this, I think I would repeat what the Secretary said in his testimony and what we have said before, that Chairman Arafat is the leader of the Palestinian community, the Palestinian Authority. We would expect to deal with him in that capacity. We expect to keep dealing with the Palestinian Authority at various levels in order to try to get them to take the kind of sustained and irreversible actions that are necessary to move the situation forward.

QUESTION: Can I just have a quick follow-up on that? What do you think then of these various proposals to -- not to replace him, but to kind of broaden the level of contact that one has with the Palestinian leadership?

MR. BOUCHER: I'm not quite sure what proposals you're talking about, but certainly --

QUESTION: (Inaudible) on Friday, I seem to remember him proposing exactly that.

MR. BOUCHER: Well, from the US Government point of view, we have always had a very wide number of contacts with the Palestinian Authority at all kinds of levels. So I don't think there is anything unusual. The Secretary met with Abu Alaa and some others the beginning of this week, Monday. He has met with a group like that in the past. I remember six or eight months ago they came. So we have had discussions both from our diplomatic representatives and the Secretary and others, and the Secretary has also kept in touch with Chairman Arafat and would expect to continue to do so.

QUESTION: Would you expect to intensify this contact?

MR. BOUCHER: I don't think I can characterize it one way or the other. I think, as the President said, we have been very, very clear on what the situation is and what they need to do. So whenever we feel there is something useful to discuss, we discuss it with the Palestinian Authority at various levels. But the issue is not contacts; the issue is action on the ground to stop the violence.

QUESTION: (Inaudible) on Arafat?

MR. BOUCHER: About 10 days, two weeks ago.

QUESTION: (Inaudible.)

MR. BOUCHER: I could look it up for you, but I'm low on batteries. So I'll tell you afterwards.

QUESTION: Just one more question on this. When Abu Alaa was here, Ahmed Korei, was there any indication that he was anything but a representative of Mr. Arafat?

MR. BOUCHER: I don't quite understand the question.

QUESTION: I mean, people talk about other Palestinian leaders to try and -- instead of Arafat. But isn't Ahmed Korei in reality just an extension of Mr. Arafat? Is he still loyal to Arafat, is he still representing Arafat? Or is he an independent, rebel, alternative voice?

MR. BOUCHER: I don't remember him describing himself as an independent, rebel, alternative voice. I think he described himself as a representative of the Palestinian Authority, and that's the way we met with him, and that's the way we saw him.

QUESTION: Same subject?

MR. BOUCHER: Same subject.

QUESTION: What is the current US position on the utility of holding Chairman Arafat under tight restrictions as far as his movement is concerned? Because there have been some reports saying that you no longer believe this is a useful tool.

MR. BOUCHER: I think what I have said before applies today, and that is we think the focus needs to remain on Chairman Arafat to take the necessary steps. And that remains our position.

QUESTION: But you didn't really answer the question whether you think it's useful to restrict his movement. I mean, he could -- the focus could remain whether his movements are restricted or not.

MR. BOUCHER: We haven't changed our view of this, and we have said the same thing today that we have said before on the subject. I will leave it at that.

QUESTION: Can I change the subject? Under Secretary Grossman and his delegation returned, I believe, from Colombia today. And could you talk about the discussions they had with President Pastrana, specifically on this proposal in the budget regarding the protection and security of a pipeline in the north of the --

MR. BOUCHER: I didn't actually have that much more to say at this point, because they did a press conference down there, which I'm sure we would be glad to share with you. I think they talked about it quite a bit down there.

In Nassau, we had several people who were with Marc down there come up and join us in Nassau. I guess it didn't come up in the press conference in Nassau, but it did -- they had done a press conference on Wednesday in Colombia. And I would be glad to get that for you.

QUESTION: Can I move on to something? I just found it very interesting that you mentioned that the Secretary spoke with Minister Van Aartsen. The timing of this call is quite propitious. Did the Secretary congratulate the Minister on the Dutch government's purchase of millions of dollars of US fighter planes, which was announced today as well?

MR. BOUCHER: Oh, I didn't realize it had been. I didn't check, I'm sorry. I'll have to check.

QUESTION: I have one question -- and I'm sorry, it goes back to a subject, but I don't think you've answered it yet. Who decided, who was the competent tribunal who decided that these detainees are not prisoners of war?

MR. BOUCHER: Well, we dealt with this subject. Some wire service reporter claimed that we had to have a competent tribunal. I reminded him that the Convention itself says, should there be any doubt. And I explained the reasons for which there is really no doubt.

QUESTION: (Inaudible) haven't completely ruled out having a tribunal? Was that part of this latest review, or is that still in play?

MR. BOUCHER: We're not constituting a tribunal. What I did say was that should there be something unknown to us, or something that came along that raised doubts about this, I'm sure we would review the situation and take appropriate action. I will leave it at that for the moment.

QUESTION: With respect to what has occurred with some of the detainees in the West Bank, it seems to be, again, a revolving door where -- I've read in the paper, it's been in the wire services that some of the detainees were released, others were held. Has anyone spoken to the PA regarding this?

And also, what about detainees -- I mentioned it a week ago -- in Australia, the Australian Red Cross has been commenting, and are firmly against what has occurred there. I asked, and reiterate again, is it time that some of these detainees be returned to Afghanistan?

MR. BOUCHER: Well, first I think we have to differentiate between the two situations. One you have people being detained for possible -- you know, for links to terrorism and possible criminal activity, with regard to some of the murders that have taken place and the bombings that have taken place. So I think our view has always been that those people need to be detained, and firmly detained, until the proper judicial proceedings can be carried through.

On the situation in Australia, we are aware of the statements that have been made. We remain confident that the Australian government can examine this and take appropriate humanitarian action in these cases.

QUESTION: Do you have anything on the Daniel Pearl case? Apparently, there were some arrests made in Pakistan today, or late yesterday.

MR. BOUCHER: As I believe we have been for the recent days, we are going to be rather reticent and somewhat careful in this situation, because our primary concern, as I'm sure everyone's is, is the safe and rapid release of Mr. Pearl. We are fully engaged in that goal, but until it happens, we don't want to get into details of what may or may not be going on in the investigation.

I would just say generally the Pakistani police in our view have made progress in their efforts. US law enforcement officials are assisting them. We hope they are able to locate and free Mr. Pearl as soon as possible. They have made arrests, and they are aggressively continuing their investigation. Cooperation is very close.

We have also remained in close touch, both from the Department here and our Embassy in Islamabad, our Consulate General in Karachi, with Mr. Pearl's family and with the *Wall Street Journal*. Once again, I'd reiterate our view that Mr. Pearl should be released immediately and unconditionally. His continued detention is no help to the cause of those who hold him. And I'll leave it there.

QUESTION: Can we stay on Pakistan?

MR. BOUCHER: Can we stay on Pakistan?

QUESTION: Well, actually it's real quick, on President Musharraf. He is possibly --

MR. BOUCHER: That's Pakistan.

QUESTION: Isn't that Pakistan?

MR. BOUCHER: That's okay. On President Musharraf.

QUESTION: Okay, we'll make an exception.

QUESTION: He's coming next week, or is here, or what date? Do you have details of his --

MR. BOUCHER: I have a little bit. He is coming the 12th through the 14th for an official working visit. President Musharraf will meet with the President, the Vice President, Secretary Powell and other administration officials. For details on the other parts of his schedule, you will have to check with the Pakistani Embassy in Washington.

In our meetings with him, of course, we will be discussing a wide range of issues that relate to our renewed bilateral relationship. Continued cooperation with Pakistan in the coalition against terrorism is obviously one of the most prominent issues. Our desire to continue to support Pakistan's programs of economic and educational reform, and its restoration of democratic civilian rule are also important issues for us. And furthermore, we will discuss the process of peace and reconstruction in Afghanistan, and the current Indo-Pakistani tensions.

QUESTION: When you -- the desire to assist the economic and educational reforms, are we talking money? And do you have -- I mean, I assume you're talking money, and I want to know how much it is at this point.

MR. BOUCHER: Yes, we're talking money. We have -- this Fiscal Year, I think, we have identified \$600 million for those kind of programs to support -- in economic support for the Pakistani Government so that they could carry out those programs. This is the direction that President Musharraf set in his discussions with Secretary Powell last fall, and again earlier this year. And that's what we intend to support and continue supporting.

So there's other monies that we have made available to the Pakistani Government and various reasons, but the primary use of that \$600 million in economic support funds was going to be for these kinds of programs. I'm not sure if we have been able to identify exact amounts from next year's budget yet, but I'll check on that.

QUESTION: Can you tell us, what's your understanding of this incident that happened earlier today in Greece with your Ambassador and the MAA?

MR. BOUCHER: We'll give them a call.

QUESTION: No understanding? Okay. Can I ask another one, then, since you didn't know an answer to that?

Yesterday, the Secretary spoke with Foreign Minister Ivanov, yes?

MR. BOUCHER: Yes. Spoke to him yesterday and again today.

QUESTION: Have they come to an agreement that they will both be drafting the strategic weapons, an agreement for strategic weapons cuts along the lines of what the Secretary was talking about in the Senate? Because that's -- the Russian Foreign Ministry has said that.

MR. BOUCHER: I don't think I can characterize the conversations in that much detail. I would say that, as the Secretary noted in testimony, that we are willing to go forward with a legally binding arrangement. The Secretary talked about the various forms that that might take -- treaty, executive agreement, whatever.

And what I was going to say is that is what the Secretary has said publicly. And he has obviously discussed those issues with Foreign Minister Ivanov since then. I would not describe

the two ministers as drafters; nor would I say that we have reached a final understanding with the Russians on the exact nature of this.

QUESTION: What happened at this morning's talks with the Russians here on Afghanistan?

MR. BOUCHER: Well, this morning's talks on Afghanistan weren't due to be over until right about the time I started, and they will continue throughout the day. So we do have the US-Russia Afghanistan working group meeting here. And let me see if there is any other information I have that I can share at this point.

This is the sixth meeting of the Afghan Working Group that takes place today in Washington. The chairs are Deputy Secretary Richard Armitage from our side and Russia's first Deputy Foreign Minister Trubnikov on the Russian side. Obviously they are discussing the situation in Afghanistan, efforts to implement and maintain the Bonn agreement, as well as efforts to counter terrorism worldwide. They will be meeting through the day, I think.

QUESTION: Can we get something later in the day on that?

MR. BOUCHER: I will try to get you something on that, yes.

QUESTION: Well, this is a working group on Afghanistan, so they obviously discuss the issues surrounding Bonn and reconstruction. But the worldwide, the terrorism in general, has this broadened the scope of this -- is it now a US-Russia working group on terrorism?

MR. BOUCHER: We have had other expert and specific discussions on terrorism issues worldwide. I think, first of all, the issue of Afghanistan, al-Qaida and their links to what we have said is some 60 countries, has naturally led us to a very broad and worldwide discussion in the past. So I wouldn't say that this is precisely an expansion right now; it's just inevitably part of the subject matter when you discuss terrorism around the world.

QUESTION: Mr. Boucher, any comment on the Greek-Turkish dialogue for the Aegean Sea, which has been inaugurated by the two foreign ministers in New York City on February 7th? I asked you the other day, and you said you would look into that.

MR. BOUCHER: We posted an answer to the question that I don't have in my hand. But Phil does. So this news just in.

We welcome this further step by Greece and Turkey in their continuing efforts to build closer ties.

QUESTION: That's it? (Laughter.)

MR. BOUCHER: Short and sweet.

QUESTION: Thank you.

MR. BOUCHER: It's good. It's good that they're talking about it.

QUESTION: Back on Pakistan, the Secretary, in the month after December 13th, spent an awful lot of time on the telephone with leaders from both India and Pakistan. Has he had such conversations lately?

MR. BOUCHER: Yes. Funny you should ask; this one I have handy.

Wednesday, he talked to both Foreign Minister Singh and President Musharraf on that. And as you know, he has been continuing periodic contacts with those two leaders about the situation.

QUESTION: Well, is he still as optimistic now as when he left the region a few weeks ago?

MR. BOUCHER: We remain encouraged by the willingness of both sides to resolve the situation politically and diplomatically. We continue to work with both sides to make sure that we find ways to pursue that course.

But I don't want anybody to think the situation is not tense; there are still issues there that need to be dealt with. And the two sides need to look at, obviously, in the longer term, trying to see if they can't get back to a dialogue with each other that can resolve some of the more fundamental issues there.

QUESTION: Is there anything new on the 20 detainees in --

MR. BOUCHER: No.

QUESTION: (Inaudible) on the conversations from the Secretary and Ivanov in Russia? And did it at all come up, the issue of the Russians' unhappiness about CIA Director Tenet's comments about Iran?

MR. BOUCHER: I didn't hear specifically that that came up, so I don't think it did. I don't have a --

QUESTION: Isn't he --

MR. BOUCHER: We don't go word by word through every transcript for you, I'm afraid.

QUESTION: (Inaudible) the two sides to finishing this agreement, strategic arms, by May?

MR. BOUCHER: Well, the two sides have been looking at reaching an understanding on strategic framework issues by the time the Presidents next get together. That has always been the context of our discussion, the goal; it was the context of the discussion, I think, between the two presidents in Crawford, certainly when the Secretary was out there in December and subsequently. So that's what they're looking to try to do, yes.

QUESTION: Has there been any change in the US position about keeping weapons in reserve beyond the numerical goals that the two sides have --

MR. BOUCHER: I'm not aware of anything, no.

QUESTION: Richard, for the past couple years, people from this building have been quite involved with the UN and trying to establish a tribunal to try the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia, the remnants of the Khmer Rouge. This morning, the UN announced it was pulling out because the court could not be considered, couldn't guarantee its objectivity and independence couldn't be guaranteed. Does the US share that, the UN concerns on this, since you had such a -- this building had such a big role in trying to bring this about?

MR. BOUCHER: Well, as you noted, this is something we have worked on for quite some time, along with the United Nations. We have also noted, I think, the important roles that members of our Congress played in moving towards the establishment of a tribunal.

We have seen the UN press conference this morning; we are aware of their views. I think what I would say generally is that we think that this remains an important project. The tribunal is important to help resolve many of the issues that remain in Cambodia. We would hope that they would continue discussions. We think there are grounds for continuing their discussions.

QUESTION: In other words, you don't agree with the UN decision to withdraw from that operation?

MR. BOUCHER: We think that there are grounds for them to continue discussions. I will leave it at that.

QUESTION: Okay. I have another Cambodia question: have you decided what you make of the election that they just had? The European Union has come out and said that they were not -- they couldn't be considered free and fair. And considering the fact that you and the Europeans get along so well on most everything these days, I presume you share their opinion, but I just want to make sure.

MR. BOUCHER: We have both -- we have sort of three levels of assessment for you now. But I would note that we won't know the final results until February 19th.

On election day itself, the voting procedures were basically good. The results appear acceptable to the major parties, based on the preliminary reports that we have received by our embassy. Nonetheless, we criticized the overall process -- sporadic cases of violence, including murders and intimidation against candidates and activists in the pre-election period that we and other members of the international community have protested those before. But we also protested decisions by the authorities to limit access to television and radio. These kind of problems can affect the outcome of the elections.

Because of these factors -- the violence, the intimidation, the lack of media access to all the contestants -- we do believe that the election process fell far short from being free and fair.

At the same time, you know, in a slightly longer term perspective, one would have to say that because these elections will allow all the major political parties to participate in local government, that they do represent something of a step forward for democracy in Cambodia. We would expect to remain engaged to continue with a number of democracy promotion programs to try to assist Cambodia in its transition to democracy, including such things we do such as training newly elected commune council members on their civic responsibilities and supporting civil society organizations promoting democracy.

QUESTION: That's an unusual condemnation of an election that it is a step forward for democracy. You're saying that even though the election was flawed, it was a good thing?

MR. BOUCHER: Even though it's flawed, it's a good thing that the major political parties now have the ability to participate in political life, in these local institutions in Cambodia, and that we would hope that we would be able to work with them, and especially the new members of these councils, to help train them in the whole process, and to try to promote better elections in Cambodia in the future.

QUESTION: A follow-up on that: when you talk about killings and intimidations, was that something, in your view that was done by the authorities? Or was this something beyond their control?

MR. BOUCHER: We put out a statement in December. I'm not sure I have it here, but we certainly felt strongly that those were politically motivated.

QUESTION: To the advantage of the ruling party or whatever? I mean (inaudible) --

MR. BOUCHER: The criticism that we made at the time, and I think subsequently, was to say that a number of these election-related deaths were politically motivated. There was a UN report issued on January 15th that noted the shortcomings of police investigations into the deaths of political activists, highlighting the officials' reluctance to probe political motives. As I say, we publicly expressed our concern about the violence on December 14th.

Since last July in Phnom Penh and in Washington, we repeatedly raised at the highest levels the problem of politically motivated violence in advance of the elections. We would again call on the Cambodian government to bring to justice those responsible for election-related violence, and furthermore, we would ask the government in the post-election period to ensure the safety and security of all candidates.

So that basically there has been a lot of violence which appears politically motivated, but since there haven't been thorough and decent investigations, I'm not sure we can say exactly who committed it.

QUESTION: North Korea? What's the status of the contacts, if there have been any at all, with the representatives in New York?

MR. BOUCHER: Continuing periodic contacts, to maintain some communications with them. But no acceptance of our offer to have discussions, serious discussions, anytime, anyplace.

QUESTION: Is the President, is that in the plan, so that when the President goes to Seoul, is he going to urge again Chairman Kim Jong Il to finally make his visit to Seoul? The one that he announced but didn't carry out back last year?

MR. BOUCHER: I don't know if I can get that detailed into what the President will eventually discuss in Seoul when we're there. Certainly we have always felt that this was important, that it was important for the Koreans to maintain their contacts. We have supported President Kim Dae Jung's efforts to engage with North Korea, and we see that as a central part of establishing lasting peace and security on the Korean Peninsula. And we do believe that those discussions and contacts should continue.

QUESTION: China said it opposes the expansion of the war on terror, and also didn't like the "axis of evil." Do you have any response to that?

MR. BOUCHER: Not beyond what we have said before. We think the President's statements were quite clear, were quite well founded -- that the issue of the conjunction of states that work and support terrorism, those being some of the same states that are developing weapons of mass destruction, should be a concern to the entire international community.

Certainly the development of weapons of mass destruction and the ability to deliver them in the hands of irresponsible regimes like this is a threat to us all.

QUESTION: Thank you.

QUESTION: No, one more.

MR. BOUCHER: One more?

QUESTION: Maybe a quick one. What do you think of these French proposals for a voluntary code of conduct limiting missile proliferation? There's a meeting in Paris about this.

MR. BOUCHER: Don't think I've seen those. I'll have to check on it.

QUESTION: Okay. Thank you.

MR. BOUCHER: Thank you.

(The briefing was concluded at 2:00 P.M. EST.)

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