



Press Briefing

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SECRETARY POWELL: Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. I'll just say a few words, and then I'll be prepared to take your questions. The President had a very moving day in Botswana and he enjoyed the conversations with President Mogae, and had a chance to discuss regional issues with the President and compliment the President and his government on their commitment to democracy and all the successful economic development that has taken place in Botswana.

I think now, several days into the trip and with three countries under our belt, the President has been able to demonstrate to Africa and the rest of the world that he considers Africa to be a priority of his administration. It's not any surprise or news to me because from the very first days of the administration, the President made it clear that he wanted Africa to be a priority.

And if you look at what we have done over the last 2-1/2 years, whether it's with respect to the expansion of AGOA, whether it's with respect to all of the African leaders who have been to the White House and seen the President, whether it's what we've done with the Millennium Challenge Account and the focus that that account will have on developing nations in Africa, and what you've seen the President do at the encouragement of the Southern African Customs Union and the United States Free Trade Agreement, and especially what he has done with respect to HIV/AIDS, the programs that we have on a bilateral basis now, some \$350 million over the current year to African HIV/AIDS programs, and how we are trying to ratchet that up with the emergency fund and what we did a year or so ago with the global fund -- all of this, I think, is evidence of the President's priority and the President's commitment.

And he was able to discuss a number of regional issues, as you know, with the Presidents that he has visited so far in Senegal, South Africa and Botswana, and he looks forward to continuing those discussions in Uganda and in Nigeria. And I'm sure when we get to Nigeria, there will be an opportunity to discuss Liberia in greater detail with President Obasanjo, who has indicated a willingness to help resolve the crisis that is unfolding in Monrovia.

So we're very pleased with the trip to this point, focused on trade, focused on regional issues, focused on HIV/AIDS, all key elements of the President's agenda for Africa.

With that, I'd be delighted to take your questions.

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, even here in Botswana, in this country, which has one of the most aggressive AIDS programs in Africa -- the President had praised it, even promised them free drugs -- they haven't been able to reduce their infection rate since 2001. Is there a chance that the kind of programs that we're looking at are not effective for cultural reasons and do we need to refocus? And a second related question -- the House Appropriations Committee today cut back the first year's funding from \$3 billion to about \$2 billion, and we know that the administration said they can live with this, but Democrats and AIDS activists say it's not enough. Do you think that this cutback may damage the program?

SECRETARY POWELL: I would, of course, have preferred full funding of the President's request. We will make the best use of the money that Congress has provided to us. And I'll wait and see the completed action and see how this ultimately emerges from the Congress.

With respect to the programs in South Africa, Ambassador Hume and I have spent a great deal of time over the last two days discussing the South African programs and how we want to work with them to make sure that as the money begins to flow from the emergency fund, that we have solid programs that focus on all parts of the problem: education of young people; providing anti-retroviral drugs; making sure that systems are in place for the delivery of those drugs.

I can't comment on any specific program that the South African government is implementing right now. But we certainly are going to have a very aggressive effort as these monies become available to work with the countries in Africa, the 12 countries we've identified, and the two in the Caribbean, to make sure that the money is used for worthwhile programs that deal with education; deal with teaching young people to abstain, be faithful; the use of contraceptives; the ABC program that you will hear more about in Uganda tomorrow; and the provision of anti-retroviral treatment for those who are in need -- all aspects of the program. We're only going to be investing in those programs that will have a demonstrated payoff and we can see results.

QUESTION: When I said this country, I'm sorry, I meant Botswana.

SECRETARY POWELL: Oh, I'm sorry.

QUESTION: -- in terms of Botswana's program as being one of the most aggressive ones.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Oh, I'm sorry, excuse me, I misunderstood. We've been in two countries today. It is an aggressive program. They have an enormous problem. In fact, in my discussions today with the Foreign Minister, I said, how did the infection rate get so high in such a short period of time that you are now faced with this problem of the 38.6 percent, roughly, infection rate?

And to some extent, it was caused by people who came to Botswana to help with some of the construction activities and other infrastructure development activities of the last 15 years, or so. And so they are now getting on top of it, and they are starting to at

least cap out the rate. President Mogae said to President Bush that he is not satisfied with what they have done so far, but they believe they have started to bring the rate into -- let me put it this way -- tolerance, so that it is not growing, and it can start, now, to decline.

But it is a major tragedy facing Botswana. And I think the President of Botswana's commitment is total, and we're going to help them in every way that we can.

QUESTION: Would the United States be prepared to send peacekeepers to Liberia to ensure Taylor's departure? Is this something the President will be discussing with Obasanjo? And then I have a second question.

SECRETARY POWELL: Yes, the President is examining all of his options with respect to how we can assist in the transfer of power in Monrovia as President Taylor leaves. President Taylor has reaffirmed that he is prepared to leave the country upon the arrival of peacekeepers.

I just got off the phone with Kofi Annan to review the current state of play. Our assessment team in Monrovia has about finished its work, and I expect that we'll be getting a full report from them on the humanitarian situation in Monrovia. And this weekend, in Accra, Ghana, a U.S. team will be meeting with the ECOWAS military leaders to assess what will be required to move the ECOWAS troops into Monrovia and to support them, and as part of that assessment, what role the United States might play or ECOWAS thinks we should play. The President hasn't made any specific decisions on the level of support or actual participation -- boots on the ground combat units, is the essence of your question.

And I expect that over the next several days as we finish the assessment in Monrovia and get that report and the military assessment team working with ECOWAS over the weekend, the President will be in a position to make a decision.

QUESTION: And on Iraq, does the United States think NATO should increase its military or economic contribution to the Iraqi --

SECRETARY POWELL: Well, NATO really doesn't make an economic contribution, but we think the European Union should and will. And we've been in touch with our European friends.

With respect to NATO as a military alliance in Iraq, let me back up for a minute and point out that Poland, a NATO member, has one of the division zones in Iraq. Other NATO members, such as Spain and other nations, will be working with the Poles. And so many of the constituent members of NATO are making their contribution now: the United States, the United Kingdom, Poland, Spain, Italy, others are making their contribution now.

Whether there is a specific role for the Alliance at some point in the future, we're examining, as an alliance. Right now, NATO as an alliance is concentrating on helping the Poles deploy into Iraq. And then in the course of this summer, we'll be discussing with NATO whether there is a broader role that the Alliance can play. But most members of the Alliance are doing something now.

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, there's been some comparisons made between this presidential visit and that visit of Mr. Bush's predecessor, President Clinton. For all the attention that Mr. Clinton got, in your estimation, was that a matter of maybe more style than substance that you're trying to achieve during this visit?

SECRETARY POWELL: We're not here for style, we're here for substance. And I think the substance of this trip will compare to any previous trip by any former President. We have put before the people of Africa a solid agenda that talks about aid and trade, talks about investment, talks about the greatest threat to Africa right now and, frankly, to many parts of the world -- that's HIV/AIDS -- talking about expanded opportunities for investment. And so I think as the people of Africa examine the results of this trip, but more importantly, as they see the programs that we are putting in place and start to benefit from those programs, if there is any suggestion of not enough style, it will come.

And I think people have seen in President Bush's stops so far -- Goree Island, in his visits in Senegal, in Botswana today, and in South Africa -- a leader who is committed and we're not just here for show. Somebody asked me earlier, is this a PR exercise? Not in the slightest. This is a trip that the President has been wanting to take for a long time, would have taken earlier this year if it had not been for the situation in Iraq, and he is here for substance. And I think that is demonstrable.

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, you mentioned that some may think this is a PR exercise. You talked about what you have seen and what you believe to be a real commitment to Africa. But there is a political question. What effect do you hope this trip and this commitment has for African American voters back home that the President will likely face, will face in a reelection bid?

SECRETARY POWELL: I hope that all Americans back home, to include African Americans, will see the trip for what it's all about, what the purpose of the trip was. The purpose of the trip was not a political exercise and was not designed to influence the election of next year. It was designed to deal with real problems facing people in need in Africa. It was designed to reinforce our relationship with those countries that are moving in the right direction through dealing with the crisis of HIV/AIDS and to improve their economic situation. It was intended for the President to speak to leaders who are trying to resolve regional conflicts here in the continent.

And I hope that all Americans will see a President who is not just focusing on one part of the world, but realizes that America has leadership responsibilities around the world, and nowhere is that more important than here in Africa. Just like last month, nowhere was it more important than it was in the Middle East, when he went to Aqaba and when he went to Sharm el-Sheikh and we got the road map started.

So this is a President with a broad agenda and he is executing that broad foreign policy agenda. And I hope that next year the American people will recognize that, admire it, appreciate it, and respond accordingly.

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, regarding that erroneous report last January that Saddam Hussein tried to buy uranium in Niger, does the administration owe Americans and, in fact, the world an apology for making that statement? And should the administration beat Congress to the punch by making a detailed investigation and a detailed explanation of how something so important and so wrong got into a presidential address?

SECRETARY POWELL: I think this is very overwrought and overblown and overdrawn. Intelligence reports flow in from all over. Sometimes they are results of your own intelligence agencies at work. Sometimes you get information from very capable foreign intelligence services. And you get the information, you analyze it. Sometimes it holds up, sometimes it does not hold up. It's a moving train. And you keep trying to establish what is right and what is wrong. Very often it never comes out quite that clean, but

you have to make judgments.

And at the time of the President's State of the Union address, a judgment was made that that was an appropriate statement for the President to make. There was no effort or attempt on the part of the President, or anyone else in the administration, to mislead or to deceive the American people. The President was presenting what seemed to be a reasonable statement at that time -- and it didn't talk to Niger, it talked specifically about efforts to acquire uranium from nations that had it in Africa.

Subsequently, when we looked at it more thoroughly and when I think it's, oh, a week or two later, when I made my presentation to the United Nations and we really went through every single thing we knew about all of the various issues with respect to weapons of mass destruction, we did not believe that it was appropriate to use that example anymore. It was not standing the test of time. And so I didn't use it, and we haven't used it since.

But to think that somehow we went out of our way to insert this single sentence into the State of the Union address for the purpose of deceiving and misleading the American people is an overdrawn, overblown, overwrought conclusion.

QUESTION: So can I follow that up -- some British officials apparently think that what will happen in the end is weapons of mass destruction will not be found. There may be evidence that Saddam Hussein, before the war, either hid or destroyed weapons of mass destruction. Is that now what this administration thinks?

SECRETARY POWELL: No. And I cannot speculate on what an unnamed British official may or may not have said, or does or does not believe. Let's start at the beginning. I don't want to take you through the whole history, but it's instructive.

This is a regime that developed weapons of mass destruction, had them, used them, and in 1991, when we went to war, and I was Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff at the time, we were concerned that they would use those weapons against them -- against us, and everybody knew they had them.

When the first Gulf war was over, Desert Storm, we found them, and we destroyed some. And we looked for more. And the UN took it over, and for years the UN kept searching for more. And they never were able to get a full accounting and could not find them all. Resolution after resolution was passed, agreed to by the entire international community.

In 1998, Saddam Hussein created conditions that caused the inspectors to have to leave. They were getting close, and they had to leave. President Clinton was so concerned at time that he bombed. What did he bomb? He bombed for four days, in Operation Desert Fox, facilities that were believed to possess or developing or producing weapons of mass destruction.

The entire international community has felt, over this entire period, that Saddam Hussein had these weapons, and there was sufficient intelligence available to all the major intelligence agencies of the world that they existed. And they do exist. And when we went to the United Nations last year, when the President spoke to the United Nations General Assembly last September, he put the charge to the General Assembly: you have been saying; put the charge to the Security Council as well, you have been saying for all these years that this is a nation that has not come clean, here is one last chance.

And in resolution 1441, 15 nations unanimously approved that resolution that begins with a statement that Iraq is in material breach. So everybody had reason to believe, good reason to believe -- not figments of the imagination -- that they had weapons of mass destruction and had programs to develop more. And if there is anybody who thinks that Saddam Hussein had ever lost the intent to have such weapons, then I think that is the most naive view imaginable. And he had the chance to come clean to the international community; he did not take that chance, he did not take that opportunity. And the war followed.

And we have now removed a tyrant, a dictator. We have freed people. We have found the mass graves. We have found -- we are starting to find evidence that I think will make it clear that there was a more than adequate justification for this war and more than adequate authority for it under Resolution 1441.

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, many of your critics in America, African Americans, and many that are here are saying that President Bush and the Bush administration went into Iraq for oil. Many people are saying -- those same critics are saying that you're coming in for substance for Africa and trying to secure the west coast of Africa, Liberia, for that same situation, oil. What do you say to those critics?

SECRETARY POWELL: We have not taken one drop of Iraqi oil for U.S. purposes, or for coalition purposes. Quite the contrary. We put in place a management system to make sure that Iraqi oil is brought out of the ground and put onto the market in order to generate revenue for the Iraqi people. And we have put in place an auditing system and people who can oversee what we are doing. And the United States government is spending a great deal of money to support our forces over there. It cost a great deal of money to prosecute this war. But the oil of the Iraqi people belongs to the Iraqi people; it is their wealth, it will be used for their benefit. So we did not do it for oil.

By that same token, we did not come to Africa -- the President did not come to Africa on this trip for the purpose of taking anyone's oil or imposing our will on anybody. We are here to visit friends. We are here by invitation. We have been welcomed by the governments. And there has -- in the three days that we have been here, we have not participated in one single discussion with any leader about oil in any way, shape, manner, fashion or form.

And the people of Liberia are suffering under a terrible dictatorship. The United States has been asked by the international community, by ECOWAS, by the United Nations, we have been asked by President Taylor, we have been asked by the organizations opposing President Taylor to play a role in bringing this crisis to a solution. And we are examining what we should do.

So we are not here for any other purpose than to demonstrate our friendship, to demonstrate our commitment, and to see if we can help people in need.

QUESTION: Can you please tell us the purpose of the upcoming meeting with Kofi Annan? Is it going to be Liberia? Is it going to be AIDS? Is it going to be WMD? Tell us a little bit about that, please.

SECRETARY POWELL: The Secretary General is coming to Washington on Monday. He comes on a regular basis to meet with the President. And I'm sure we will talk about Iraq and we will talk about the reconstruction efforts in Iraq. He and I talked about it just a few minutes ago. And I'm sure we'll talk about Liberia.

I've talked to the Secretary General every day this week. We almost have a nightly check-in now to see what's going on in Abuja or Maputo, where he is today, or in Accra or in Monrovia. And so it will be a continuation of that regular

dialogue. And I think Monday will be a good chance for the Secretary General and the President to really review where we are, with respect to Liberia, after the African Union meetings this weekend and the assessment teams that finished their work both in Accra on the military aspects of the ECOWAS mission, and our participation in that, and what level of participation, and the assessment team coming out of Monrovia.

QUESTION: So they will have finished that work before the meeting?

SECRETARY POWELL: I know that -- I'm quite sure the humanitarian team will be finished by then. I'm reasonably sure of that. I can't be sure that the military team will be finished, because -- they're arriving now, but I don't think there meeting is until Saturday. So I can't be sure of that.

QUESTION: To follow on Liberia. Since there's growing pressure for something to happen, is it your expectation that the African troops would go in first, if Taylor is awaiting a peacekeeping force -- they're closest, they could get in their more quickly, and Taylor could exit the scene. Do you expect that to be the way things play out -- they go in first and the U.S. role would be fine-tuned later?

And I have one follow-up.

SECRETARY POWELL: I don't want to get too deeply into the -- how it might be synchronized. I think the preference would be for Mr. Taylor to leave at about the time that an ECOWAS force is arriving. The arrival of the ECOWAS force would have to be facilitated and supported in some way by the United States. Whether that is just with logistics units or command-and-control units or communications facilities or support of that kind, or whether there would actually be U.S. troops on the ground, the intention right now is to lead with ECOWAS. And the Secretary General has been quite clear about that.

The preference is to lead with ECOWAS, with the U.S. essentially playing a role of support. And if it's participation, then we'll make a judgment as to what the level of that participation is. But the chronology is -- or the synchronization and chronology in terms of who arrives on what day, that's all going to be worked out in the days ahead.

QUESTION: To follow, if I could, in the international community and some folks at home view Liberia not just as potentially a domestic political issue for this White House, but as an international one -- that despite the President's rhetoric on nation-building here, after Iraq, after so many frayed relations, that the international community reached out to us, this is a unique country, this is a chance for all those things to come together and for the President to send a political message through Liberia. Do you think that there is a message being delivered here?

SECRETARY POWELL: The international community very often looks to the United States for economic assistance, for political support, and for military support. This is a situation where I'm pleased that the United Nations and ECOWAS, that part of the international community, has made it clear that they have responsibility for the political transformation, the provisional arrangements that will be made and that will lead, we hope, to a new election after the departure of President Taylor. And the UN has made it clear that they have principal responsibility for the humanitarian relief effort and the reconstruction effort, the nation-building part of this.

And so this is a case where there is, it seems to me, going to be an appropriate division of responsibility and activity with the United Nations and ECOWAS. In other words, the region, working through the United Nations, doing the political transformation, doing the nation-building and providing for the humanitarian support, and the United States lending its good offices and some level of support and participation as appropriate, but letting others take the lead in the long-term work.

If there is U.S. participation, particularly on the ground, we fully expect and have made it clear to our friends in the international community, ECOWAS and the UN, that we see it as being very limited in duration and scope, and really for the purpose of getting ECOWAS in there in sufficient strength to do the long-term rebuilding effort, stabilization effort, and if, as it becomes appropriate in due course, to put the blue helmets on and be the peacekeeping force for the longer-term.

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, I believe you mentioned that the President in the State of the Union didn't mention Niger; he mentioned Africa.

SECRETARY POWELL: Right.

QUESTION: Do you think the other intelligence that was involved, has it stood the test of time? The Niger didn't. Did the other intelligence that went into that, did it stand --

SECRETARY POWELL: I think so. The definitive presentation of our intelligence case, frankly, was the presentation I made on the 5th of February. I spent an enormous amount of time with many of my colleagues and with a large part of the top leadership of the CIA, as well as a lot of the working-level analysts of the CIA, closeted in Langley at CIA headquarters for four days and three nights -- or it might be four weeks and three months -- it felt like it. And we were there well into the night, until midnight, 1:00 a.m. every morning, going over everything. We had lots and lots of information. The challenge was to get it down to that which was absolutely supportable and we were confident of.

There were a lot of items of information that I could have used if I had had three hours or three days. And there were other items of information that were pretty good, but maybe we didn't have a second, third, fourth source on, so let's not lead with that.

And the case I put down on the 5th of February, for an hour and 20 minutes, roughly, on terrorism, on weapons of mass destruction and on the human rights case -- a short section at the end -- we stand behind. And the credibility of the United States was at stake when that presentation was put forward. And I spent the afternoon waiting for the reaction -- not just your reaction, as important as that might be -- but I wanted to see what the Iraqis were going to do. I was interested to see what their response was going to be.

And I waited that afternoon and the next morning, I waited to see what their response was going to be. The first response was predictable: it's all a bunch of lies -- just as they'd been saying for 12 years, all a bunch of lies. And then I waited for, okay, hit me on something, attack some part of the presentation. Well, they're phony intercepts -- nonsense, they're real. I heard the actual -- you heard the voices. And then the only thing that came up over the next several days was a debate about one of the pictures I showed, as to whether those were chemical weapons bunkers or not. And that pretty much was it in the way of a counterattack.

One item I showed was cartoons of the mobile biological van. They were cartoons, artist's renderings, because we had never seen one of these things, but we had good sourcing on it, excellent sourcing on it. And we knew what it would look like when we found it, so we made those pictures. And I can assure you I didn't just throw those pictures up without having quite a bit of confidence in the information that I had been provided and that Director Tenet had been provided and was now supporting me in the

presentation on, sitting right behind me.

And we waited. And it took a couple of months, and it took until after the war, until we found a van and another van that pretty much matched what we said it would look like. And I think that's a pretty good indication that we were not cooking the books.

And what I keep saying to people is, if that was really a hydrogen maker for a weather balloon, and I'm Saddam Hussein or the Minister of Information we all got to know and love so well, that van would have been pulled out the next morning and they would have tried to blow us out of the water as they blew up a weather balloon. They didn't, they couldn't, they never showed -- they brought other vehicles forward; they never brought that one out.

And so it stood the test of time. It stood the test of time a couple of weeks ago, when, if you'll go back to the presentation on nuclear capability and weapons, I said that they had the brainpower, I said they had the infrastructure, and they've never lost the intention, and they have hidden components of their program. I talked about the centrifuge. And I made the point then that there was a difference of opinion about the centrifuge and let's continue to study it. I didn't use the uranium at that point, because I didn't think that was sufficiently strong as evidence to present before the world. And what did we see two weeks ago? An Iraqi scientist coming forward with a bunch of diagrams and blueprints and some centrifuge parts that he dug up out of his yard.

And so I think as you let Mr. Kay and the ISG that support the team that's out there looking at this stuff continue to look, continue to interview people, continue to pore through all the documents that we have, I think the case will no longer be in doubt.

QUESTION: -- describe the process you went through on Niger, was it just that they only had a single source? It appears from what we've heard, the British had some report and they kind of went on a single source. Is that what it turned out to be --

SECRETARY POWELL: What I had available to me, as we went through this -- I can't recover all from my failing, fading, aging memory, but there wasn't enough that would say, take this one to the UN next week. So we didn't. We weren't trying to over-sell a case.

Now, the British, as you noticed in the last day or two, still feel that they have enough information to make the claims that they have made. And I would not dispute them or disagree with them, or say they're wrong and we're right, or we're right and they're wrong. I wouldn't do that. Because intelligence is of that nature. Some people have more sources than others on a particular issue; some people have greater confidence in their analysis. And what I've found over many years of experience in this business is, at the end of the day, you're essentially making -- very, very often -- judgment calls, as opposed to an absolute, 100% certain fact. When you have 100% certain fact, it's great. But very often, you're making judgment calls. And, you know, remember, the reason they call it intelligence is that people are working very, very hard to keep you from knowing the truth.

QUESTION: If I could follow. I mean, let's say the American people assume that the administration was not intending to mislead or misinform. Why doesn't the administration see it as an issue of credibility when it comes to the President's State of the Union address? I mean, this is a statement of record. The President used this, he used the facts to make the case that Saddam Hussein was trying to build up his nuclear weapons arsenal, and making a case for war to the American people. Why is this not an issue of credibility when it comes to the President's delivering his State of the Union address and using that misinformation?

SECRETARY POWELL: I think the President in the State of the Union address had this sentence in there and it talked about efforts on the part of Iraq to obtain uranium from sources in Africa. There was sufficient evidence floating around at that time that such a statement was not totally outrageous or not to be believed or not to be appropriately used. It's that once we used the statement and, after further analysis and looking at other estimates we had and other information that was coming in, it turned out that the basis upon which that statement was made didn't hold up. And we said so. And we've acknowledged it and we've moved on.

I'm not troubled by this. I think the American people will put this in context and perspective, and understand perfectly why the President felt it was necessary to undertake this military operation with a willing coalition, in order to remove this tyrant from office, to make sure there are no more questions about weapons of mass destruction, because the regime that was determined to have them is gone. And we now have to focus on the future, and that is to build a better Iraq for the Iraqi people, and help them put in place a representative form of government that will make sure that there are never any more weapons of mass destruction in this country, and that it's a country that will live in peace with its neighbors. And we can chew on the sentence and the State of the Union address forever, but I don't think it undercuts the President's credibility.

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, the point is, I think, that very little time passed between the State of the Union address and your presentation to the UN, little more than a week. You know as well as anyone how carefully a State of the Union message is vetted, there are speechwriters and agency people from far and wide fighting to get their material into the speech, to make it a priority. This was clearly one of the keynote aspects of the President's speech, the case against Iraq. It's in the speech, it's in the State of the Union. Yet eight days later, you go before the UN and it's not credible any longer. How quickly does information, intelligence, whither away? And does the fact that it withered away to the point where you wouldn't use it 8 days later suggest -- with the benefit of hindsight -- that there should have been more questions about it?

SECRETARY POWELL: Well, with the benefit of hindsight, as we have said, it's a statement that, upon reflection and the test of time, we've acknowledged that there was trouble with it. And so -- yes?

QUESTION: But does intelligence usually get reevaluated so quickly?

SECRETARY POWELL: At the time it was put into the State of the Union, my best understanding of this is that it had been seen by the intelligence community and vetted. But on subsequent examination, it didn't hold up, and we have acknowledged that.

QUESTION: Who at the State Department vetted the President's speech with that line in the President's speech? Can you give us their names and their recommendations to the President?

SECRETARY POWELL: I saw the speech and I don't remember the specific line in the speech, but we all at a senior level get a chance to look at a State of the Union address. I saw it, and -- the whole speech -- and it was my understanding that it had been seen and cleared by the intelligence community.

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, you talked about intelligence being a process of judgment often. And I think what we're trying to get to is an understanding of the sense of urgency that the administration portrayed about the Iraqi threat before the war began. Was the underpinning of that intelligence making statements that were not totally outrageous? Or was it a determination to find the most credible understanding of the threat to present to the American people? In other words, we're looking for why a statement that is simply not outrageous would have been included in the President's State of the Union address, and not something that was thoroughly vetted and known to be true?

SECRETARY POWELL: I can't tell you more than what I've said to you, that the sentence in the State of the Union was not put in there without the knowledge and approval of the intelligence community that saw the speech. And what level and who, I don't know.

Okay, one more.

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, one more question. On Zimbabwe, the administration now seeks to have endorsed President Mbeki's quiet diplomacy despite your public call for a more robust approach to the problem. But there seems to be now, in the wake of that blessing, some confusion over the state of play, because the opposition Movement for Democratic Change has disputed President Mbeki's assertion that the two sides were talking and that there's no political stalemate. So what is your understanding of the state of play in Zimbabwe? And if the two sides aren't talking, is quiet diplomacy really still the best way to go?

SECRETARY POWELL: I think the President and President Mbeki yesterday made clear that they both have a similar goal and that's to see the democratic process undertaken in Zimbabwe, where the opposition is allowed to openly present its point of view and work with the government in finding a way to move forward. With respect to what negotiations may be going on between parties, I can't speak to that. And what President Mbeki's role may be in it and what he may be doing, I can't speak to that either.

The leader of the opposition made a statement today with respect to not having negotiations underway at the moment. Others in the opposition have said there are some statements going -- discussions going. So I can't answer the question as to what might be taking place.

Our rhetoric has been rather direct and sharp. We appreciate the efforts of President Mbeki and we appreciate the commitment he has to our shared goal of seeing a solution to the problem in Zimbabwe. And he has focused on quiet diplomacy. My first visit to South Africa two years ago, when I spoke at Wits University, I was quite harsh with the regime in Zimbabwe, President Mugabe, and remain so to this day.

And as the President said yesterday at the conclusion of his press conference with President Mbeki, he will continue to speak out strongly, and so will I.

Thank you.

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