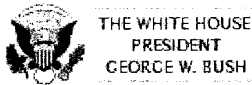


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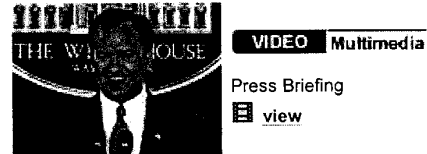

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For Immediate Release
Office of the Press Secretary
December 6, 2005

Press Briefing by Scott McClellan

James S. Brady Briefing Room

- [Economy](#)
- [Council of Foreign relations speech](#)
 - [Reference B](#)
- [Aid for earthquake victims in South Asia](#)
- [Secretary Rumsfeld criticism of media](#)
- [Rendition](#)
- [Iraq troop withdrawal](#)
 - [Reference B](#)
- [Venezuela fuel assistance](#)
- [Tax cuts](#)
- [Medicare](#)
- [Saddam Hussein trial](#)
- [President's economic team](#)
- [Vice President's speech](#)
- [Senator Lieberman working group suggestion](#)



12:40 P.M. EST

MR. McCLELLAN: Good afternoon, everyone. I want to begin with two things. First of all, the President yesterday spoke about the underlying **strength of our economy**, which is powered by our American workers and their ingenuity and hard work and know-how. Our economy is growing stronger and creating more jobs each day. Two-hundred-and-fifteen-thousand jobs were created in November. Nearly 4.5 million jobs have been created since May of 2003. The third-quarter GDP growth was at 4.3 percent. Consumer confidence and business investment are up. There are a lot of good signs about our economy.

Today we received more proof that our economy is very healthy, as we learned that productivity growth was up 4.7 percent in the third quarter. This represents the fastest productivity growth over a five-year period since World War II. And it's important to look at what this means for working families. More often than not, they mean -- higher productivity growth means higher wages, something that the President is very focused on.

The reason we are encouraged and optimistic about this productivity is that higher wages for American workers would be expected to be soon to follow. What happened in the late 1990s and throughout our history is exactly that. The other factor that typically leads to higher wages is a strong job market. And we certainly have that in place right now. So we're confident about the direction of our economy. And I just wanted to draw that to -- that new information to your attention.

Secondly, let me talk about tomorrow's remarks on the war on terrorism, and our plan for victory in Iraq. The President will be speaking before the Council on Foreign Relations and talking about our plan for victory. This is the second in a series of speeches leading up to the December 15th elections in Iraq. Each of these speeches has some common themes about our strategy for success. The terrorists have made clear that Iraq is a central front in the war on terrorism. It is critical that we defeat the terrorists and prevail in Iraq. That is critical to winning the war on terrorism.

And during this time of war, the President believes it's important to talk to the American people about the different aspects of that strategy. Like I said, there's some common themes -- the importance of winning, the stakes that

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2005/12/print/20051206-3.html>

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are involved and why it's so important that we succeed in Iraq, to our efforts to spread democracy in the broader Middle East and change the status quo in the Middle East and how that will help lay the foundations of peace.

And so I expect he'll talk about the nature of the enemy that we're facing, the stakes involved, and how we define victory and how we achieve it. There are three elements to this comprehensive strategy that he talked about last week. They are all integrated. As we move forward on one, that helps us move forward on the other. Those three tracks are the security front, which the President talked in great detail about last week at the Naval Academy. The Iraqi security forces are more and more taking the lead in the fight, and they're controlling more territory of Iraq.

There's the political front. The Iraqi people have shown time and again that they are going to defy the terrorists and build a free and peaceful future. And it's important that we help the Iraqi people put in place an inclusive democracy based on institutions that protect the interests of all, and that's what we're working to do.

Then there's the economic side, and we are working to help the Iraqi people rebuild their infrastructure, reform their economy and build prosperity to give all Iraqis a stake in their future that is based on freedom and peace.

So tomorrow the President will talk in greater detail about our approach for helping the Iraqi people with economic reform and reconstruction. And he will talk about how we have adapted to circumstances and challenges on the ground when it comes to the economic front. The Iraqi people are making steady progress. And he'll talk about some of the examples of success, about how our approach is working and how that approach is working in some areas -- important areas of Iraq. As the security is improved in those areas, we've been able to move ahead to help the Iraqi people on the reconstruction.

There have been challenges that we have had to learn from. We are learning from our experience. And much like on the security front, our approach has changed and improved over time. We are helping local Iraqi leaders and security forces overcome those challenges, and they are making some important gains in their future.

And the President will also talk about some specific concerns that still need to be addressed, as well. So that's kind of a general overview of his remarks tomorrow, and you will hear the rest from him.

And with that, I'll be glad to go to your questions.

Q So you're saying it will basically be on **Iraq's economic progress**?

MR. McCLELLAN: Well, he'll talk about all three tracks in our comprehensive strategy for victory, like I said, and he'll reiterate some of the themes that he will be talking about in each of the remarks. But tomorrow will be focused in greater detail on the economic side.

Q The President spoke at Annapolis last week; the Vice President at Fort Drum today. Who do you expect will be in the audience tomorrow? And how has the White House -- if at all -- shaped who will be there?

MR. McCLELLAN: Well, this is the Council on Foreign Relations, and so it will be members of the Council on Foreign Relations. It is an independent, non-partisan organization that is widely respected.

Q And so they handled all the invitations?

MR. McCLELLAN: I don't know if we had some, but it's --their organization is hosting this event.

Go ahead, Goyal.

Q Scott, just came back from the **earthquake area up in Pakistan and India**. A lot of dollar amount is coming from the East and West, including from the United States, but people are saying really not reaching enough to them for what it should be. And another thing is that, as far as India is concerned, the major topic --

MR. McCLELLAN: You're talking about earthquake aid for Pakistan?

Q And India, right. And Pakistan, yes. And another topic, in India, today on the -- the topic, is that winning war on terrorism, and most Indians support President Bush as the war on terrorism is concerned. But recently last week, an Indian worker in Afghanistan was brutally beheaded by the al Qaeda terrorists. What they are saying is, really, where the Indians stand as far as support for the U.S. war on terrorism is concerned? What President Bush has to say and --

MR. McCLELLAN: Two things. Let me take the first part of your question. First of all, I think that the people in the region are seeing the true generosity and compassion of the American people. They're seeing that through the example of aid workers, through non-governmental organizations. They're seeing that through the example of our military that has provided substantial help to people, particularly in the hardest hit areas of Pakistan, providing important equipment and resources to help get people out of harm's way and to help provide much needed relief to those people.

Remember, the President just recently announced that a number of leaders from the private sector are heading up a private relief effort to provide additional funding to those organizations that are on the ground, organizations that have a proven track record of helping people in need. And certainly, India has a lot of capability to respond to the needs of their people, but we always stand ready to assist India in any way possible, as well. And so we look forward to continuing to work with both those countries to help in any way that we can. And that's what we are committed to doing.

In terms of the war on terrorism, we have a very close partner in both those countries as we move forward to winning the war on terrorism. Both those countries are committed to doing all they can to protect their citizens from the threat of terrorism, and they are taking steps to address those threats, and we are working very closely with them. And it's important that we also continue to share intelligence and cooperate in many ways to address those threats.

Q Is President Bush going to talk about --

MR. McCLELLAN: Let me keep -- let me keep going.

Q About one thing --

MR. McCLELLAN: I'm sorry?

Q Is President going to talk about, in tomorrow's speech, as far as Afghanistan and al Qaeda --

MR. McCLELLAN: Well, tomorrow is focused really on Iraq and our plan for victory there.

Go ahead, Elaine.

Q Yesterday, **Secretary Rumsfeld**, in his speech, criticized the media. I'll read his quote. "We've arrived at a strange time in this country, where the worst about America and our military seems to go -- seems to so quickly be taken as truth by the press, and reported and spread around the world, often with little context and little scrutiny, let alone direction or accountability after the fact." Does the President, as Commander-in-Chief, share Secretary Rumsfeld's feelings?

MR. McCLELLAN: Well, the Secretary is a pretty plain-spoken kind of guy, and I think he calls it like he sees them. And I think that's what he was doing yesterday. I think you've heard the President's comments, and he's talked about the real progress we're making. Sometimes there's important developments on the ground that don't necessarily make the headlines, and it's important to talk about the real progress that we're making and look at the gains that are being made on the ground. Because we're going to win in Iraq -- the President talked about that earlier -- he knows we will win; we have a very clear strategy for defeating the terrorists and for helping the Iraqi people build a free and peaceful future; and we will succeed and our troops will succeed, and they have our full support in doing that. And it's important to take into account the good progress that's being made on the ground.

Q Does the President feel that -- the same way the Secretary does, in that the media has not done a good job in portraying --

MR. McCLELLAN: I think what I will continue to do is reiterate what the President has been saying. He's been talking about the real progress that's being made on the ground. I indicated my response to your question about Secretary Rumsfeld.

Q Back in March, the President said, when asked about rendition, "We seek assurances that nobody will be tortured when we render a person back to their home country." Today he said, "We do not render to countries that torture." That sounds like a change.

MR. McCLELLAN: No, I think he was referring to what we have previously said, which was, we have an obligation not to render people to countries if we believe they're going to be tortured. And in some instances we seek further assurances to make sure that people won't be tortured.

The United States of America is strongly committed to upholding our values and our laws and our treaty obligations, and that's what the President was talking about.

Q So there's no change --

MR. McCLELLAN: No, he's referring to --

Q -- even though he's said, we don't render to countries that torture? In other words, if you don't get assurances, they won't -- you won't send us --

MR. McCLELLAN: Yes, he's referring to what we previously have said, that we have an obligation not to do so.

Q On the same subject, Scott. When you do -- **when renditions do take place**, are there procedures in place to make sure that the United States, on a regular basis, monitors the conditions of the prisoners and the way they are interrogated on a daily basis, or so forth? And, if not, are such conditions now being put in place at White House instigation or the instigation of others?

MR. McCLELLAN: Well, a couple of things. One, Secretary Rice spoke at length in response to some questions that had been raised by the European Union, in response to a letter --

Q She didn't address this issue --

MR. McCLELLAN: -- response to a letter from Secretary Snow. And we make sure that we have assurances that people won't be tortured if -- or before we render them to a country. That's something that we place high priority on.

Now, this is about protecting our citizens. And all countries have an obligation to work together to do everything we can within the law to ensure the safety and security of our people. This is a global war on terrorism, and we work cooperatively with many nations. And we respect the sovereignty of each nation. And we have and we will continue to do so. It is their choice as to how they want to -- it is their choice in terms of how they want to participate. But in terms of renditions and talking in any specific way about it, I'm just not going to do it. I'm not going to get into talking about these issues because it could compromise things in an ongoing war on terrorism. And we're not going to do that.

Q Scott, one follow-up on that: Why not take them back to U.S. soil if you are concerned that they not be tortured, where you are under clear guidelines both of U.S. law and, of course, the whole torture issues that you raised. Why move them around to foreign countries --

MR. McCLELLAN: A couple of things. Renditions have been in place for a long time.

Q Yes.

MR. McCLELLAN: Secretary Rice talked yesterday about the Jackal and others that have been rendered previously and brought to justice, and the importance of rendition as a tool that will -- can help us prevail in the

war on terrorism. And she made very clear that we are going to do everything lawful within our means to protect our citizens. And we have to recognize --

Q Render them back here?

MR. McCLELLAN: Hang on, no, hang on, I'm coming to your question. We are in a different kind of war against a different kind of enemy. This is an enemy that has no regard for innocent human life. They don't wear uniforms. They don't report to a particular state or nation. They espouse an ideology that they seek to spread throughout the world. It's a hateful and oppressive ideology.

Now, in terms -- you jumped in there a second ago, so I forgot the first part of your question I was coming to.

Q Why not -- why not render them back to the United States where there is --

MR. McCLELLAN: Response to that -- the way I would say -- respond to that is that we make decisions on a case-by-case basis, working with other countries, in terms of where individuals are rendered.

Q What is the purpose of rendition, other than, if it is not, in fact, to subject detainees to a degree of interrogation somewhat more difficult than that which they would be subjected to in the United States? And that being the case, what definition of torture does the United States understand and accept?

MR. McCLELLAN: The ones that are defined in our law and our international treaty obligations. We have laws --

Q If that's the case, then why bother to render anybody?

MR. McCLELLAN: We have laws that prohibit torture. We have treaty obligations that we adhere to. And the Convention Against Torture is a treaty obligation that we take seriously and we adhere to. And in that treaty, it -- those treaties and laws, it defines torture. And --

Q Then what's the purpose of rendition?

MR. McCLELLAN: -- so we adhere to our laws and our treaty obligations, and our values. That's very important as we move forward in conducting the war on terrorism.

But what this is about is how we conduct the war on terrorism, how we protect our people, our citizens. And each country's highest responsibility is the safety and security of their citizens. And we all must work together to prevail in this different kind of war. And intelligence helps save lives. And we have an obligation when people are picked up on the battlefield -- unlawful enemy combatants -- to do our part to question them and learn information that can help us prevent attacks from happening in the first place. And we work very closely with countries throughout the world to make sure that we are doing all we can to protect our citizens -- but we do so in a lawful way.

Q But if we are committed to international conventions against torture, what, then, is the purpose of rendition?

MR. McCLELLAN: Again, I'm not going to get into talking about specific intelligence matters that help prevent attacks from happening and help save lives. As Secretary Rice indicated yesterday, the steps we have taken have helped save lives in America and in European countries. We will continue to work with --

Q But you seem to be suggesting that --

MR. McCLELLAN: No, you're --

Q -- there's more to be gained by interrogating these people outside the United States than there is inside.

MR. McCLELLAN: It depends. It's a case-by-case basis, Bill, and in some cases they're rendered to their home country of origin. You cited two examples of past renditions yesterday, one individual that was involved in the attack on the World Trade Center in 1993; another individual that is one of the most notorious terrorists of all time.

Q But how do we know they weren't tortured? They claim they were.

MR. McCLELLAN: I'm sorry?

Q How do we know they weren't tortured?

MR. McCLELLAN: Well, we know that our enemy likes to make claims like that.

Q I want to go back to David's question about whether or not the administration is looking into any new ways of monitoring rendition activities in other countries that --

MR. McCLELLAN: I answered his question and I'm not going to --

Q You didn't answer that question, Scott.

MR. McCLELLAN: I'm not going to talk any further about it.

Q You didn't say anything about whether or not -- you said we receive assurances from other countries. You never did say anything about whether or not we, then, go further and make sure that nothing is occurring. Is the White House --

MR. McCLELLAN: Secretary Rice talked about it yesterday. And I talked about it today. And we're not going to comment further than that when it comes to intelligence matters that are helping us to prevent attacks from happening and helping us to learn important intelligence that saves lives.

Q So there's no monitoring -- so there's no mechanisms, no monitoring after --

MR. McCLELLAN: You're asking me to talk about intelligence matters that I'm just not --

Q We're not asking you to talk -- we're asking you whether there's a procedure in place --

Q To make sure --

MR. McCLELLAN: You've had your question, I've responded to it and this what I'm going to say.

Q I had my question; you haven't responded to it.

MR. McCLELLAN: Well, I've told you why. I have responded to it and I've told you the reason why. And I think the American people understand the importance of protecting sources and methods and not compromising ongoing efforts in the war on terrorism, and that's why I'm just not going to talk about it further.

Q I'm not asking you about an individual case. We're asking whether there is a procedure in the U.S. government to make sure that the system you tell us will not result in torture, in fact, doesn't.

MR. McCLELLAN: A couple of things. One, again, I'm not going to talk further about intelligence matters of this nature. So let me make that clear, again.

Q We're not asking on an intelligence matter.

MR. McCLELLAN: No, this is relating to intelligence matters; it absolutely is, David. And because of the nature of the enemy we face and the different kind of war that we're engaged in, these are matters I think the American people can understand that we're not going to talk further about because of the sensitivity and because of the fact that they could compromise our ongoing efforts.

We need to prevail in this war on terrorism. We've got to do everything we can within the law to protect our

citizens, and we need to work with other countries to help save lives, and that's what we're doing.

Q The question you're currently evading is not about an intelligence matter.

MR. McCLELLAN: You've had my response, Bill.

Go ahead.

Q Scott --

MR. McCLELLAN: It is relating to intelligence. Go ahead.

Q If the countries to which we are rendering detainees are not torturing, are we to conclude that they have some technique that is, in fact, more successful in gaining intelligence than the United States?

MR. McCLELLAN: No, I didn't say anything -- I didn't say anything to suggest that.

Q A separate issue, then, if I may.

MR. McCLELLAN: Sure. I would encourage each of you to look closely at what Secretary Rice said yesterday, because she addressed this in detail.

Q For months, discussions of a potential U.S. withdrawal were met, in this briefing room and by the administration, by a suggestion that that would send the wrong message to the troops, to the Iraqis, to the terrorists, to the world. In the last month or so, in the 35-page document last week, and your own comments, et cetera, we're now told that there -- that the administration fully expects a **conditions-based withdrawal** potentially to start next year. And today, the Vice President said that going forward we'll have fewer nationwide operations and more specialized operations against the terrorists, we'll move out of Iraqi cities, reduce the number of bases, and conduct fewer patrols and convoys. Does that not telegraph to the enemy our intentions and allow them to plan for it tactically?

MR. McCLELLAN: No, the President talked about that very issue last week in his remarks at the Naval Academy.

Q Scott, Congressman William Delahunt of Massachusetts has entered into a deal with **Hugo Chavez of Venezuela** to provide low-cost heating fuel, and apparently the State Department is furious about this, and there may be another deal in the works with the Bronx in New York. Why is -- why are not American oil companies like ExxonMobile stepping in to say, Mr. Chavez, we've just had a huge windfall profit in the last quarter; turn your tankers around, we'll take care of our own in this country. And since there was just a hearing up on Capitol Hill to discuss the windfall profits, why isn't there pressure --

MR. McCLELLAN: Well, I think -- I think the State Department has spoken out about this specific issue when it comes to Venezuela, and they've talked about that. I really don't have anything further to add to what they've already said.

In terms of oil companies here in America, we've made very clear what our views are, and that all of us have a role to do to help address high energy prices. And we are taking action to do so. This is an important need that we need to address for the American people. High energy costs harm our economy. Our economy is strong and continuing to grow stronger. And the President yesterday spoke at length in his remarks about now that we have this foundation for growth in place, we need to continue to act on pro-growth policies to help better the lives of our workers and our families. And that's what we're doing. We passed a comprehensive energy strategy. Now we need to move forward to expand refining capacity and take additional steps. And that's what we will continue to do.

Q Scott, last week the NEC director said that the White House absolutely supports the Katrina tax relief bill. But I was wondering why the White House supports **across-the-board tax relief** which would extend to certain establishments like casinos -- which they said they're going to rebuild anyway -- and certain other establishments, like massage parlors and liquor stores?

MR. McCLELLAN: I think for the reasons we've stated previously, Paula. I think you've asked this question of me - or someone else in this room has -- and I've responded to it. We don't believe you can be selective when it comes to addressing the economic needs of the region. It should apply equally and fairly to all those businesses.

Q I thought the White House, in principle, is opposed to targeted tax relief.

MR. McCLELLAN: Well, we've talked about the importance of providing tax relief to all Americans. And, yes, we have talked about that specific issue. That's why we've provided tax relief to all those who pay federal income taxes. And the last thing we need to do right now is raise taxes -- that would be a significant impact on those who are recovering in the region and it would be a significant impact on the pocketbooks of the American people.

We need to make the tax relief that we've put in place permanent; we also need to continue to take steps to help people in the region as they're rebuilding their communities and rebuilding their lives. That's what we're doing; we're working with Congress to meet their needs. We've already provided some \$60 billion in assistance to the region; \$17 billion of that we're working to reallocate to recovery and reconstruction needs in the deficit reduction package efforts. And we're working with Congress to make sure that people have their needs met.

Q Also, do you think there should be greater Medicaid rebates by drug manufacturers so that you don't have to cut so much on low-income --

MR. McCLELLAN: We believe that we need to move forward on **Medicare** reform and modernize Medicare and to close loopholes. And we can find savings and slow the growth in Medicare by addressing those important needs. And I think that's what the American people want us to do -- to make sure that people who need the help are getting the help, and to take steps to restrain spending.

Q Scott, you very graciously answered seven questions from two reporters, and I have a mere three-part question. First, at the National Christmas Tree lighting last week the President said, "Each year we gather here to celebrate the season of hope and joy, and to remember the story of one humble life that lifted the sights of humanity. Santa, thanks for coming." And the question: Will the President apologize to Christians offended by his referring to Jesus as Santa?

MR. McCLELLAN: The President meant exactly what he said, Les.

Q Second, does the President know of any way that the passport of Ramsey Clark could be revoked on grounds of his consistent actions against the United States?

MR. McCLELLAN: Look, there are procedures in place for all American citizens when it comes to those issues, and we expect those procedures to be followed for all Americans.

Q When defendants in --

MR. McCLELLAN: One more.

Q Yes, one more. When defendants in criminal cases in the United States have shouted or otherwise disrupted the court, haven't there been cases where they have been bound and gagged in court? And would the President recommend this for Saddam Hussein?

MR. McCLELLAN: It's up to the Iraqi people to **hold Saddam Hussein to account**. There is an Iraqi court, led by Iraqis. It is a special tribunal that was set up to hold Saddam Hussein and his regime leaders to account for the atrocities they committed. This was a brutal regime that was engaged in systematic torture. They had rape rooms and torture chambers. And we are hearing eyewitness accounts of the kind of brutality that this regime was engaged in. When you have an eyewitness talking about human blood being in a meat grinder, and talking about electric shocks, you see the true nature of this regime. And the court that is in place today shows the change that is coming to Iraq. This is an important step in building a democratic future for Iraq, based on the rule of law. The Iraqi people are the ones that will hold Saddam Hussein to account for the atrocities he committed against the Iraqi people, and the crimes he committed against humanity.

Q Thank you.

Q Scott, it was two years ago today that the administration fired Secretary O'Neill and Mr. Lindsey and overhauled his **economic team** ahead of the -- ahead of an election year. Given the fact that the President feels the -- feels it's necessary to promote the economy now, does that suggest that he doesn't have confidence in his current team to communicate that message?

MR. McCLELLAN: Our economic team is doing a great job helping to build on the foundation for growth that we have in place. He has a great team: Secretary Snow; Secretary Gutierrez; Secretary Chao; Al Hubbard, our Director of the National Economic Council; Ben Bernanke is leaving as Chairman of the Council of Economic Advisers to move on to the Federal Reserve. And we will move forward on replacing that position as quickly as we can when he is in place.

But we have an economic team that is doing a great job on behalf of the American people, and helping us to put in place the kind of pro-growth policies needed to continue creating jobs and creating an environment for future growth.

Go ahead.

Q In the **Vice President's speech** this morning, he said -- and this was in the context of the war in Iraq -- he said, "We weren't in Iraq on September the 11th, and the terrorists hit us anyway." Why does the Vice President continue to give the impression that Saddam Hussein's Iraq was connected with the September the 11th attacks, when the President has conceded that they were not, and the 9/11 Commission conceded they were not?

MR. McCLELLAN: I don't think that does. I don't think that does. But I think what you have to understand about September 11th is that September 11th taught us some important lessons: one, that we need to take the fight to the enemy and engage them abroad to prevent attacks from happening here at home -- that's the best way we can protect the American people. And two, to address the root causes that lead to people flying planes into buildings or strapping on bombs and blowing themselves up and killing innocent men, women, and children. And that means spreading freedom in the broader Middle East and changing the status quo.

The Middle East had become a dangerous breeding ground for terrorism, and what we're working to do is bring some hope and opportunity to the region. Iraq will inspire the rest of the Middle East by its example of building a free and democratic future for its people, and help encourage those who, around the Middle East and beyond, want to live in freedom. So I think that you have a misunderstanding of what he said.

Q "We weren't in Iraq on September 11th and the terrorists hit us anyway." Would you not agree that there's some linkage there?

MR. McCLELLAN: No, I think he's making the point that the President made last week, that those who suggest that if we weren't in Iraq, that the terrorists would just be idle. That's an absurd allegation, because the terrorists are determined to spread their fear and chaos and violence throughout the civilized world. They attacked us well before we were in Iraq; they attacked other countries well before any decisions were made to go into Iraq.

Q The Vice President --

MR. McCLELLAN: They continue to try to carry out the attacks. That's why it's so important that we're engaging the enemy in Iraq, that we're taking the fight to them there. And all you have to do is look back at the letter from Zawahiri to Zarqawi to see the nature of the enemy that we face and what they recognize is involved in Iraq, because they have said themselves that when we succeed in Iraq, it will be a major blow to their ambitions. And that's why we are going to continue to move forward toward victory, because it is critical to prevailing in the broader war on terrorism.

Q Does the Vice President now agree that Saddam Hussein's arrest was not involved in September 11th?

MR. McCLELLAN: Those questions have been gone over ad nauseam in the past. Thanks.

Q Scott, how long will it take for Iraq to achieve the level of economic stability where the U.S. will not have to be in there propping it up?

MR. McCLELLAN: Well, first of all, what we are there doing is helping the Iraqi people reform their economic institutions and move forward on reconstruction. The President spelled out in the plan for victory that we released last week for the American people the progress that we're making on the different fronts, including the economic front, and the challenges that lie ahead.

And the President, again, will talk about what **our definition of victory in Iraq** is tomorrow, and that is putting in place an Iraq that is not a safe haven for terrorists to plan and plot their attacks. That's very important for people to understand, because the terrorists want to try to create a safe haven in Iraq from which they can plan and plot attacks and spread their fear and chaos throughout the broader Middle East and attack -- or take over other parts of the Middle East. That was spelled out in the letter from Zawahiri to Zarqawi.

But victory is defined as making sure that terrorists and Saddam loyalists can no longer threaten Iraq's democracy, making sure that Iraqi security forces can defend and protect their own citizens, and making sure that Iraq is not a safe haven for terrorists to plan and plot attacks.

In terms of the progress that's being made on the economic front, I encourage you to listen closely to the President's remarks. I mean, he's going to talk about the challenges that remain and how we've really worked to adapt and change to the circumstances on the ground. But there's important success being made when it comes to the economic front. And he'll highlight some of that.

Q Does the administration have any feel, any sense --

MR. McCLELLAN: If you're trying to put some arbitrary sort of timetable on things, the President has talked about that.

Q Well, he's talked about that **in terms of troops**, but I'm asking in terms of tomorrow's topic, is there any feel at all for how long it will take to achieve these reforms that you just mentioned to achieve the kind of economic stability that this country will be able to stand on its own feet?

MR. McCLELLAN: Well, each front is -- this is an integrated approach. Go back to what I said at the beginning. The security front, the economic front, and the political front all affect one another. And as we move forward on each, it helps us move forward on the other. And that's why it's important we focus on these three areas. That's makes up the comprehensive strategy for victory that the President has in place. And we need to continue to help support the Iraqi people as they build their security forces. We need to continue to help the Iraqi people as they reconstruct their country and put in place economic reforms that will lead to prosperity for the Iraqi -- for all Iraqis.

Remember, Iraq has a lot of potential when it comes to their economic future. But this was a country that for three decades was led by a brutal dictator who was more intent on putting that great wealth to the betterment of the few in power than the betterment of the people, and neglected the infrastructure and neglected the economy of that country. And so it takes time to rebuild from that.

And the international community has a responsibility. You make it sound like it's just the United States. All of us have a responsibility to help the Iraqi people as they move forward on putting in place the market reforms and establishing the institutions for democracy to succeed.

Go ahead.

Q Mr. McClellan, you mentioned a couple of times today our efforts to -- continuing efforts to spread democracy --

MR. McCLELLAN: I was calling on him, but go ahead.

Q All right, well, just to be clear about something, we didn't go to Iraq to spread democracy, did we? I mean, we didn't go to Iraq to help the Iraqi people. It was initially a security issue -- just to be clear on that.

MR. McCLELLAN: Well, we spelled out the reasons we went to Iraq, and I would encourage you to go back and look at that. We have liberated 25 million people in Iraq, and 25 million people in Afghanistan. And spreading --

Q But it wasn't the reason we went --

MR. McCLELLAN: -- spreading freedom and democracy -- well, we're not going to re-litigate the reasons why we went into Iraq. We've made very clear what the reasons were. And, no, I don't think you define them accurately by being so selective in the question.

In terms of the lessons of September 11th, again, let me reiterate what those were -- that we need to address the underlying causes that lead people to hijack airplanes and fly them into buildings, or that lead people to strap on bombs and blow themselves up. And that's what we're doing by spreading freedom in the broader Middle East. And there are different ways we can support those efforts.

The Middle East peace process -- the President has been providing a lot of strong support for the Israeli people and the Palestinian people as they move forward on the Middle East peace process. That's important for spreading hope and opportunity in the broader Middle East. We are continuing to support the people of Afghanistan as they move forward. And we'll continue to support and help the Iraqi people as they move forward, too.

Q But just to be clear, that's a different argument than was made to the American people before the war --

MR. McCLELLAN: Our arguments are very public. You can go and look at what the arguments were. That's not what I was talking about.

Go ahead.

Q In terms of the economic development of Iraq, does this mean the President is committed to a long-term post-war economic Marshal Plan over there to try to establish --

MR. McCLELLAN: Well, the international community is providing help. Remember, Iraq is moving forward on debt relief, and the international community has stepped forward. The international community has stepped forward with some significant contributions, in terms of helping Iraq with reconstruction.

Iraq has a lot of vast resources that they can help -- that they can put towards rebuilding the infrastructure and helping with their long-term economic needs, as well. And the President will talk about that in his remarks, too.

Go ahead.

Q I'm thinking -- I'm thinking, really, about the Bosnia experience. We have now pulled out of Bosnia, but it still has not been reconstructed economically. And I just wondered whether we would -- if this is another 10- or 15-year commitment for the United States --

MR. McCLELLAN: You might want to look at -- look at the planning we outlined last week. But go ahead, Kelly.

Q The President and Vice President have both been speaking very warmly about **Senator Lieberman** lately. And the Senator has suggested that the President should appoint a bipartisan working group on Iraq to meet perhaps weekly, including members of Congress, National Security officials, to talk about progress there, and to be able to report back to the American people. Is that an idea the President would welcome?

MR. McCLELLAN: Senator Lieberman has talked about the visible and practical progress that is being made on the ground, and he's talked about the importance of winning in Iraq. And I think while there may be disarray and disagreement within the Democratic Party, Senator Lieberman is someone who is firmly committed to supporting our troops and succeeding in Iraq. He recognizes the importance of victory there and the importance of succeeding.

Q So is his suggestion something the administration would embrace?

MR. McCLELLAN: I haven't had a chance to look at what he said today, Kelly, so I'll have to take a look at that. But we work very closely with him in the war on terrorism, and we appreciate his leadership, and we appreciate his ideas. And I'll take a look at that and see if there's anything else to add.

All right, thank you.

END 1:16 P.M. EST

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