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CREATOR: Leah F. Pisar (CN=Leah F. Pisar/OU=NSC/O=EOP [NSC])

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SUBJECT: conference call

TO: Brooke D. Anderson (CN=Brooke D. Anderson/OU=NSC/O=EOP@EOP [NSC])
READ:UNKNOWN

TEXT:

Summary of today's press call:

Talbott briefing this am on US-Russia relations (backgrounder.)

Ross back from ME. Don't know if he has briefed POTUS yet, but he will.

1 year arms embargo on Ethiopia-Eritrea. USUN feels this is a big victory in Security Council. Not addressing whether or not this is a "new type of sanction."

Sierra Leone: 1) Jesse Jackson in Africa. Met with Obasanjo. Travel to Liberia, Mali, Guinea and possibly Sierra Leone. 2) Sankoh is in hands of authorities, custody matter for their govt. to address. USG is reviewing courses of action. 3) USUN: Considering resolution in increasing # of troops (might come up this afternoon.) More troops are on their way now. Our #1 priority at the moment is the release of the detainees.

POTUS will do Sunday, 7:00 Oval Office address on PNTR.

Also, it looks like we're set for the 12:00 conference call tomorrow. Participants: State, Defense, Treasury, Energy, Commerce, USTR. The number is 757-2105 and the pin is 2122.

RECORD TYPE: FEDERAL (NOTES MAIL)

CREATOR: "U.S. State Department" <stategov@UIC.EDU> ("U.S. State Department" <state

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SUBJECT: 000829 Reeker U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE DAILY PRESS BRIEFING

TO: DOSBRIEF@LISTSERV.UIC.EDU (DOSBRIEF@LISTSERV.UIC.EDU [UNKNOWN])
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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE

DAILY PRESS BRIEFING

DPB #88

TUESDAY, AUGUST 29, 2000, 1:42 P.M.

(ON THE RECORD UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED)

MR. REEKER: Hi, everybody. Welcome back to the State Department on this fine Tuesday afternoon.

I would just like to take an opportunity to welcome a number of our colleagues from embassies around the world, our Foreign Service National employees from a number of embassies who are focused on information and press work. We are very happy to have them here to watch this process, and I am sure all of our journalist friends will be on their best behavior for our international guests so that they can see what I have to go through every day. Maybe I should have worn my flats.

I don't have any announcements so, Barry, please.

QUESTION: Could you tell us please why Cuba's senior parliamentarian is being denied a chance to attend a parliamentary session that begins tomorrow in New York? I mean, I know the authority under a proclamation, and I know the proclamation is being cited, but what is really behind it? Just yesterday, we heard from the US, you know, complained about arbitrary actions taken by Cuba. Why has the US decided now to keep this man from going to a meeting in New York?

MR. REEKER: Let me start out by pointing out and reminding everybody that Section 222(f) of the Immigration Act clearly states that visa records are confidential. So I don't want to get into specifics of individual visas in terms of applications, granting of visas or denials.

In terms of the meetings that you are describing, those would be meetings in New York of the Inter-Parliamentary Union. That organization is hosting this meeting, not the United Nations; and we, the United States, are under no obligation or requirement under the UN Headquarters Agreement to issue visas to individuals attending Inter-Parliamentary Union events.

Our decisions, in terms of issuing or not issuing visas, are based on the Presidential Proclamation of 1985, which I think you alluded to, Barry, which gives us authority to deny entry of Cuban Government officials if such entry will be contrary to the interests of the United States.

I will note that we have authorized the issuance of visas to some Cuban officials who applied to travel to this Inter-Parliamentary Union event and just reiterate, I think, as you did for me, that these actions are in fact consistent with Secretary Albright's January 1999 policy that we would, among other actions, streamline visa issuance for qualified persons other than senior Cuban Government officials.

QUESTION: I understand your - the proclamation gives you authority. I was just hoping that we could get some explanation why the attendance by the top parliamentarian is inimical to US interest, but the attendance by two of his deputies is okay. It does smack of arbitrary, the kind of arbitrary behavior you are accusing - you and the Secretary were accusing Cuba of yesterday.

MR. REEKER: I think, once again, if you listen to what I said just a moment ago, as the Secretary outlined in January 1999, our policy is that we would, among certain other actions, streamline the visa issuance for qualified persons other than senior Cuban Government officials. So obviously the decisions that were made, in terms of issuing visas for this independent event, this meeting taking place in New York, were made within the lines of the Presidential Proclamation going back to 1985 and within the lines of the Secretary's policy on that.

QUESTION: So can I just get this straight?

MR. REEKER: Yes.

QUESTION: You are not allowed to say if you reject a visa for someone, but you can say if you've given a visa to someone?

MR. REEKER: Generally, Matt, Section 222(f) of the Immigration Act says that visa records are confidential, so we try not to discuss --

QUESTION: (Inaudible) - authorized?

MR. REEKER: Right. And I didn't go into specific names or otherwise.

QUESTION: Well, then let's try it this way. Has a very senior - has the most senior lawmaker in Cuba been denied a visa to travel to the United States?

MR. REEKER: Under the policies which I outlined earlier, the

United States and the Department of State determined not to issue visas to some people that had applied. I am not going to get into specifics of those who applied, those who were denied visas, those who were granted visas for travel, in trying to keep with the policy of confidentiality of visa records under the Immigration Act.

QUESTION: Your reading of the law means that you can say that some Cuban officials have been granted visas, but it does not allow you to say that some have not, then; is that it?

MR. REEKER: I just said some have not been granted visas.

QUESTION: How many were denied?

MR. REEKER: I'm not going to get into specifics, and that's how we're going to try to keep within the confidentiality of visa records.

QUESTION: But for the record, it's not law, is it?

MR. REEKER: I'm sorry?

QUESTION: It's not a law; it's an executive action.

MR. REEKER: Section 222(f) of the Immigration Act, that is a law that makes visa records confidential.

QUESTION: I didn't mean that. I meant the action was taken under a Presidential Proclamation.

MR. REEKER: Right, and in keeping with the Secretary's policy from January '99.

QUESTION: That's what I meant.

MR. REEKER: Yes.

QUESTION: Is it not a contradiction of US policy to give these kind of ideas with the Cubans when in this forum, for example, you are promoting Cuba to participate with other countries, democratic countries, to give them the idea how to --

MR. REEKER: Stop right there, because this is not something that we're promoting. This is an independent event organized by something called The Inter-Parliamentary Union. It's not a US event. It's not a UN event. It's an independent event.

QUESTION: But you don't see that as an opportunity for other countries to pressure Cuba in terms of helping their democratic process?

MR. REEKER: I think we make our points about Cuba and how they should open their minds and their processes to democracy often from this podium. Certainly our policy on Cuba is very clear, and I think a number of other countries from around the world continue to make that point as well.

QUESTION: Phil, in New York, maybe the head, or at least one of the senior people of these union, called this a disappointing

action by the United States. Also, the matter of the United States not paying its dues to this union was brought up. Is that accurate? Is the US behind in its dues?

MR. REEKER: The Inter-Parliamentary Union is not an organization to which the executive branch of government has a connection. I would refer you perhaps to folks on the Hill if you want something. It's not an organization that we --

QUESTION: I'm lost. Maybe dues is the wrong word, and obviously I don't have a lot of background on the subject. Just what was said up there today plainly was that they were encouraging the United States to make up its dues or its shortfall in contributions.

MR. REEKER: I'd be happy to try to get you somebody that may know somebody about the Inter-Parliamentary Union but, again, it's an independent organization. It's not the UN and it's not something to which the Department of State or the US executive branch is involved.

QUESTION: I know, but I'm also sure you're not trying to diminish the importance of this meeting.

MR. REEKER: Not at all.

QUESTION: There were 141 governments there; by latest count, 155 parliamentary leaders; and Cuba is the host next year. So the timing is somewhat strange.

MR. REEKER: Thank you for those comments.

QUESTION: Maybe I missed something here. You said that you have the authority to deny entry to people if it's contrary to the US interest. Can you just say in general terms why this is contrary? I mean, all during the '80s you would say Arafat couldn't have a visa because he hasn't renounced terrorism and that's the reason.

MR. REEKER: Look. A determination was made. Each visa request, each visa application, is taken individually and on its merits, and a determination was made not to issue visas to some people and to issue visas to other people.

QUESTION: I understand that. But what I'm asking you is what is contrary to the US interest in the case? Not specific to a person, but in general.

MR. REEKER: I'm just not in a position to describe our deliberations on a specific visa case, but again to point out that our actions and the way we review these are very consistent with what the Secretary instituted in January 1999 in terms of our policy that we would try to streamline visa issuance for qualified persons other than senior Cuban Government officials.

QUESTION: You said that some were denied. Could you say how many?

MR. REEKER: I don't have specific numbers, no.

QUESTION: Can I ask you, even though it's not a UN event per se, does a visa carry restrictions on travel and, in fact, participation in other - in other words, would a visa - is a visa to attend this meeting, this kind of conference, does it carry with it restrictions on other activities and travel?

MR. REEKER: Each visa is issued individually, but I would remind you that a visa provides the person permission to apply for entry to the United States. Their entry and limitations on their travel are then determined by the Immigration and Naturalization Service at the time of entry to the United States at the port of entry.

QUESTION: If you can't tell us how many visas were denied, can you tell us how many visas were applied for?

MR. REEKER: I don't believe I even have that. I checked and was told that we authorized the issuance of visas to some Cuban officials who applied for travel to attend this meeting of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, and that's all I have.

QUESTION: Different subject?

MR. REEKER: Different subject. Are we done with Cuba?

QUESTION: Can you tell us what you know about the American who has been seized in the Philippines?

MR. REEKER: Yes. We understand that an emissary of the Filipino secretary who has been the Philippine's chief negotiator for the release of other hostages held by a faction of the Abu Sayyaf group on Jolo Island has reported that he has seen Jeffrey Schilling on Jolo Island in the hands of another faction of the Abu Sayyaf group. So the United States strongly condemns this latest kidnapping and we call for the immediate safe and unconditional release of this hostage and the other hostages still held captive as well on the Island of Jolo.

Our Embassy became aware of this situation early this morning local time in the Philippines when there was a radio report that reported or discussed the kidnapping of an American citizen. Our Embassy consular and security officials immediately were in touch with Filipino authorities in Manila, and our Embassy continues to work very closely and intensely with the appropriate authorities in the Philippines to try to determine all the facts in terms of this case, and we're taking the appropriate action, including sending several Embassy officials to Zamboanga on the Island of Mindanao where they can meet with the local Filipino authorities to discuss this. Obviously there are Privacy Act considerations in terms of the individual who has been reported kidnapped and the family there. We are trying to be in touch with the family as well.

QUESTION: Any -- (inaudible) - his condition?

MR. REEKER: I don't have any details of his condition. As I said, we have sent officials to work with the Philippines to look into this. Now, I think yesterday I made very clear our position on hostages. The United States does not make deals with terrorists, and this organization, the Abu Sayyaf group, is an

organization which is listed in our Patterns of Global Terrorism as one of the radical Islamic separatist groups operating in the southern Philippines.

QUESTION: On that point, the Libyans have now - whose actions in securing the release of the six hostages the other day, you have said you disagree with it and this Department has said it disagrees with, have offered, or said that they are willing to mediate in this case to secure Mr. Schilling's release. I'm wondering, is such assistance or such mediation welcome by the United States?

MR. REEKER: I have seen those same reports, and I would just refer you to what I said yesterday and what I said just now; that, as we have said before, the US Government wants to see an end to this ordeal and the release of all the hostages immediately and unconditionally. We support efforts by negotiators to find a quick resolution. We are extremely concerned about the safety of all the hostages, and obviously look forward to their release. But, again, as far as payingransom is concerned, US deals with terrorists; we will not pay ransom; we will not change policies; we will not release prisoners or make any other concessions that reward hostage-taking.

QUESTION: Right. But, okay, how about if the Libyans said that they're willing to mediate and they promise not to pay any ransom in this case.

MR. REEKER: Well, again --

QUESTION: I'm trying to find out if you're willing to accept the help of Libya in any form short of what you just said.

MR. REEKER: I think it's premature to make any specific statements on any requests or offers or issues specifically involving the case because we're trying to determine all the facts. We have seen these reports involving Libya's apparently positive role in other Filipino hostage situations.

And as I said, we support efforts by negotiators, whomever they may be, to find a quick resolution to this case. We are extremely concerned about the safety of this individual reported to be kidnapped, and all of the hostages, and look forward to their release.

QUESTION: In light of this kidnapping, how concerned is the State Department about the safety level of the Philippines for US citizens?

MR. REEKER: Well, I think all of you will be aware that we have a Public Announcement in place as part of our consular information system which highlights some of the issues and specifically tells American citizens to avoid travel to the southern and western areas of the Island of Mindanao. And I can provide you copies of that, or you can find it on our website.

I think this highlights the dangers that we outlined and have showed in those announcements for American citizens, and certainly the tragic kidnappings that have been taking place over a period of months and have been highlighted in the press make

people quite aware of that.

QUESTION: Do you know when that last Public Announcement was updated?

MR. REEKER: I believe June 8th was the most recent update of that. And obviously given the current situation, they may be updating it to include information on this specific incident that does involve reportedly an American citizen.

QUESTION: So can you tell us nothing more about this gentleman and why he was there and why he was traveling to the Philippines? And also, can you rule out whether he was working for the US Government?

MR. REEKER: In terms of your last question, it is longstanding US policy not to comment on such questions in terms of employment. But more generally, we have seen his name reported and, at this point, we are operating on the presumption that this individual, an American citizen, has been kidnapped. But in terms of providing more information about that individual, we are just not in a position to do so given the Privacy Act considerations. Obviously that individual is not in a position to do Privacy Act waivers, but we are trying to be in touch with his family, with the next of kin, and it would just be inappropriate at this point to give any information about the individual.

QUESTION: There has been some confusion about the circumstances under which he came to be in their control. There have been reports that he was looking for these people, and there are also reports that he was snatched. Do you all have any information?

MR. REEKER: I have seen all those reports, and I don't have anything more specific on why he was in the area, other than to point out the warnings that we have in terms of our Public Announcement. Those are the kind of facts that I think our Embassy team, working with the Filipino authorities, will be trying to establish as they continue to look at this.

QUESTION: Have they talked to his wife?

MR. REEKER: I am not aware of the particulars of whether the individual even has a wife. I do believe there are parents involved as well that the Embassy and the State Department have tried to be in contact with in our usual consular response to notify next of kin.

QUESTION: I have one more. Are you aware of any demands being made by the rebels in order to secure his release?

MR. REEKER: I have seen a number of reports to that effect, including the initial media report that brought this to our attention, which was monitored by our press staff at the Embassy in the Philippines and what then had our Embassy officials responding immediately and working closely with the Filipino officials. But I am not in the position to outline or confirm any specifics from that organization or what they have reported to be demanding.

QUESTION: Can you give a readout on Ed Pope? What's the latest?

MR. REEKER: Are we done with the Philippines and the situation there? Okay.

I think most of you are aware that Mrs. Pope, the wife of Edmund Pope, the United States citizen who is currently in jail in Lefortovo Prison in Moscow, that Mrs. Pope spent an hour and a half today with her husband this morning, in the prison there in Moscow. She was accompanied by two of our consular officers from the American Embassy in Moscow.

Mrs. Pope and her husband and the consular officers discussed his health, the status of his legal case and other personal matters. As we had noted, Congressman Peterson, who has been very helpful in this case, is in Moscow accompanying Mrs. Pope. Congressman Peterson was denied permission to join the visit with Mr. Pope at the prison.

And I will just reiterate once again that Russia's treatment of Mr. Pope since his arrest raises serious concerns about the safety and security of American business travelers in Russia, and about our ability to protect the health and welfare of American citizens who may be traveling or living in Russia. And as we have noted, we are continuing to examine the implications of Russian actions very closely.

I will reiterate once again that we have seen absolutely no evidence that Mr. Pope violated any Russian laws, and we are both disturbed and concerned that he remains in custody. To the best of my knowledge, no trial date has been set, and we believe, once again, that the Russian Government should release Mr. Pope and allow him to return home.

QUESTION: Can I follow up?

MR. REEKER: Sure, follow up.

QUESTION: Can you see, perhaps, how the Russians might view this, perhaps what he was doing there? Apparently he was trying to buy some hardware or technology which may be perfectly legal and declassified but, in the Russian view, that could fall into a gray area? And second, are you at all in a position to ever resolve this, or is it completely dependent on what the Russians will do?

MR. REEKER: The charges that were brought against Mr. Pope on April 13th were charges of violation of Section 276 of the Russian Criminal Code, which deals with espionage. To date, the Russian Government has not provided us with any details about the basis of these charges. And once again, as we have said repeatedly, we have seen no evidence that Mr. Pope has violated any Russian laws, and that we are both disturbed and concerned that he remains in custody. They have had plenty of time to review this case, and our feeling is that the Russian Government should release Mr. Pope and allow him to return home now.

QUESTION: In this particular case, Phil, can you say on the record that he was not working for the US Government?

MR. REEKER: Again, we have a position of not --

QUESTION: But you said he was a business travel. Was it not US business?

MR. REEKER: Again, as I say, we make it a policy, as you know very well, that we don't discuss those things. However, we are not aware that Mr. Pope has violated any laws, to our knowledge. No evidence exists that he has violated Russian laws, and we believe he should be released.

Further on this subject?

QUESTION: You said that you were examining the implications of this. Can you expand on that a little bit? What do you mean?

MR. REEKER: Well, it is something we had discussed here while you were away, and at some length. It is the responsibility of the Russian Government to provide for the care and well being of US citizens who are under detention in Russia. We hold them to that responsibility, and it is certainly our obligation to try to see that that responsibility is carried out.

So we need to carefully look at the implications of what they have done in terms of medical care, which has, in our view, not been provided to Mr. Pope. I would add that we understand that the medical examination was performed yesterday, in which a blood sample was taken. That would be in line with what they promised to do in terms of performing additional medical tests after their prison doctor had met with our embassy doctor. That was August 15th.

Obviously all of our information about Mr. Pope's health is secondhand because the Russians have refused to allow our embassy doctor access. We continue to insist that the Embassy doctor and an English-speaking specialist be allowed to see Mr. Pope. We have asked to see results of the tests that were carried out yesterday as soon as possible.

And again, it is our right to act to ensure that the protections that the Russian Government is required to give are carried out. Again, it is their responsibility to protect the welfare of detained American citizens. And as I indicated, we have seen no evidence that he has violated any laws there, and we are disturbed and very concerned that he remains in custody.

Still on this?

QUESTION: Still on this, yes. In the past several weeks when we brought this up, you have said that the President has taken this up with Mr. Putin, that Secretary Albright has spoken with Mr. Ivanov. Has there been any recent, last few days, conversation at those kinds of levels?

MR. REEKER: I don't have any specific additional readouts on that. You are correct, and we have talked about it here a number of times that the President raised this with Russian President Putin. The Secretary has raised this on several occasions with her counterpart, Foreign Minister Ivanov. They will continue to do so. Obviously this is being raised and pressed at the highest

levels, and we will continue to keep it on the agenda for those types of meetings and conversations.

Still on Mr. Pope?

QUESTION: I think there was an implication earlier on that maybe the US would be less of a booster for Americans to invest in Russia. Your statement said something, not only that you have some thoughts about how Americans are treated, but I thought you were implying that American businesspeople might be advised to be careful before they --

MR. REEKER: I think obviously people have to take - make their own decisions in terms of travel to Russia or any country. As I said, it is the Russian Government's responsibility to see to the care and well being of an American citizen or any country's citizen that is being held in Russia.

Their treatment of Mr. Pope to date, since his arrest, certainly raises some serious concerns about the safety and security of American business travelers in Russia and about our ability to protect the health and welfare of American citizens that are traveling there or living there. And we have to continue to look at the implications of that, and that is what we are doing, watching that very closely.

QUESTION: Well, so are you saying that US business travelers should, when considering going to Russia, should kind of think twice about going over there?

MR. REEKER: That is not exactly what I said, Matt. It is something we have been --

QUESTION: I am trying to squeeze some nugget out of what you said.

(Laughter.)

QUESTION: You're specifically mentioning business travelers; you're not saying it raises the question of all people?

MR. REEKER: Actually, I did indicate that. I said, if we go back to what I said - and I'm happy to check the transcript - that the treatment of Mr. Pope since his arrest by the Russian Government raises serious concerns about the safety and security of American business travelers in Russia and about our ability to protect the health and welfare of American citizens - if that suits you better - all American citizens traveling or residing in Russia.

QUESTION: At this point, though, a formal - some kind of statement, public announcement, the kind of thing that you released yesterday on Lebanon, for example, you're not at that point yet?

MR. REEKER: You know, I would be happy to refer to our Consular Information Sheet on Russia and see where it stands now, but in terms of something specific, I don't have that. Obviously we have to examine the implications of Russian actions as this case is prolonged.

Are we done with this?

QUESTION: Do you have anything on Wendy Sherman's talks with the Russians today?

MR. REEKER: I don't. Ambassador Sherman should be in Moscow today. I won't have a readout of those. She's there through tomorrow. Perhaps once she's done with those talks - and then as you will recall, Ambassador Sherman will move on for trilateral talks with the Japanese and Koreans to be held in Seoul.

QUESTION: Another Pope for a second?

MR. REEKER: Yes.

QUESTION: Congressman Peterson, was he carrying any sort of message or anything?

MR. REEKER: You would have to ask Congressman Peterson that.

QUESTION: He wasn't going with any word from the Administration?

MR. REEKER: No. I mean, we have worked very closely with Congressman Peterson in terms of strongly supporting his travel, which he's doing obviously in support of his constituents, including Mr. and Mrs. Pope, so we're very supportive of that. We are in regular contact with his office and with other congressional contacts who have expressed concern about this case. To my knowledge, there is no particular US Government funding for his travel. He is there as a representative of this American citizen who is one of his constituents, and obviously so is Mrs. Pope.

QUESTION: I keep thinking about just last week these four journalists who were jailed in Liberia on charges of spying and they were - you know, Jesse Jackson was saying he'd go over. Is there anything being contemplated along those lines?

MR. REEKER: Well, I think as I indicated, this has been raised at the highest levels. We have been talking about this for weeks now in terms of the Embassy being very involved and whenever possible making consular visits, pushing continuously for access for our Embassy physician who could actually make an evaluation of Mr. Pope's medical case. The Ambassador clearly involved. Clearly we've been involved here in Washington too in terms of contacts with Russian representatives at their embassy here.

And as we just discussed, the President has discussed this with the Russian president and made our concerns very clear, and Secretary Albright has raised this with Minister Ivanov. So I don't quite see the connection with Liberia. We've been very involved and keeping very close track of this case for quite sometime, since Mr. Pop

QUESTION: New topic?

MR. REEKER: New topic. Last chance on Russia?

QUESTION: "Time is short," quoth the President with regard to the 13th of September deadline, and Mr. Ross says to keep an eye

on settling the matter. What is the State Department currently doing? Can you tell us about Mr. Ross and his work?

MR. REEKER: Well, let's just recap where we stand on the Middle East a little bit. As you know, the President arrived in Cairo early this morning to meet with President Mubarak to discuss the Middle East peace process and determine how best to move forward.

The President met with President Mubarak during his refueling stop in Cairo after learning that he, President Mubarak, won't be coming to the Millennium Summit at the United Nations in New York next week.

I think most of you would have seen comments by Ambassador Dennis Ross, who said in Cairo that the main purpose of the two presidents' meeting was to compare assessments on the kinds of contact both we and the Egyptians have had with the two parties, to compare notes and bring each other up to date, and to consult on how best we can help the parties to move towards an agreement.

It was described as a very good meeting and, as President Clinton said, we and all the parties understand that we need Egypt's involvement and leadership and support to move forward towards a real peace in the region.

QUESTION: Thank you.

QUESTION: How would you assess the prospects of a three-way summit in New York next week?

MR. REEKER: I don't have any specifics on the individual meetings that the President or the Secretary will have in terms of the Millennium Summit next week and the UN General Assembly in the following weeks. As we have talked about, clearly the Camp David summit produced significant progress on all of the core issues, and the Israelis and the Palestinians have resumed their own direct discussions since the conclusion of Camp David. And just to reiterate what President Clinton has said, we are ready to support the process in any way possible. If the parties are ready to make the tough decision, we're ready to bring them together. But I don't have anything on set meetings or specifics.

QUESTION: Do you have any news or specifics about the lobbying effort to get the Palestinians to back down on their September 13th deadline?

MR. REEKER: I think everything I pointed out was very clear.

QUESTION: It certainly was. However, the Israelis are saying that Mr. Ross will be compiling - they call it a catalog, I guess it's a summary of Camp David, putting things on paper. And as you said, there was great progress there until, of course, the thing collapsed. (Laughter.) I'm sorry - no, I mean, they were making great headway and then it fell apart. (Laughter.) That wasn't intended to be funny.

MR. REEKER: You certainly broke up the hall here.

QUESTION: I don't know why. You made progress and then you stumbled over Jerusalem and the refugees. But what is the point of the catalog, which is what I'm driving at? What are you

attempting to do?

MR. REEKER: I'm not aware of a catalog. I've seen various press reports. What I can say about Ambassador Ross - and I think this will come as no surprise - that he is continuing his meetings in the region. We do hope that he is getting some vacation time in while he is there. He has, over the past ten days, met with Israeli Prime Minister Barak, with Egyptian Foreign Minister Moussa and with Chairman Arafat. Obviously he was in Egypt for the presidents' meeting this morning there. And he continues to meet with negotiators from both sides, and he'll continue to do so through the end of his trip.

QUESTION: (Inaudible) - to be to meet with Barak and a report on the Mubarak-Clinton meeting. Do you happen to know if that has happened yet?

MR. REEKER: I don't have a further readout after the presidents' --

QUESTION: But you have nothing on the - obviously you're thousands of miles away, but you have nothing on the notion of putting things on paper, which didn't work too well in Shepherdstown, as I remember?

MR. REEKER: I wouldn't try to speculate on what kind of notes Ambassador Ross keeps or what his way of meeting with and discussing these issues with the negotiators would --

QUESTION: No, it sounded like more formal than that. It sounded like the US, as the mediator, was trying to get - intended to put on paper the areas of progress and hoping to build from there.

MR. REEKER: As I said, there was a lot of progress at Camp David. I think we've talked that through. We're all quite aware of where things stand and, as the President said, we are ready to support the process in any way we can when the parties are ready to make the tough decisions.

QUESTION: Do you have any reaction to the resolutions adopted by the Jerusalem Committee meeting in Agadir, Morocco which calls for the Muslim word but is Jerusalem?

MR. REEKER: No. I saw those statements, and let me say that the statement of the Jerusalem Committee of the Organization of the Islamic Conference reflects the members' understanding of the sensitivity of the negotiations currently underway between the parties. We appreciate attempts to make a constructive and positive contribution to the success of these negotiations and, as I said earlier, we certainly continue to support this process and the resolution of all permanent status issues through direct negotiations between the parties.

QUESTION: (Inaudible) - has been the process overall?

MR. REEKER: Well, we hope that all countries will encourage both sides to build upon the successes, the progress that was made at Camp David, and to make the difficult decisions that are necessary to achieve a real comprehensive peace.

QUESTION: There had been some concern expressed in this building that what the Jerusalem Committee - well, some hope expressed by this building that the Jerusalem Committee would not do anything that might make it more difficult to talk about the negotiations over the city. Is it your view that this, what they have come up with, does in fact fulfill the hope of - that hope?

MR. REEKER: Again, I don't know if I can characterize it in the way you want me to, but we do appreciate the attempts to make constructive and positive contributions to the success of the negotiations.

QUESTION: But that stops short of saying whether this was a positive contribution. Was this an attempt that failed, or is this an attempt that --

MR. REEKER: I think, again, I'm not trying to categorize as failure or success somebody else's meeting. What I'm saying is their statement - we were not a part of that meeting, obviously - the statement of the Jerusalem Committee reflects certainly the members' understanding of the sensitivity of the negotiations. I think that obviously reflects some of what you were saying and what we discussed before. And we appreciate attempts to make a constructive and positive contribution. And, again, we hope - we will continue to hope that all countries will encourage both sides to build upon Camp David and the successes and progress that we all saw there and to make those difficult decisions now so that they can achieve a real comprehensive peace.

QUESTION: But you're not prepared to say that this was a positive contribution to the process?

MR. REEKER: I think I outlined exactly our reflections on the OIC meeting in Jerusalem. Anything further on that?

QUESTION: It is not on this, but it is on Israel. I guess on Thursday, I understand, that the senior Israeli Defense Ministry officials will be coming to this building to talk about what they hope will be wrapping up an arms exporting agreement. Can you give any kind of expectation, if you think that is going to be done before the Barak-Clinton meeting? Can you talk about it at all?

MR. REEKER: Yes. In anticipation of your presence here, I checked into that. Upcoming talks between the US and Israel is part of our continuing discussions that we began earlier this month in response to the President's announcement after the Camp David summit that we will: (1) conduct a comprehensive review to improve our strategic relationship with Israel; to conclude a Memorandum of Understanding regarding our bilateral assistance; and consider assistance to upgrade Israel's security in view of its withdrawal from Lebanon.

I think we talked about earlier the three days of discussions that were held earlier this month which were intensive, constructive, beneficial. But, at the time, we said that more work needs to be done and we had planned to have additional discussions. The present discussions are a continuation of that work that we began in early August, and that is what will be taking place with the group you described.

QUESTION: Will you be talking at all about technology transfer and the question of whether, if Israel builds its own military technology, who it can sell them to? There has been talk about a list of four countries: China, Russia, India and Pakistan.

MR. REEKER: Well, in terms of questions about Israel's - any proposed arms sales or transfers, I would have to refer you to the Israeli Government, obviously. I think our talks will focus on the subjects that I listed. We are not engaged in any discussions with Israel regarding US arms sales to any country.

QUESTION: We are not engaged regarding US arms sales?

MR. REEKER: Right. Just to clarify, he was asking about arms sales generally so I was making a point that we are not engaged in any discussion about that. We do take into consideration the effect on Israel's qualitative military edge when making our decisions about arms sales to other countries. But US arms sales policy is not a subject of these discussions at all.

QUESTION: How about Israeli arms sales policy?

MR. REEKER: I think, in broadly discussing the issues that we outlined - that the President outlined - in terms of a comprehensive review of our strategic relationship with Israel, and a Memorandum of Understanding regarding our bilateral assistance is what we will be talking about there. I don't have anything more specific beyond that.

QUESTION: Also, you said that the present talks? This is right; they begin Thursday?

MR. REEKER: Yes, exactly. Present, as in this is the set of talks.

QUESTION: And they're how long?

MR. REEKER: I don't know. I don't have a specific set of --

QUESTION: But they are not open-ended days?

MR. REEKER: No. We had three days of discussions last time. I would anticipate a similar session beginning later this week.

More on this?

QUESTION: No. This is Peru and Berenson.

MR. REEKER: Anything else on this? Middle East? Israel? I know that you are not asking about Israel, Mr. Lambros, so, Barry, please.

QUESTION: What about Peru and Greece? (Laughter.) Berenson. Is the US obliged to - as people close to the family suggest - is the US obliged to try to get her freed, even though her situation has been eased a bit?

MR. REEKER: Well, let's talk about the case of Lori Berenson. I think as I told some of you last night when news first emerged on

this, that we are very pleased with the decision of the military court in Peru to transfer from the military court system to civilian court system her case. Since Ms. Berenson's conviction nearly five years ago, we have maintained that the trial proceedings against her did not meet due process standards, and so we very much welcome the court's decision there.

My understanding is that the case has been transferred to the National Prosecutor's Office, and that they will determine the appropriate next steps and, in the meantime, Ms. Berenson remains in prison in Peru. We had serious concerns, which we have reported on in our Human Rights Report for Peru, about the openness and fairness of trial proceedings in the military court and, in fact, in cases related to terrorism in the civilian courts.

And you will recall, Barry, that with the Organization of American States and a number of our partners throughout the hemisphere, we continue over a long period now to press the Government of Peru to undertake serious reforms and ensure democratization and transparency in a number of Peruvian institutions, including the courts.

So this action by the military court is a welcome first step. We hope there will be a just and expeditious resolution of this matter, and we are going to continue to engage the Government of Peru regarding just that.

QUESTION: If you believe the suggestion of the family and people close with them, is that the US has an obligation to try to get her liberated. Is that correct? A legal obligation? I know you are looking for a better system and more justice --

MR. REEKER: In terms of the development that we have seen today, and obviously we - as I just said, we welcome that as a first step.

QUESTION: Right.

MR. REEKER: And we hope that there is expeditious resolution of the matter overall. We take no position on her guilt or innocence. But we have maintained since the trial back in 1996 that the proceedings did not meet due process standards. And we will continue to express our concerns regarding this matter to the government, as well as our hope, as I have just said, for a just and expeditious resolution to this.

So we welcome today's development in terms of the legal matter, but our concerns about Peruvian democracy remain unchanged. And as I indicated with the OAS and other partners in the region, we will continue to press on those.

QUESTION: Because the civilian court is seen as a much more open and transparent body, do you think that the State Department will send -- or the Embassy will send -- some representatives to view the trial, because it's --

MR. REEKER: I know our consular officials always try to attend trials. I don't know the specifics. Obviously we don't have a readout yet on what the next steps are. It has simply been

transferred to the prosecutor's office, and they will determine the next steps. So it would be obviously premature to speculate on what the next steps would be.

QUESTION: So in such cases where there is an American on trial in a foreign country, will there be representatives to ensure that she has a just and fair trial, and if they see that she's not, what are the proper steps to take?

MR. REEKER: Well, my understanding is that Ms. Berenson has legal representation in Peru, and obviously her legal representation is exactly that. We would certainly monitor this trial, just as we monitored the other one and highlighted our concerns in terms of the serious shortcomings in terms of due process and international standards in that case.

But right now this first step has been taken and the case has been transferred to the prosecutor's office, and they need to determine the appropriate next steps. She remains in prison, and I am not aware of a be.

Anything further on this? Peru? Berenson?

QUESTION: Should I take it from what you just said that you have no information on when the trial is likely, or could start, or whether she is going to be transferred to Lima?

MR. REEKER: My understanding, again, is that Ms. Berenson remains in prison in Peru, where she has been, and that the case has been transferred from the military court system to the civilian court system, but that the step for doing that was to transfer the case to the prosecutor's office, and that they need to determine the next steps. So I am not aware of the next step. But as I said, we see this as a first step, which we are pleased with, but we want to see what is going to happen next.

QUESTION: Do you have an update on an explosion in Cape Town near the US Consulate?

MR. REEKER: Yes.

QUESTION: Any Americans injured, or what do you think it is from, et cetera, et cetera?

MR. REEKER: No, I don't believe there were any Americans involved or injured in that. We are aware of a bombing. We have been in touch with our consulate in Cape Town. We are following developments there, just as all of you are. I think the details will have to come from the police and South African authorities there in Cape Town, who are conducting, as I understand it, an investigation.

The car bomb, as it appears to be -- the blast occurred a couple of blocks away from the American Consulate in Cape Town, South Africa. But we have absolutely no reason to believe that this was directed against the US Consulate, and so I just don't want to speculate about targets or reasons. It is obviously something that the local police there are handling. And for details, we would have to refer to them.

QUESTION: Can I ask another Peruvian question?

MR. REEKER: Sure.

QUESTION: One face-saving scenario is Berenson getting a guilty verdict in a civilian court with a sentence of the time already served or a suspended sentence. Is that something the State Department would be content with?

MR. REEKER: I just can't speculate on what the next steps are. I have described for you our pleasure with this decision by the military court. It is something that we have been pushing for nearly five years in terms of maintaining that the trial proceedings didn't meet due process standards. And as I said, the case has been transferred to the prosecutor's office, and they have to determine appropriate next steps.

We are going to monitor this extremely closely, as we have all this time. But I think that is really as far as we can go until there is something more to actually comment on.

QUESTION: Phil, yesterday, a Mexican judge gave a sentence of seven and ten years to a human rights activist, one of those who receive international - (inaudible) - because he -- (inaudible) -- favor of the Mexicans. Do you have any reaction to those?

MR. REEKER: I don't. I'm afraid I am not even aware of the case, so it is one that if you want to give us the details, I can try to have the Human Rights Bureau look into, or the Western Hemisphere Affairs Bureau.

QUESTION: And quickly, a Senior State Department was supposed to give to the foreign media the agenda - the objectives - of the US about the Millennium Summit in New York. Do you have - it was canceled. Do you have any --

MR. REEKER: No, I believe there were some scheduling problems, and we still hope to have, at the Foreign Press Center, what we call a "scene-setter" in terms of talking about US objectives, and some of the things. I think, with the President traveling obviously, they just may not have had the staff - the people that were preparing for that. So watch the schedule at the Foreign Press Center. And we will also try to have other briefings in anticipation of next week's Millennium Summit, and the UN General Assembly generally.

QUESTION: The Greek Minister of Public Order, Mikhail Khrisokhoidhis, will be in town next week to sign with your government the well-known Protocol of Cooperation against terrorism in Greece. Do you have anything on that, or any comment?

MR. REEKER: I don't have anything on that. And so I will turn to my colleagues, who can see me in the camera in the European Bureau, to look into that, and also in our Counter-Terrorism Office, and we will look into it.

QUESTION: The Cyprus Talks will take place finally in New York City September 12th due to the point that the Turkish Cypriot Leader again is undermining the whole process, and the Greek side

already protested today to the UNFICYP.

MR. REEKER: A slight editorial comment. (Laughter.) I don't --

QUESTION: You should be aware of what is going on. Nobody knows.

MR. REEKER: I don't have anything specific. I would refer you to the United Nations for details on the Cyprus Talks. We have always agreed that we won't comment on those talks, and I don't have any details on when the talks were resuming, or what the status of those talks is.

QUESTION: When would you plan to release your annual report on religion?

MR. REEKER: Our Annual Report on Religious Freedom I expect to be released on Tuesday. But we will certainly put out a notice to the press to allow you ample time for that. It is an annual report that has a specific time frame in terms of reporting to Congress, and then obviously making available public copies of that.

QUESTION: After the -- (inaudible) --

MR. REEKER: That is the date that we are looking at. I just don't have any specific details for you. We will certainly get back to you on that and expect to provide you with copies and a full briefing on that.

QUESTION: Do you have any comment on the concerns voiced yesterday by Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, in the Washington Office of Latin America, about the fact that the human rights of conditions have been waived - actually the conditions imposed by Congress, in connection with the military aid being sent to Colombia? This is seen as a green light being given to the government to continue its --

MR. REEKER: First, I think we addressed it in great deal when the announcements were made last week, but let me just say that the challenges faced by Colombia are a matter of national security interest to the United States. We have certainly discussed that at great length.

Our assistance package is crucial to maintaining our counter-drug efforts there, and to helping the Colombian Government and people to preserve Colombia's democracy. Moreover, the United States has important interest in promoting economic reform, protection of US citizens, hemispheric stability, all of which are addressed by our support for Colombia, and by our financial support through Plan Colombia.

Human rights, as we have made very clear here, is a central issue in our bilateral relations with Colombia, and we are going to continue to engage with the Colombians - with the Government of Colombia on the concrete measures that that government should take to meet the certification conditions, and to improve its human rights performance.

We continue to press the Government of Colombia to achieve

tangible results in these areas, and we are going to carry out a continuing series of consultations with the nongovernmental organization community regarding human rights and humanitarian issues in Colombia. I think we have always seen such discussions, which we have had on an ongoing basis for a long time, as a very positive exchange of ideas which truly help to advance our mutual desire to assist Colombia in improving its human rights environment.

As a number of people noted last week, we feel that the government of President Pastrana is making a very good faith effort to pursue that, and we are going to continue to work very closely with them on that.

QUESTION: You said you are going to continue to consult with the groups like she mentioned. They - yesterday, in the press conference - gave us a document that was given to the State Department, and they are very disappointed with the answer they get to that report.

MR. REEKER: That is their right to be but, as I just told you now, our position hasn't changed on that. We take human rights as a central issue in our bilateral relationship with Colombia, and we are going to continue to make that a major focus of our relationship and indeed our aid and support for Colombia.

QUESTION: They give the name of five specific generals that are working now in Colombia that they have concerns about their relations with human rights' abusers, like the paramilitaries. Have you given any advice to the Pastrana government about the activities of these five generals?

MR. REEKER: I am not aware of the list. I am not aware of specific individuals. That is obviously part of the reason for our dialogue with these organizations, and why we find it extremely useful. And it is something that we have done, not just on Colombia, but on many, many countries, and many, many issues, particularly in terms of human rights.

So those dialogues are useful; the information they can provide us is useful. It is the kind of thing we follow up on, but I just don't have the specifics on it. What I can tell you is that we take this very seriously. This is a central issue in our bilateral relationship with Colombia. It obviously will be a major factor in our relationship as we continue to support Colombia with our assistance package, and the counter-narcotics efforts, and all of these issues which are really an important matter of national security interest to the United States.

QUESTION: Did this building - are you aware of this building having any involvement in the arrest the other day, or yesterday, of this German neo-nazi in West Virginia?

MR. REEKER: I am not. I saw the report and photograph in some of the local papers, but I am not aware of that. I think you would want to talk to the Justice Department or law enforcement agencies.

Thank you.

(The briefing was concluded at 2:40 P.M.)