

State Dept Press Brief 22 June '07

Contributed by Administrator
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Daily Press Briefing
Sean McCormack, Spokesman
Washington, DC
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Secretary Rice Travels to Paris
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12:18 p.m. EST

MR. MCCORMACK: Hey, guys. Good afternoon. We don't have any -- I don't have any opening statements, so we can get right to your thoughtful, incisive questions. Who'd like to start?

QUESTION: Thanks for the compliment. (Laughter.)

MR. MCCORMACK: Yeah. Now, the pressure's on -- see if they're thoughtful and incisive.

QUESTION: I don't know if I have anything thoughtful and incisive, but I hope you might be able to talk in a little more detail about the plans for the Secretary's meeting with Prime Minister Siniora.

MR. MCCORMACK: Oh, Prime Minister Siniora was going to be in Paris coincidentally. They're going to overlap. The Secretary's traveling to Paris -- going to be leaving Saturday night, traveling there primarily to -- for the Sudan conference that Prime -- that Foreign Minister Kouchner is holding. It's also a good opportunity to talk about the direction of U.S.- French bilateral relations with this new government. I think there are a lot of areas that we can work together -- in which we can work together. And the meeting with Prime Minister Siniora is an opportunity for the Secretary to touch base with the Prime Minister and talk about where Lebanon is headed in terms of political reform, economic reform, talk about the fight against violent extremism in Lebanon. I know that the Lebanese armed forces has talked about the fact that they are ending the offensive military operations right now in the Palestinian refugee camp against the al-Qaeda-affiliated terrorist group, said that they had succeeded in pretty much shutting down this group. I expect that there is going to be continued fighting in that regard. I'm sure they'll talk about the tribunal, progress towards establishing a tribunal and the general situation in the region.

QUESTION: There's a -- seems to be a consensus among some of the Lebanese media that the Secretary and her French counterparts and Siniora may be trying to figure out who should be the next Lebanese Prime Minister -- President.

MR. MCCORMACK: The next Lebanese President or --

QUESTION: Yeah, well, I mean, his term is --

MR. MCCORMACK: Regardless of which office, that is not for us to choose it's not for the French Government to choose. That is for the Lebanese people and the Lebanese political system to decide upon who will lead Lebanon, certainly not for -- not for us.

QUESTION: No king making?

MR. MCCORMACK: No.

QUESTION: Sean.

MR. MCCORMACK: Samir.

QUESTION: The Syrians were -- there were reports the Syrians were closing borders with Lebanon.

MR. MCCORMACK: I hadn't seen those reports. I couldn't offer you any comment, although they have in the past used this as a way to influence the political situation in Lebanon. I can't tell you if in fact they have closed the borders this time around and if in fact that is the motivation. But usually there is some less than benign motivation on these kinds of actions by the Syrian Government.

Go over here.

QUESTION: Sean, (inaudible) with the new French President and Foreign Minister?

MR. MCCORMACK: Well, first of all, it's her first opportunity to meet with President Sarkozy, as President. She had previously met him in the United States -- I don't know, maybe within the past year, let's say -- and he has a number of ideas of how France wants to play in the international and political arena, working on issues of common concern. They're very stepped up in taking a lead on a number of issues related to humanitarian or potential humanitarian crises around the world, including Sudan. We're quite pleased that Foreign Minister Kouchner and President Sarkozy are taking this initiative. We think it's important. Foreign Minister Kouchner is taking a distinct interest at the direction of President Sarkozy and the issue of Kosovo. And certainly, we welcome that strong European leadership on the issue and I'm sure they are going to talk about the whole range of issues before us, whether that is dealing with issues related to Africa or Iran or the transatlantic relationship.

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Thank you.

(The briefing was concluded at 12:38 p.m.)

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