

State Department - Daily Press Briefing - Lebanon

Contributed by Administrator
Thursday, 13 January 2011
Last Updated Thursday, 13 January 2011

Philip J. Crowley
Assistant Secretary
Daily Press Briefing
Washington, DC
January 12, 2011

INDEX:

DEPARTMENT

Secretary Clinton Travel / Meetings with Officials / Bilateral and Regional Issues / Gulf Cooperation Council
Special Representative Gration Travel to Darfur / Meeting with Government Officials and Civil Society / Voter Turnout /
Referendum
Ambassador Bob Loftis Remarks on Southern Sudan
A/S Valenzuela in Buenos Aires / Meeting with Argentine Officials
Collapse of Lebanon's Government / U.S. Concern / President Obama's Meeting with President Hariri / Special Tribunal /
Hezbollah

LEBANON

Collapse of Lebanon's Government / U.S. Funding for Lebanon / Formation of a New Government / Committed to
Lebanon and its Stability / Decry Motive of Hezbollah / Fluid Situation / Support for Existing Government / Continue to
Support Lebanon / In U.S. Interest / Secretary in the Region and Will Talk with Leaders / Transparent Attempt / Special
Tribunal / Support for Sovereignty of Lebanon / Look Forward to Emergence of New Government / Choice for Lebanon to
Make / Procedures for New Governing Coalition / Lebanese Constitution / Stability Sustained Inside of Lebanon /
Watching Carefully / Syria's Intentions / Destabilizing Act / Encourage Work of Tribunal

AFGHANISTAN

Admiral Mullen Remarks / Work in Progress / Strategic Changes / People of Afghanistan Deserve Peace
Economic Tension / Energy / Watching Closely
Suicide Bombing in Kabul / Embassy Statement / Condolences to Family / Cowardly Act

PAKISTAN

Suicide Bombing / Condemn Politically Motivated Violence

ISRAEL/PALESTINIANS

Working Level Meetings

CHINA

Visit by Chinese President / Secretary Clinton Remarks
Secretary Gates in China / Military Interactions between China and the U.S. / Transparency

TUNISIA

Protests / Deeply Concerned about Violence / Dynamic Situation / Recent Arrests / Freedom of Assembly / Economic
and Social Concerns

NEPAL

Travel Advisory / Encourage Government to Resolve Situation

TRANSCRIPT:

1:42 p.m. EST

MR. CROWLEY: Good afternoon and welcome to the Department of State. A few things to touch on, including –
and I’ll get to a subject I’m sure that you’re going to ask me about. The Secretary’s
obviously continues her travel in the region. She started the day today in Muscat where she participated in a coffee

ceremony with Foreign Minister Yusuf bin Allawi and then had a productive meeting on a range of bilateral and regional issues with Sultan bin Qaboos in Oman, participated in a town hall meeting with civil society leaders, and then she traveled to Doha where she met with Sheikh Hamad bin Khahifa Al-Thani as well as Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Hamad bin Jasim Al-Thani, covering a range of bilateral and regional issues, including the importance of civil society. She is currently meeting with foreign ministers of the Gulf Cooperation Council and, of course, will participate in the Forum for the Future tomorrow.

In Sudan, Special Representative Scott Gration traveled to El Fasher, Darfur today with Ambassador Dane Smith, our newly appointed senior advisor for Darfur, meeting with government officials, the United Nations, and African Union Mission leadership and civil society groups. We are encouraged by the news today of a significant voter turnout and the projection that the referendum has reached the 60 percent threshold required under the Comprehensive Peace Agreement. We applaud the parties for creating the conditions that allow the people of Southern Sudan to vote freely without intimidation and coercion. High voter participation indicates that the referendum is proceeding well and the results should reflect the will of the people, and we certainly, along with others, continue to watch the ongoing referendum voting and await the final results.

Regarding Sudan, on Friday of this week, Acting Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization Ambassador Bob Loftis will speak on Southern Sudan and innovative tools that we've used for local empowerment at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. I think we're putting out, or have put out a media note giving you details of that address.

Turning to this region, Assistant Secretary Arturo Valenzuela had very productive meetings in Buenos Aires with several key interlocutors. He met with Foreign Minister Hector Timerman. They know each other well from years past where Mr. Timerman was the Argentine Ambassador to the United States. They discussed a number of issues of mutual interest, including the importance of regional organizations, trade, and economic issues, and future bilateral consultations. He also met with Minister Nilda Garre, the head of the newly created Argentine security ministry. They discussed joint security initiatives and citizen safety. He also met with Governors Daniel Scioli and Sergio Urribarri, as well as Argentine academics and analysts. He arrived in Santiago yesterday, and today he and ministry of foreign affairs, Under Secretary Fernando Schmidt, are leading a U.S.-Chile bilateral political consultation which covers such issues as law enforcement training, peacekeeping operations, as well as energy, environment, science and social protection initiatives, among others.

And finally, obviously we're aware of the news in Lebanon. We are disappointed by what has occurred today and are concerned. This is a transparent effort by forces who seek to subvert justice and undermine Lebanon's stability and progress.

As you know, President Obama met today with Prime Minister Hariri and commended him on his leadership in protecting and advancing the sovereignty and independence of Lebanon and for staying focused on the needs and interests of the people of Lebanon. We believe that the work of a special tribunal should go forward so that justice can be served and impunity ended. More than that, we believe that all of Lebanon's leaders have a responsibility to serve the people of Lebanon. Trying to bring down the government is an attempt to undermine the special tribunal, and it is an abdication of that responsibility.

We're working with the Lebanese Government and other partners who share our interest in stability and justice for Lebanon, including France, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Egypt, on next steps that will protect the work of the tribunal and help to achieve stability in the Lebanon. We encourage all Lebanese to work together to avoid threats and actions that could cause instability and to enable the governing coalition to serve the interest of the Lebanese people in justice, stability, and peace. Hezbollah is presenting a false choice for Lebanon of justice or stability. We think that Lebanon deserves both.

QUESTION: Just to – can we stick with Lebanon?

MR. CROWLEY: Sure.

QUESTION: The United States Government has since 2006 provided significant assistance to Lebanon, notably in FMF funds to the Lebanese armed forces and also to a branch of the security apparatus. Does the U.S. Government intend to continue such funding, both during any interregnum now between the apparent collapse of the government and the arrival of a successor, and will the complexion of any successor government determine whether you will keep funding it in future?

MR. CROWLEY: Well, we'll wait to see what happens here going forward. Obviously, President Sulayman will provide instructions for the formation of a new government. We'll watch closely what occurs and evaluate any actions that we might take as events develop.

We're committed to Lebanon. We're committed to its stability. And it is within that context that we provide

military and other assistance to Lebanon. It's in our national interest to do that. But we want to make sure that we see the emergence of a government that continues to focus on and serve in the interest of the people of Lebanon and not the interests of outsiders.

QUESTION: And there's no immediate cutoff, though, as a result of the current political uncertainty?

MR. CROWLEY: Well, I mean, at one aspect, this – we decry the motives of Hezbollah and what they've obviously tried to do to continue to intimidate the government and use this activity as a pressure tactic. But at this point, Lebanon will work to put together a new government, and we'll see what emerges.

QUESTION: I'm sorry, but there's no immediate cutoff?

MR. CROWLEY: No.

QUESTION: Okay, thanks.

QUESTION: In the past during similar crises, the crisis resulted in the eruption or the outbreak of violence. So when – are you prepared for such an eventuality? And second –

MR. CROWLEY: I'm sorry. Are we prepared to what?

QUESTION: On Lebanon.

MR. CROWLEY: No, no. But you –

QUESTION: For such an eventuality.

QUESTION: There's been an outbreak of violence in the past. They erupted into violence. Okay, when there was such similar government crisis or the – or (inaudible) government.

MR. CROWLEY: Well, we – yeah –

QUESTION: Are you prepared for such an eventuality? And one, do you decry Hezbollah rhetoric and interference, or do you also caution places like Israel not to take advantage or not to take what is happening in Lebanon as a cover for interfering in Lebanon?

MR. CROWLEY: Well, I mean, let's not jump to conclusions. We're talking about events that have occurred in the last three hours. This is obviously a fluid situation in Lebanon. We certainly do not want to see violence occur. We do not want to see any outside party take advantage of what's going on. That's why we have been committed over many months to the stability and sovereignty of Lebanon and why we have been vocal in our support for the existing government because we thought that brought the best potential for long-term stability. We will continue to support Lebanon. We'll continue to do whatever we can with the international community to help Lebanon remain secure, prosperous, and move forward politically, socially, and economically. It is in our interest to see this happen. We are committed to try to help Lebanon in any way we can.

QUESTION: Do you think that the collapse of the government means the collapse of Saudi/Syrian efforts, or are we likely to see it continue there?

MR. CROWLEY: We're engaged – the Secretary is in the region. She has the opportunity, as we speak, to talk to leaders who also have an interest in Lebanon. We'll continue to consult closely with those countries you've talked about and others who have been focused and secure – and concerned about what is happening in Lebanon. But just to reiterate, this is obviously our view, a transparent attempt to force the Lebanese Government to back away from its support for the special tribunal. No government has the authority to do that. We will – we're committed to see justice served in Lebanon. We think it's important to Lebanon's future, and we would hope that – and we'll do everything we can to see the work of the tribunal continue to whatever end the tribunal itself decides based on their review of the facts.

QUESTION: P.J., Hezbollah ministers and their allies have resigned at the same time when President Obama was meeting with Prime Minister Hariri.

MR. CROWLEY: Yeah, what a coincidence.

QUESTION: What do you think about the timing, first?

MR. CROWLEY: Well, again, this goes to the transparency of their tactics. We question whether Hezbollah really does

have the interests of the people of Lebanon at – in – as their focus. We believe they're serving the interest of outsiders and are trying to divide Lebanon rather than try to continue to support Lebanon's long-term interest.

QUESTION: They've said that the deal between Saudi Arabia and Syria regarding Lebanon failed to reach an agreement regarding the stability in Lebanon. Was there any American role behind all this?

MR. CROWLEY: Behind what?

QUESTION: Behind the failure of the Saudi/Syrian role?

MR. CROWLEY: Well, I mean –

QUESTION: Deal?

MR. CROWLEY: We have an interest in Lebanon. We continue to support stability and the sovereignty of Lebanon. We can't speak for a country like Syria, and we've expressed our concerns many times about Syria's support of Hezbollah and what that means in terms of the sovereignty of Lebanon. We want to see Lebanon prosper. We want to see a government that enjoys the support of the Lebanese people and is serving the interest of the people of Lebanon. We think this government was doing that, and we regret that these actions have been taken today, and we would hope to see a government emerge that is again focused on Lebanon's long-term interest. And obviously, we'll continue to support the work of the tribunal.

QUESTION: One more. One more on Lebanon. Secretary Clinton had said yesterday in an interview that I think that the government and people of Lebanon should hold those individuals accountable – she was talking about the tribunal – not the groups to whom they belong. I don't believe in collective guilt but the individuals should be judged as individuals. Can you clarify this point?

MR. CROWLEY: Well, it is what we've said all along. The tribunal is there in order to support justice and end impunity within Lebanon, as I said earlier. Hezbollah is promoting a vision where the choice is either stability or justice. We think that Lebanon deserves both.

QUESTION: But when she said that individuals should be judged, not the groups, if the indictment accused Hezbollah members to be behind the assassination of Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri, that means they shouldn't indict the Hezbollah as a group, only the individuals?

MR. CROWLEY: Well, let's put aside – I mean, we have concerns about Hezbollah and their – as a terrorist organization. And those concerns are not affected by the work of the tribunal. But to the extent that the – the tribunal is investigating a political assassination that took the life of a great leader of Lebanon and other Lebanese citizens at the same time. It is important for the tribunal to be able to finish its work, evaluate the facts, and then take the appropriate actions or recommendations based on its evaluation of the facts. This is what justice is all about.

But you don't indict an entire group. You do, in fact, indict those who are responsible for this terrible assassination that has increased tensions in the region. We want to see justice served and we want to see Lebanon able to pursue its interests in the future. And we think Lebanon should be able to do both.

QUESTION: That means, finally, that if there were individuals from Hezbollah it doesn't mean that Hezbollah was behind the assassination?

MR. CROWLEY: Well, there are individuals who are responsible for this assassination. Those individuals should be brought before a duly constituted court, and that is what is behind the work of the tribunal, to determine who is responsible for this assassination and bring those individuals to justice.

QUESTION: Even if it was the leadership of the party who did this thing?

MR. CROWLEY: Well, again, this is a legal process. In a political assassination there very well might be someone responsible for that killing beyond just the individual or individuals who planted the bomb. The real issue is if there were people who were involved in a plot to kill the duly constituted leader of any country, they should be brought to justice. That is what the people of Lebanon want to see and that is what we, along with others in the international community, want to see.

QUESTION: The collapse of most of Mr. Hariri's government is taking place today, a few days after the meeting of Secretary Clinton with King Abdullah in New York. Even though the State Department has exposed that visit as a check in on him or just a courtesy visit, but with Secretary Clinton having accompanying her some personnel from the National Security entourage, like Mr. Shapiro, this is making people in the Middle East believe that it was not only a courtesy visit

but – that this visit – there has been some (inaudible) between that visit and the result we see today with the Lebanese Government. Could you reveal to us if there was --

MR. CROWLEY: I'm not sure where you're going with this.

QUESTION: I mean, any elements in that visit that could have led to this conclusion? Because people are accusing also America that – asking the parties not to interfere, but this is interference from the United States in Lebanon.

MR. CROWLEY: We are absolutely not interfering in the internal affairs of Lebanon. We are expressing our heartfelt view that we felt there was a government in Lebanon serving the interests of the people of Lebanon and include – which includes supporting the pursuit of justice for Lebanon through the special tribunal. We look forward to the emergence of a new government. This government should be formed from inside Lebanon. It should not be subject to influences from those who have outside agendas, and we don't think those outside agendas are in the long-term interest of Lebanon.

We are committed to see the state of Lebanon emerge that is secure, peaceful, prosperous, and is not subject to outside interference, whether that interference comes from Syria, whether that outside influence comes from Iran or anywhere else. We are committed as a country, and together with the international community to support the sovereignty and independence of Lebanon. These are choices for the Lebanese Government and the people of Lebanon to make. They should be allowed to make those choices, but we question the fact that a political action by one element of Lebanon today is – we question whether that is really serving the long-term interests of the people of Lebanon, who want security, want justice, and are entitled to both.

QUESTION: The name of Mr. Rashid Karami has been thrown in there as an alternative person, a Sunni person, to preside a new government in Lebanon. Would the United States be willing to support such a government?

MR. CROWLEY: Again, the Secretary met with Prime Minister Hariri late last week as the duly constituted leader of the Lebanese Government. The President met with Prime Minister Hariri today in that same vein. During that meeting, we reiterated our commitment to support Lebanon and its sovereignty and independence. That is what we will continue to do. Obviously, Lebanon will determine what to do in light of the political action taken today. It will not change our commitment to support Lebanon in any way we can as it continues to seek to reinforce its sovereignty, independence, and security.

QUESTION: Thank you.

QUESTION: (Inaudible) any theory (inaudible) behind the (inaudible)?

MR. CROWLEY: It's hard for me to say. I don't know. Syria has a history of interfering in Lebanese affairs, but I just don't know at this point whether there was a hidden hand behind this.

QUESTION: How confident are you that a new government can be formed peacefully and without outside influence?

MR. CROWLEY: Well, that is what we'd like to see. We would like to see through a process that is --

QUESTION: How confident are you that that would happen and that this won't lead to greater instability?

MR. CROWLEY: Well – and obviously, there are no guarantees at this point. We want to see the emergence of a new government in a peaceful environment free of any intimidation, free of any outside agendas. That will be our hope for Lebanon. But obviously, we'll see how events unfold in the coming days and we will hope that no element within Lebanese society takes advantage of this or tries to incite violence in the aftermath of this.

QUESTION: Change of subject?

QUESTION: Can I ask one more question?

QUESTION: Victor Shalhoub, Al-Bayan newspaper in Dubai. A couple hours ago, the prime minister – Qatari prime minister, in a press conference with Secretary Clinton, said we have to find a way – and the way he put it – in a way we have to or we will be finding a way for the Lebanese crisis. Is the Administration prepared, willing, or will be part of this process?

MR. CROWLEY: Well, let's separate those two things out. First of all, there is – in any country with a parliamentary system, when a governing coalition fails there are procedures for the emergence of a new governing coalition. So obviously, certain ministers today have withdrawn their support for the existing government, and a new government will need to be formed. We want to see that government formed through the normal processes under the Lebanese constitution. We want to see it happen peacefully and free of any outside interference or any further

intimidation tactics as we've seen in Lebanon in recent weeks and months.

There are countries which are concerned about events in Lebanon, are doing everything that we can to support Lebanon as it moves ahead. We are one of those countries. This is not to say we're going to interfere. These are decisions to be made inside Lebanon. But the United States, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, other countries, obviously want to see stability sustained in Lebanon. Everyone recognizes that instability in Lebanon has the potential to spill over into other contexts. And our interest here is a stable, peaceful situation in Lebanon enables the continuing work of the tribunal and it also enables us to continue to pursue our goal of comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

So we'll be watching this carefully. We'll be supporting the emergence of a new government. But obviously, these are decisions for the Government of Lebanon to make and for the people of Lebanon to support.

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

MR. CROWLEY: Not yet.

QUESTION: Just quickly, can you update us on who the Secretary has called about this, specifically what of her – who of her counterparts?

MR. CROWLEY: Just before I came down, the Secretary, I believe was still in meetings, so I haven't – I don't have a sense today as to who exactly she's met with on the ground.

QUESTION: What about (inaudible) phone calls actually more so than who she's met with on the ground?

MR. CROWLEY: I'm not aware – she's had a full schedule today. I'm not aware that she's had any phone calls. But with the gathering of leaders for the Forum for the Future, there is a great opportunity for her to interact with her counterparts from other countries in the region.

QUESTION: Can you check and get us a list of phone calls, if she has indeed made any, on Lebanon?

QUESTION: There were some reports that she had made some calls while she was on the plane between Oman and Qatar.

MR. CROWLEY: Okay, I'll – obviously, I haven't been fully briefed on that yet.

QUESTION: Thank you.

QUESTION: One other one on Lebanon, if I may, please. The Saudi/Syrian efforts to try to find some kind of solution to prevent what happened today – the resignation – obviously didn't succeed. Is it – do you support the Saudi and Syrian diplomatic efforts to try to find some kind of solution here for Lebanon, and do you think it might still be possible for there to be some kind of a negotiated solution here?

MR. CROWLEY: We obviously support any effort that we think can constructively help Lebanon continue to pursue peace and security on the one hand, and justice on the other. The Secretary had the opportunity to talk to Saudi King Abdallah late last week. We are confident that Saudi Arabia is committed to playing a constructive role in helping Lebanon. Obviously, we have less confidence about the intentions and role played by Syria, both in the near term and in the recent past.

QUESTION: But – so can you tell us that you supported Saudi Arabia talking to Syria about trying to work out an agreement here?

MR. CROWLEY: Well --

QUESTION: Or not?

MR. CROWLEY: It's not a matter of us supporting it. We do know that there are a number of discussions going on. We obviously believe dialogue is – can be useful, can be constructive. It all depends on what the motivations of participants in that dialogue are. But we've been in close contact with Saudi Arabia on its own efforts in the context of Lebanon, and we will continue to consult closely with Saudi Arabia, with Egypt, with a range of countries, all of whom want the same thing, which is stability and justice for Lebanon.

QUESTION: So when you say that you have less confidence in Syria, would you like to see someone else from the region step in with the Saudis or that Saudi Arabia would be on its own in pursuing this effort?

MR. CROWLEY: Well, first of all, we understand Syria is a neighbor of Lebanon. It has an historical interest in Lebanon.

So far, so good. But obviously, in the past, Syrian efforts have actually subverted the emergence of a sovereign, independent, strong Lebanon. And that has always been our concern. If Syria wants to play a constructive role in the region, we welcome that. It's one of the reasons why we have decided to place an ambassador in Damascus. But it remains an open question as to what Syria's intentions really are.

QUESTION: So are you -- clearly, you would like to see -- would you like to see Syria --

QUESTION: (Inaudible.)

MR. CROWLEY: Whoa, one at a time.

QUESTION: (Inaudible.)

QUESTION: Is the ambassador --

MR. CROWLEY: Hold on, hold on.

QUESTION: Let me just follow up, please. Would you like to see Syria continue with its effort, or would you like to see the --

MR. CROWLEY: Well, as I said, Syria is going to have a relationship with Lebanon because they are neighbors. That's perfectly fine. The real question is, in that relationship, is Syria committed to a stable Lebanon or is Syria trying to subvert the long-term interests of Lebanon? That is still an open question that we are trying to answer.

QUESTION: Mr. Hariri has acknowledged the positive role of Syria in playing with the Saudi role to accomplish a peaceful solution to Lebanon as Syria has taken many steps, practical steps -- diplomatic relationships and many other steps in order to affirm its stand that it recognizes the necessity of the security of Lebanon as a strategic aim for Syria also. Now Mr. Hariri has acknowledged this positive role of Syria. The opposition -- the 10 ministers, Lebanese ministers today, they thanked Syria also along with Saudi for its role. This seems to contradict what you are saying about Syria's role today.

MR. CROWLEY: Again, we are still trying to understand what happened today and the reasons behind it. But the decisions by these ministers today is, in and of itself, a destabilizing act. We are concerned about whether this action -- and we are skeptical that this action was really intended to serve the broad interests of the people of Lebanon. We have great concerns that this is serving the narrow interests of Hezbollah because of their ongoing concerns about the work of the tribunal and their active efforts at intimidation over many months to undermine the work of the tribunal. And we just wonder who else outside of Lebanon was encouraging this action.

QUESTION: Can I just pursue that a little bit? With the tribunal, I mean, in the past in Lebanon and the Taif Agreement and (inaudible) sort of an understanding that people who did bad things in the past, that bygones be bygones, whatever. How attached is the U.S. to tribunal? Is the tribunal an absolute must, even if that means political instability?

MR. CROWLEY: Well, (inaudible), the tribunal is independent. It was duly constituted through the United Nations at the request of the Government of Lebanon. Its work is important and it should continue free of any interference, free of any politicization, free of any intimidation. That is what we want to see. They're investigating a political assassination and they should follow the facts wherever they lead. The people of Lebanon deserve justice. And this is all that we see for the people of Lebanon, and we encourage that the work of the tribunal should continue without any outside interference.

QUESTION: Change of subject? P.J., today Admiral Mullen, chief of staff from the Pentagon, he was speaking at the Foreign Press Center laying down the --

MR. CROWLEY: You look good on television.

QUESTION: Thank you. Making the point -- he was speaking about U.S. policy in -- around the globe, especially in Afghanistan and Pakistan region. My question is he said that there's no victory or peace in Afghanistan without the full-fledged cooperation from Pakistan, but also he said that Pakistan must shut down all the safe haven in order to have peace and stability in the region, especially in Afghanistan. Now, he was speaking military viewpoint. How about your views and your comments as far as diplomacy diplomatically is concerned? How can you shut down -- it's been 10 years now.

MR. CROWLEY: Well, I mean, as a simple fact, I'm a great admirer of Admiral Mullen and I agree with everything he said.

QUESTION: But it's been 10 years now. Which steps are you taking now after 10 years to shut down all those

safe havens?

MR. CROWLEY: Goyal, this is a work in progress, and we have made important strategic changes in the last two years and we think those changes are reaping benefits.

QUESTION: And you think because of this people of Afghanistan are suffering?

MR. CROWLEY: I think the people of Afghanistan deserve peace. We are trying as hard as we can to help support the emergence of a government in Afghanistan that can actually serve the long-term interests of the Afghan people. That's what we want for Afghanistan and we know that's what the Afghan people want as well.

QUESTION: Some kind of economic tension is brewing up between Afghanistan and Iran. Iran has blocked the supply of gas to Afghanistan, which has led to increasing gas prices and shortages of gas in Afghanistan. What do you have to say about that – on that?

MR. CROWLEY: I mean, we are watching closely that development. Energy is a critical resource to any country and any economy, and it should be available at whatever the appropriate market price is.

QUESTION: Thank you.

QUESTION: Just one quick one in the region. Do you have any comment on the reported suicide bombing in Pakistan that killed 17 paramilitary soldiers and policemen?

MR. CROWLEY: I know the Embassy put out a statement earlier today condemning the bombing. It took place in Kabul this morning. Our understanding is at least four people were killed, more than 20 injured. Our condolences to out to the families affected. This is yet again a cowardly act against innocent Afghan civilians. It represents another attempt to instill fear and deter progress.

QUESTION: I was asking about something else, actually --

MR. CROWLEY: I'm sorry.

QUESTION: -- which was as suicide bombing in Pakistan.

MR. CROWLEY: I'm sorry, wrong country.

QUESTION: -- that killed – no, it's okay – that killed 17 police and paramilitary. If you don't have anything about it, don't worry.

MR. CROWLEY: No, not yet. But obviously, we condemn this kind of politically motivated violence wherever it occurs.

QUESTION: Change topic? Palestinian-Israeli talks, could you tell us what is – what – a scenario, how these talks will be conducted and will they begin tomorrow, for instance?

MR. CROWLEY: I think some of the particulars are still being worked out. We do expect to have negotiators from both sides here tomorrow, but as to who will meet who, when, where, that – I don't have all the information.

QUESTION: Is it expected that the Secretary of State at one point will meet with them? Will they – when she comes back, will they still be --

MR. CROWLEY: No, this is a working level – these are working level meetings and my understanding is they will occur tomorrow. And just to be clear, there will be meetings between our team and the Israeli team and separately with our team and the Palestinian team.

QUESTION: Still Molho and Erekat, correct? You said “teams,” but it's --

MR. CROWLEY: Yes.

QUESTION: -- those two?

MR. CROWLEY: Yes.

QUESTION: And do you know if they're morning or afternoon or --

MR. CROWLEY: That's – I was checking to see if there are – if the details were completely nailed

down. They are not yet, but we do anticipate the meetings occurring tomorrow.

QUESTION: Chinese president will be in this town next week.

MR. CROWLEY: Next week.

QUESTION: So what are the expectations from the visit, the state visit, of the Chinese president? And what other issues do you plan to intend --

MR. CROWLEY: Well, in fact, I think later this week, the Secretary will have some remarks on Friday and she will outline our goals for the upcoming visit.

QUESTION: A number of stories have been going on as far as China's expansion, militarily especially. Is this a worry to the U.S.?

MR. CROWLEY: All right. Goyal, start again.

QUESTION: As far as the Chinese militarily expansion is going on around the globe, is this a worry to the U.S. and it's going to be a part of the discussion?

MR. CROWLEY: Well, you have Secretary Gates in China as we speak. We have long promoted greater interaction between our defense establishment, the Chinese defense establishment. And our primary concern is not any monitorization that's happening with the Chinese military, but transparency so we can fully understand their capabilities, their motivations, and where we can, to have a more open and frequent relationship.

QUESTION: Thank you.

QUESTION: Tunisia demonstration?

MR. CROWLEY: Hmm?

QUESTION: On Tunisia?

MR. CROWLEY: Tunisia?

QUESTION: Right. Do you have any comment on what is happening with Tunisia? There are some reports that 51 people were killed by police demonstrators. Do you have any figures or any assessment?

MR. CROWLEY: Well, I mean, new protests have occurred today, including demonstrations in Tunis and Sfax. The United States is deeply concerned about the violence, the deaths of 23 civilians and excessive force in recent demonstrations in Tunisia. We send our condolences to those who lost loved ones and call for restraint as citizens exercise their right of nonviolent public assembly. The situation is a dynamic one, and we continue to monitor developments.

With respect to the recent unrest, we've conveyed our concerns directly to the Tunisian Government, calling on it to respect its citizens' right of -- our universal right of freedom of assembly. And we hope that this ongoing unrest can reach a peaceful resolution.

QUESTION: That was excessive force by government forces?

MR. CROWLEY: We are concerned about excessive force regardless of its -- of where it emanates. But obviously, government forces are part of that equation.

QUESTION: Right, so that's what you're talking about in this case, correct?

MR. CROWLEY: Yes.

QUESTION: All right. And then secondly --

QUESTION: Tunisian president --

QUESTION: Sorry, just one more. Yesterday, the guidance, I think, said "Reports of the excessive force by government forces." You no longer feel like they're reports; you are convinced that this has been excessive force; correct?

MR. CROWLEY: We are concerned about this violence and we are concerned about excessive force in recent demonstrations.

QUESTION: Thank you.

QUESTION: Has Tunisian president --

MR. CROWLEY: But I would say yes, we're concerned about government actions, but we're also concerned about actions by the demonstrators, those who do not have peaceful intentions.

QUESTION: The Tunisian president released his interior minister today. Do you see this as a good step forward to deal with the situation?

MR. CROWLEY: That's a decision for President Ben Ali to make. He has pledged to respond to public concerns. There are primarily economic and social concerns, and obviously, the ability of a government to address the concerns of the people is an important way to resolve the underlying tension.

QUESTION: Thank you.

QUESTION: Last question. You -- the State Department issued a Travel Alert on Nepal today, and the UN is withdrawing its peacekeeping mission over the weekend. But still, there is no government formation in Nepal. What is your assessment of the situation in that country? And does the U.S. plans to play any role in the --

MR. CROWLEY: Actually, in the Travel Advisory, we have a description of our concerns about the current situation.

QUESTION: But is U.S. playing any role as far as to end this -- I mean, what you call (inaudible) is not there. People are asking the U.S. help to -- in any way to help Nepalese if not --

MR. CROWLEY: We are continuing to encourage the government to do everything it can to resolve the situation. Thank you.

(The briefing was concluded at 2:23 p.m.)

DPB # 8

<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/dpb/2011/01/154548.htm>

VIDEO: <http://www.state.gov/video/?videoid=747524887001>