



Press Briefing by Ari Fleischer

The James S. Brady Briefing Room

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4:05 P.M. EDT

MR. FLEISCHER: Good afternoon. The President today has been making a series of phone calls to leaders around the world, to rally an international coalition to combat terrorism.

He has spoken today with Prime Minister Blair, with Prime Minister Chretien, with President Chirac, with Chancellor Schroeder, with President Jiang of China, and twice with President Putin. The President will continue to reach out to leaders throughout the world to develop this coalition, send a message that the United States and the world stand united, all the freedom loving countries and others to fight terrorism.

The President is also gratified by the action taken today by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, NATO, in which they invoked Article 5, saying that an attack on one NATO nation is an attack on all NATO nations.

The President is also gratified by the United Nations Security Council Resolution that passed today condemning this attack and saying that it was a threat to international peace and security.

Finally, as the President said in his remarks this morning, freedom and democracy are under attack. The American people need to know that we are facing a different enemy than we have ever faced. Those are the President's words. In this case, we have specific and credible information that the White House and Air Force One were also intended targets of these attacks.

As the President also said in his remarks, this battle will take time and resolve; and, make no mistake, we will prevail.

I'm happy to take questions.

Q Ari, in terms of this specific threat that you talked about against the White House and Air Force One, we have heard from administration officials that the plane that went into the Pentagon may have originally been targeted at the White House. What can you tell us about that?

MR. FLEISCHER: John, we have real and credible information that the airplane that landed at the Pentagon was originally intended to hit the White House.

Q Can you tell us about the nature of that evidence?

MR. FLEISCHER: No, of course I cannot. Any questions relating to how we have obtained any of this information, sources and methods, I will, of course, not answer.

Q -- why it changed course, Ari? Why it went to the Pentagon and not the White House?

MR. FLEISCHER: We really do not know the answer to that. But we are aware of what we have.

Q If this is the case, why did Vice President Cheney remain in the building?

MR. FLEISCHER: The Vice President was removed to a secure area at the White House.

Q We were told he was working out of the Situation Room with Condoleezza Rice.

MR. FLEISCHER: The Vice President worked out of several locations, and the White House has sufficient secure locations in events such as this. And this follows a regular plan that the White House has in case of any such incidents.

Q Can you confirm reports, though, that the plane flew over the Pentagon and passed over the U.S. Capitol? If the White House was indeed a target? There have been military sources who say it flew over the U.S. Capitol.

MR. FLEISCHER: No, I do not -- I have not heard that report. I have not heard that report.

Q Ari, then do you have credible information that the plane that crashed in Pennsylvania was intended for Air Force One?

MR. FLEISCHER: I do not have any information about that, about that plane.

Q And if Air Force One happened to be a target, isn't it true that when the President went to Louisiana, at that point, once he took off from Louisiana, there were no flights in U.S. airspace?

MR. FLEISCHER: No, at that moment there were still reports of airplanes that had not yet been identified as to their whereabouts. That's another reason that the White House and the President operated in the secure manner that they did. At that moment, when the President had left Florida and was on his way to a base that no one knew where the President was heading to, there were still reports of planes that had not yet been brought onto the ground per the FAA's order.

Q If I could follow up, though, but when Air Force One left Louisiana and headed to Nebraska, I believe at that time there were no U.S. planes, or any planes, still in U.S. airspace. So then why did the President go to Nebraska and not back here to the White House?

MR. FLEISCHER: Because the information that we had was real and credible about Air Force One. And the manner in which Air Force One operated maintained the security of Air Force One at all times. And that also is one of the reasons why Air Force One did not come back to Andrews, where some people thought it would.

Q If we could make the connection here, that would suggest, Ari, then, that the threat against Air Force One came in the form of another aircraft?

MR. FLEISCHER: No, I'm not indicating what form it came in, John, and I will not.

Q Ari, at what time did the White House get this information?

MR. FLEISCHER: On the flight from Sarasota to the first location.

Q So did the evacuation of the White House come as a result of that information?

MR. FLEISCHER: That's a detail that I'm not going to get into, Terry. But all appropriate security precautions were taken.

Q And then on the subject of rallying this international coalition, does that indicate that the President would wait, or try to get the support -- either operational support or political support of other nations before responding to these attacks?

MR. FLEISCHER: Well, I'm not going to indicate anything about -- speculate about any type of response. You've heard what the President said and his words speak for themselves about America's resolve.

However, as I indicated in my opening statement, the President is very heartened as a result of the world reaction and the solidarity that the world is showing at all levels in so many nations toward what has happened. And the President is going to continue to talk to leaders around the world as he builds this coalition.

Q Did the President secure the support of President Jiang and President Putin in those phone calls?

MR. FLEISCHER: Let me try to give you a little more specific information on each of those phone calls. The President, as I indicated, spoke twice with President Putin -- once for five minutes, the second time for seven minutes. He thanked -- the President thanked President Putin for his call and for the message of condolence that President Putin sent yesterday.

President Putin informed President Bush that he had signed a decree that there be a moment of silence at Russia, and throughout Russia, at noon tomorrow, with flags at half-mast, to express the outrage and solidarity of the Russian people with the American people.

The two Presidents agreed that they will work closely together in the coming weeks to fight those responsible for yesterday's acts of terrorism.

The President's phone call with President Jiang of China lasted for approximately 10 minutes. President Bush thanked President Jiang for his condolences and concern for the American people, as well. And the two agreed to work together also to combat terrorism, which is another indication, as I mentioned, of the coalition the President is seeking to form as the world unites in the fight against terrorism.

Q Ari, will that coalition look at all like the Persian Gulf coalition? Is he reaching out to Arab nations, as well?

MR. FLEISCHER: The President is going to continue to have conversations throughout the world. And, as you know, Secretary Powell has, too, talked to many people. And I will try to keep you informed of the conversations the President has.

Q But is it right that the President has not yet reached out to any Arab nation leaders?

MR. FLEISCHER: I'm going to try to do my best to keep you informed. But this is a process, and the President is going to continue to make phone calls. The President, as you know, he has a meeting this afternoon with the security team. Following his meeting with the congressional leaders late this morning, the President had lunch with the Vice President; he made additional phone calls; he has a meeting with the security team today and we're going to keep you informed of all the information we can about the President's phone calls --

Q Given the scale and the level of killing in these attacks yesterday, can the President assure the American people that the response will be commensurate with that?

MR. FLEISCHER: Terry, I'm just not going to speculate about the response. You have what the President said about how the United States will prevail. But I'm not going to go beyond that; I'm not going to speculate. And I leave it at that.

Q Can you say how close the U.S. is to knowing who is responsible for the attacks?

MR. FLEISCHER: The United States is in the process of gathering all the facts about this matter. The full resources of the federal government at all levels have been dedicated to this. And we will continue to gather those facts and ascertain all the information available.

Q Can I just follow up? Has there been, at least, early consideration of possible U.S. responses or is the U.S. government not at that point yet?

MR. FLEISCHER: Again, I'm not going to speculate on that.

Q What is the practical effect of invoking Article 5 of NATO, that it's an attack against the entire alliance?

MR. FLEISCHER: It is a message of solidarity with NATO. And I'm not going to go beyond that, in terms of anything else that has a practical effect. It is highly unusual, if not unprecedented, for NATO to have taken this step.

Q It does suggest a unified military response, though.

MR. FLEISCHER: I think it suggests a unified response. And, again, anything dealing with anything military, I'm not going to speculate about.

Q But, Ari, when you talk about "coalition", it implies that you're looking for some sort of tangible support from other nations, not just words of support. Is that a way to look at it?

MR. FLEISCHER: Well, this is a moment for the world to stand up to terrorism. And President Bush is very pleased with the reactions of leaders around the world. This is an opportunity for the world to stand up to terrorism, and that's how President Bush sees this.

Q Ari, is the White House going to make an open-ended request to Congress for funding, or is there going to be a figure given to Congress?

MR. FLEISCHER: No, Keith, the President thinks it's important that this not become an open-ended request. The President -- and by the way, the meeting with the congressional leaders today, the bipartisan congressional leaders, was a very important and stirring meeting of patriotism. The outpouring of support, shoulder to shoulder, regardless of anybody's political party, was wonderful, it was impressive, and it should make every American proud.

The President will continue to work with Congress, but he does not think it should be an open-ended commitment.

Q So, just to follow up, is there going to be a specific request given to Congress today or tomorrow, for a specific amount of funding?

MR. FLEISCHER: We're going to work with Congress on the specifics of it. And as soon as we have something to announce, I will announce it or provide the information to you.

Q Given NATO's decision today, and the kind words from so many -- or supportive words from so many foreign leaders, does the President feel that at this point he has the international support he needs if he decides to strike, if --

MR. FLEISCHER: You know, again, I understand that you're trying to determine what may or may not come next. But it is just an area that I'm not going to speculate about, and I'm sure you can appreciate the reason why.

Q Can I just go back to the threat on Air Force One? I mean, at the time the four planes were hijacked, the President was in Florida. If you have a threat to Air Force One, it seems as though you're raising an additional threat that perhaps we don't know about.

MR. FLEISCHER: I'm sorry? Raising an additional threat that you don't know about?

Q Well, some other action that was going on. I mean, obviously the four planes that we know were hijacked, clearly -- I mean, were no threat to Air Force One.

MR. FLEISCHER: There was real and credible information that came in to the White House, and that is the reason why the White House, Air Force One, took the actions that it took, in accordance with all existing plans. And that also included, yesterday, as those who traveled with us knew, that we were not going to indicate where Air Force One was heading to.

Q Ari, involving one of those planes -- one of those four planes, Ari, is that where the credible threat, or can you say? Or are we talking about something totally different?

MR. FLEISCHER: No, you're asking me, in essence, what the source of information is, and I think the American people --

Q No, haven't we accounted for those four planes and what their targets were? Which, by deduction, you would assume there was something else that we're talking about targeting Air Force One. Can we make that assumption?

MR. FLEISCHER: I am not going to lead you any further as to speculating about what was the nature of the threat to Air Force One. But as I indicated, and I'll say it again, it was real, it was credible and --

Q Can you say it was not one of the four planes that we have accounted for?

MR. FLEISCHER: I'm just not going to speculate about the nature of it.

Q Could I ask you this question? Was the President's original destination, upon departure from Sarasota, Andrews Air Force Base?

MR. FLEISCHER: Again, I'm just not going to get into those type of details about Air Force One's operations and its locations.

Q I'm just wondering if it was your intention to return to Washington, and then you changed plans?

MR. FLEISCHER: Suffice it to say, if people suspected that the likely location of a return of Air Force One would be to Andrews Air Force Base, if the President were returning to Washington, it would be wise, and in the interest of the country, for Air Force One not to return to the location that would have been predictable.

Q Ari, all the fingers are being pointed at Osama bin Laden and Afghanistan; he is being helped by, supported by Taliban and bases in Pakistan. So are we talking about now going against Afghanistan or Pakistan? And if it happened, then it is all in the name of Islam. So is it time now for the United States not to wait anymore, more innocent people will be killed in the name of terrorism?

MR. FLEISCHER: I was asked earlier about who we believe is the source of this. And I indicated that the United States continues to gather the facts about that information. So your question presupposes the answer, and I'm not prepared to do that.

Q Surely, investigators have uncovered reams of credible information that you've chosen not to release. Why did you decide to release this information to us today and just this information?

MR. FLEISCHER: Because just as the President said in his remarks this morning -- and I'm quoting from the President -- "The American people need to know that we are facing a different enemy than we have ever faced." And the President, having said that, thought it was appropriate to let the American people know the lengths to which those who perpetrated these terrorist acts were prepared to go in an attack on our nation.

Q Were there any other targets that we don't know about?

MR. FLEISCHER: These are the only ones that I'm aware of, Campbell.

Q Is the President satisfied, and should the American people be satisfied, with the performance of the intelligence community in this country, given what happened yesterday?

MR. FLEISCHER: The President believes that the intelligence community and the nation's military are the best in the world. And, clearly, something yesterday took place in New York that was not foreseen, that we had no specific information about. But the President's focus right now is on helping those who have lost their -- the families of those who have lost their lives and those who are suffering in this tragedy; and then on taking whatever the appropriate next steps should be.

Q Does he want to know what went wrong? Has he asked to find out where the gaps were?

MR. FLEISCHER: I think at the appropriate time the President will ask all appropriate questions. But the President is focused now on getting help to those who need help in New York, here at the Pentagon and on to talking with his national security team about any appropriate actions.

Q Ari, in terms of the President's statement this morning that this was an act of war, was it the realization that both the White House and Air Force One were targeted that elevated his language to talk about an act of war? Was it a threat against the head of this country that elevated it to that level?

MR. FLEISCHER: John, I think that the actions against the soil of the United States are what led the President to say that this was an act of war against the United States.

Q But why not use the word "war" last night in his televised address to the nation? What changed overnight to ratchet up that rhetoric?

MR. FLEISCHER: I think that you are just going to continue to hear the President speak out on a regular basis, and the President will share his thoughts with you as his thoughts develop as a result of the conversations he has with the security team, and as he thinks this matter through in his mind, and shares information with the public.

Q And how much money are you talking about in this spending request? You know, are we correct to assume it's in the billions of dollars?

MR. FLEISCHER: That's a correct assumption. And, again, once we have specific information, more specific than that, I will get it to you. But the President made it clear that this should not be an open-ended commitment.

Q But a ball park in tens of billions?

MR. FLEISCHER: We'll have -- as soon as the information is better developed in our conversations with the Congress, I'm going to do my best to provide it to you in specificity.

Q What are you hearing from the President's financial working group about a possible timetable to reopen the markets? And how important is that to not only investors in this country, but to the global economy?

MR. FLEISCHER: Well, first of all, on the first part of your question the Securities and Exchange Commission, as well as the Department of Treasury, are looking at that matter. And so I'm going to leave that answer up to them.

But, obviously, as the President said today, the federal government and all our agencies are conducting business, but it is not business as usual. But the President is cognizant of the fact that it's important to get as much back on line as quickly as is possible, and all the agencies of the government are tasked with doing so.

Q Ari, given the President's language today, is there any discussion here of asking Congress for a declaration of war?

MR. FLEISCHER: You know, again, as the President said, there were acts of war that were carried out against our country. And the President will continue to work with Congress on any appropriate measures at the appropriate time.

But, you know, this is also a different situation from situations our nation has faced in the past, and the President is cognizant of that. As the President indicated, in this case, as we ascertain information, we are dealing, at least at this point, with nameless, faceless people. And it is a different type of war than it was, say, when you knew the capitol of the country that attacked you.

So we will continue to work with the Congress on appropriate language on the appropriate time.

Q So, just to try to understand your answer, given what you said, since it is unclear who has done this, or officially unclear who has done this at this point, is it less likely that there will be a request for a declaration of war?

MR. FLEISCHER: No, I didn't indicate one way or another. I said that the President will continue to work with Congress on appropriate language at the appropriate time.

Q So you're not ruling it out, then?

MR. FLEISCHER: I've answered the question.

Q Are you planning a major expansion in the Sky Marshals program?

MR. FLEISCHER: Jim, that's a question that you need to talk to the Department of Transportation about. They'll be addressing all issues dealing with airline safety.

Q What is the President's mood right now, his state of mind? How is he -- through the day?

MR. FLEISCHER: You know, I gave you some indication about the meeting with members of Congress. And I really have to say that it was a striking meeting, in that the leaders of our nation in the Congress, regardless of party, and in the White House, are resolute and are shoulder to shoulder. And that is the President's mood.

I indicated yesterday that the President is determined, and I think that is still a fitting description of the President.

Q There are administration officials who are describing him as more angry than they had ever seen him. Do you see that?

MR. FLEISCHER: I see him as determined. There's no question that the President has strong thoughts and strong feelings. But the President also is focused on this matter in a way that -- again, I just go back to the meeting he had with the members of Congress. He is focused on rallying our nation, on helping those who need help at this time -- in New York and at the Pentagon -- expressing his sorrow to the families involved, and ascertaining all facts and all information so that the United States can and will do the right thing.

Q Ari, has he heard from or reached out to former Presidents for advice, for counsel, for support?

MR. FLEISCHER: I don't have any information, Kelly, about any former Presidents that he's talked to beyond what I indicated yesterday.

Q Ari, as to the meeting with the leaders of Congress today, does the President come out of that thinking he has carte blanche in a response, et cetera?

MR. FLEISCHER: No, the President does not think that. The President is going to want to continue to consult. The President is going to continue to lead. But the President understands that at all times, it's important to work with Congress. But it's particularly important now to consult with the Congress.

One of the greatest strengths of our country is that we are a constitution-based democracy. Our Constitution and our nation have survived acts of terror and attacks on our nation before. And the President knows that the strength of our nation comes from that Constitution, which gives an important role to Congress. And he will continue to consult closely with Congress and its leaders.

Q Ari, on the threat to Air Force One, are you really saying that this was an assassination plot that either went awry or was thwarted by our reactions, the U.S. reaction?

MR. FLEISCHER: Ron, I'm not going to speculate about that. I'm just going to share the information that I've shared about what the targets were, and I think you can draw your own conclusions.

Q Let me ask you about the idea of willingness to attack those who host terrorism. Is this a change in the U.S. policy for how we treat these countries who may not have participated in the act, but may have known that these terrorists were in-country? Is this a change in U.S. policy? And, if so, where does it come from?

MR. FLEISCHER: Well, you know, I'm not -- I don't know if this is a change or not. Of course, given the fact that President Bush has been in office, now, for nine months, this is, I think, an example of how President Bush is going to address this in a resolute manner. The President's words speak for themselves about what he said and why he said it, and everyone should be clear about what the President said.

Q Ari, the President is outspoken about his religious faith. Can you tell us if he's had any conversations with pastors or religious leaders over the course of events of the last two days?

MR. FLEISCHER: You know, I have not asked him that, so I do not know.

Q He quoted the Bible in the speech last night. Is it safe to assume that his religious faith is sustaining him during the crisis?

MR. FLEISCHER: I think it's fair to say that in all things, the President's religious faith sustains him, particularly at a time like now.

Q Before this occurred, the Congress and the President were at odds about the budget and about spending this year. As a result of this patriotic meeting today, does the President have any reason to believe that that will be resolved more easily?

MR. FLEISCHER: Well, I think there is no question there is a real sense from members of Congress and the President about the importance of working together on all issues. And as always, the government, the President, all agencies, will continue to work closely with Congress. And there will be other important issues that get addressed, as this international issue gets addressed.

Q Ari, will the President have to dip into Social Security surplus to get for these terrorist funds? And one unrelated question: how can you declare war against a nation when you don't know the nation involved?

MR. FLEISCHER: Well, that's one of the answers I gave earlier when I was asked that question --

Q You don't declare war against an individual, surely.

MR. FLEISCHER: And that's why I indicated that we would continue to work with the Congress on appropriate language at the appropriate time. But as the President just said, this is a nameless, faceless act at this point. And so that's where the President is on that.

As for Social Security, you know, again, the fiscal year will end on September 30th. We will have more specific information at that time. But clearly the situation has changed. But the President was always going to be mindful of the economy, will always be mindful of the need to help our nation's seniors. And that's another reason it's so important that the government is up and functioning -- seniors are receiving their Social Security checks.

And as the President said, it's not business as usual. But the business of the nation and the government is going on.

Q Does he feel he has to have a declaration of war to go after known terrorists?

MR. FLEISCHER: Well, that's speculating about what the President is going to do, and I'm just not going to do that.

Q No, it isn't. I mean, this would be an MO. Would we really go --

MR. FLEISCHER: That would presume a certain action by the President, and so I'm not prepared to comment.

Q Ari, you said earlier that the President has spoken with his father. Can you tell us, is former President George Bush any kind of adviser throughout this crisis management?

MR. FLEISCHER: Well, as I've indicated throughout the year, when the President speaks with his father, he speaks with him as a son, and also as someone who speaks with former Presidents. And in all his communications with former Presidents, the President has asked me to keep those confidential. And I will continue to do so.

Q Ari, as a result of the extensive briefings that the President has now had since the attacks of yesterday morning, does he have any reason to believe that there are any further attacks that may be planned?

MR. FLEISCHER: As the President indicated today in his remarks, it is not business as usual. And there are heightened security and tightened security measures in place. He has also said that our nation is going to move forward. So at all times, the United States government will continue to be vigilant and protective of its citizens. We do live in an open and free society. But obviously the attacks that were planned yesterday were executed yesterday.

Q Ari, on airport security, I know that the Department of Transportation will do a briefing, and of course the FAA is sort of putting out a directive for tighter security standards. Is the President calling for any review, right off the bat, now, of security procedures at airports? I mean, does he see any more federal needs in such a way, of sort of federalizing security at the nation's airports?

MR. FLEISCHER: The President is confident that Secretary Mineta is fully addressing this matter. Secretary Mineta has been in regular contact, not only with the airlines, but also with the intelligence community, as well as with other authorities as part of the President's team that he has put together to address this matter -- not only in the sense of one agency's responsibility involving travel, but also how all other government agencies can contribute to the safety and security of the American people in helping the Department of Transportation to carry out its mission.

Q So is the Secretary then conducting a review right now of all security procedures?

MR. FLEISCHER: I think that's a question you should address directly to the Secretary.

Q Ari, has the President started to contemplate his military options with the national security team today?

MR. FLEISCHER: Again, any questions dealing with what military options the President may or may not be considering is a question, I'm sure you can appreciate, the American people do not want answered publicly. And I'm just not going to discuss that issue.

Q Ari, you spoke earlier today about the President's desire to go to New York City. Have you gone any further down that road today?

MR. FLEISCHER: John, the President would like to go to New York City. The President's heart goes out to those who live in New York, to the families who have lost loved ones and to all New Yorkers, and to all Americans who look at New York and see a beautiful skyline that is now altered.

But the President is also cognizant of the fact that nothing should be done that would in any way hinder the ability of those who are carrying out the rescue efforts to find survivors and get them out. And any time the President travels, it does create issues for people on the ground, and the President is not going to try to do anything that would make anything harder for the people who are carrying out their number one priority.

So at the appropriate time, the President will go to New York. But the President's first focus is on making sure that the rescue workers are able to conduct their jobs.

Q Can you give us a little more detail on the President's day after, or following the meeting with congressional leaders? Was anyone else at this lunch with Cheney? What happened between -- after the lunch with Cheney and right now?

MR. FLEISCHER: The President and Vice President Cheney had lunch in the private dining room right off the Oval Office. The President then made additional phone calls to foreign leaders, and began a meeting just a little while ago with his national security team.

Q Did he make any phone calls outside of foreign leaders? Did he call anyone else?

MR. FLEISCHER: I only have a rundown on the foreign leader calls, Jim.

Q Ari, about the phone calls. I'm a little puzzled why it was necessary to talk twice in a day to President Putin. My question is, have the two presidents confirmed their desire to meet according to the schedule that is known -- in China and then in Texas?

MR. FLEISCHER: Well, let me just say on the question of how many times they spoke, the President is going to continue to reach out and talk to people, per his judgment, about how to bring about a coalition that will rally the world against terrorism. And it's, I think, a sign of the strength of the world reaction in response to this act of terrorism in New York.

As for any further scheduling of events, we're going to keep you informed about anything. But I have no information about any changes in the President's schedule beyond the immediate short-term. And so you should not anticipate any, unless and until -- and you may not be advised. They may all be underway just as planned. But events are just beginning, and we are going to keep you informed.

Q Is an emergency session of the G-8, though -- that the Italians seem to be suggesting now -- is it something that the White House is considering?

MR. FLEISCHER: Questions of the G-8 involve the finance and treasury ministers, so that's a question you should address to Treasury.

Q Ari, can I ask again, by saying that these are acts of war, what exactly does that mean practically, when the President says that? Where does that take him?

MR. FLEISCHER: That the United States was attacked. American soil was attacked. And the President will describe this, as he always has and he always does, in a frank and forthright fashion.

Q And therefore, is there -- does that pave the way for an action by Congress?

MR. FLEISCHER: I think you're getting at a question that I've addressed earlier. I think that --

Q I'm just trying again to --

MR. FLEISCHER: The words the President used speak for themselves.

Q Ari, is the President seeking any further Security Council action, to your knowledge?

MR. FLEISCHER: At the United Nations?

Q Yeah.

MR. FLEISCHER: I don't have any further information on that. That's something you should talk to State about.

Q And Ari, there are some major international gatherings scheduled in the United States soon -- the IMF/World Bank meeting here, the U.N. General Assembly. Is the President considering any action in regard to those, suggesting perhaps that they be cancelled or moved?

MR. FLEISCHER: As I indicated earlier, the President's schedule for the next several days is being revised, so that the President can spend the maximum amount of time focused on what has taken place. Any other events that are on the President's schedule beyond a week, two weeks, an extended period, we will deal with those events as they become closer.

Q Because he believes that those should still take place as scheduled in these cities?

MR. FLEISCHER: Terry, I think it's too soon to say. This act of terrorism took place yesterday, and the government is continuing to gather the facts about it. And as decisions are made, as events come upon us per the schedule on the calendar, we'll share those decisions with you.

Q On the phrase "act of war", are you saying that is just a phrase describing what happened? Or does it carry any legal, or political, or constitutional significance?

MR. FLEISCHER: I think the American people know that when the United States is attacked in the manner it was attacked, this is an act of war. And I think there is no other way to describe it. And I think that's what the American people expect from their President, is a President who will talk with them straight and direct about it.

Q Well, I was asking, does it also carry some sort of legal, congressional, or constitutional significance? Or is he just describing what happened?

MR. FLEISCHER: Again, anything dealing with Congress is something that the President will work Congress on, appropriate language at the appropriate time.

Q Ari, I wonder if you could respond to, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld talked at length about his concerns about sloppy handling of classified information. He says this is something that's happening daily. Does the President share his concerns? Is there something the President wants to do about it? And is there any sense -- it's sort of concerned with why the Secretary brought this up -- a sense that mishandling or sloppy handling of classified information contributed to these four attacks?

MR. FLEISCHER: No, that's not the sense. At a time like this, it's a very healthy reminder to all concerned that this is not business as usual. And anybody in the government who is in receipt of classified information must at all times obey the law that makes that information classified for a good reason, because it's to protect the security of the country and individuals around the world.

Q Members of Congress, is that what he's talking about?

MR. FLEISCHER: I'm not going to address specifically, but it's a wise reminder to all concerned.

Q Ari, is it -- going back to Air Force One, is it fair to assume that once he decided to leave Nebraska and head for Washington, that it was -- that you were confident that the threat was over at that point?

MR. FLEISCHER: To leave Nebraska and head back to Washington? Yes. On the flight to Nebraska from Louisiana, the President indicated that he wanted to get back to Washington as soon as possible. He was advised at that point, the recommendation to him was it would not be prudent to return to Washington at that time, given the information that we had here in Washington.

Following his meeting in Nebraska, the President made the determination to return. And obviously it was safe enough for him to do so.

Q Ari, we started off this briefing by you saying that there was specific and credible evidence that the plane that hit the Pentagon was originally targeted for the White House.

MR. FLEISCHER: Correct.

Q Do you have specific and credible evidence on the intended target of the aircraft that went down in Pennsylvania?

MR. FLEISCHER: Do not.

Q Ari, going back to the --

Q Ari?

MR. FLEISCHER: Yeah, you haven't had one yet, so let's go here and then there.

Q Ari, Secretary Powell said today that he had also spoken to Chairman Arafat, with Sharon, and with Shimon Peres, indicating that he also wants to try and get some motion into discussions in the Middle East. Now, given that this incident may be totally unconnected with anything going on in the Middle East, doesn't the President now feel that perhaps the volatility which has existed there probably should -- more measures must be taken to get that to subside?

MR. FLEISCHER: I think from the President's point of view, this is a wake-up call to all concerned that terrorism must be combatted in all its forms and in every way. And this presents people with an opportunity to work together now, to move beyond the disputes of the past. And we'll see what events unfold as a result of this.

Thank you.

Q Ari, will we see the President again today, or hear from him?

MR. FLEISCHER: We'll keep you informed.

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