



For Immediate Release
Office of the Press Secretary
September 17, 2001

Press Briefing by Ari Fleischer

The James S. Brady Briefing Room

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1:17 P.M. EDT

MR. FLEISCHER: Good afternoon. I would like to fill you in on **the President's day** and, also, I have a couple announcements to make.

President Bush this morning spoke with President Zayid of the United Arab Emirates. The two spoke about cooperation against terrorism. The President thanked President Zayid for his public statements of support and his willingness to help the United States.

The President, earlier today, convened a meeting of his National Security Council to continue making plans. Earlier, the President visited the Pentagon to be briefed on the status of the call-up of the Reserves and to thank the employers and families who we know will be making a sacrifice to allow the Reservists to come serve our nation.

The President is about to make a phone call to the Chancellor of the New York City public schools, Harold Levy, to discuss how the federal government is prepared to help the school children and the parents of New York City deal with this tragedy as children go back to school.

The Secretary of Education is with the Chancellor right now. He will be there for the phone call and he will be making an announcement about additional millions of dollars which will be provided to New York City public schools to help them in this effort and to help our children and to help their parents.

A little later this afternoon, the President is going to be departing the White House to go to an Islamic center in the Washington, D.C. area, where the President intends to speak out very strongly about the need to remind all Americans that Arab Americans and Muslim Americans love the American flag, just like everybody else who is a citizen of this country. And he's looking forward to that visit. He'll spend some time with the leaders of the community, as well as various members of the community. The President considers that a very important meeting.

Later this afternoon, the President will return for a meeting of the economic policy team, where they will discuss the consequences of the terrorist attack on the United States, from an economic point of view, as well as discuss the airline industry and the position the airline industry is in at this moment.

Mrs. Bush will be in Pennsylvania for the memorial service for those who lost their lives in the crash of the airline in southwest Pennsylvania.

Two announcements for you, and then I'll be more than pleased to take questions. President Bush will welcome French President Jacques Chirac for a meeting and a private working dinner on September 18th, tomorrow. The visit is part of President Bush's continuing consultation with key allies about our global agenda, including the war on terrorism. And I'd note that this was a previously planned meeting.

In addition, the President will welcome Amir Shaiki Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani to Washington. He is the Amir of Qatar, for a working visit on October 4th. And with that, I'm more than happy to take questions.

Q Ari, on the economic front, the President talked about working with Congress on an **economic stimulus package**. Is he specifically preparing to back another tax cut? Does he think the country needs that right now?

MR. FLEISCHER: Too soon to say, David, but the President will continue to keep his eye on the economy, and he will continue to listen to members of Congress in both parties about what steps, if any, they believe need to be taken to help the economy, if any need to be taken.

Q Can you be more specific? Is that one of the ideas that's currently being discussed, both in Congress and between Congress and the administration?

MR. FLEISCHER: That is one of the ideas being discussed, correct.

Q And what kind of tax cut? Are we talking about capital gains --

MR. FLEISCHER: No, it's too soon to say. The President will have the briefing later this afternoon, and so I would hesitate to speculate until the briefing.

Q Let me go further. Does the administration support the bill in Congress to provide assistance to the **airline industry**?

MR. FLEISCHER: That's the topic that will come up at the meeting this afternoon -- the best forum that assistance, if any is to be coming, could be available. So that's a topic the President will review, and he has -- he's very concerned about the health of the airline industry.

Q Will there be a decision on either one of these matters out of this meeting?

MR. FLEISCHER: Let the meeting take place, and I'll try to keep you informed. And, again, this is the beginning of a process where the President will keep his eye on the economy, in the aftermath of the attack on the United States. So I'll keep you updated.

Q The **Taliban** is now saying that it's Supreme Council will meet tomorrow to discuss the U.S. demand to turn over bin Laden. What's the administration's response to that? What are you looking for out of that?

MR. FLEISCHER: The President's response will be, he will see what they say. But this is much bigger than that. The President has made it clear, the Vice President has made it clear, the Secretary of Defense has made it clear that this war on terrorism is bigger than any one person. The al Qaeda organization is a network that is represented in some 60 countries around the world, that exists beyond any one leader. And this war on terrorism is a war that the President said he is committed to taking throughout this organization that engaged in this attack

on our country.

Q And the Pakistani officials are saying that they told Afghan leaders, the Taliban, they had 72 hours to turn over bin Laden. Is that a U.S.-sponsored deadline?

MR. FLEISCHER: Anything involving, any specific actions that may or may not have been taken by our allies in this matter, I'm not going to get into. And let me try to shed a little light on the reason for that, because there have been many questions about what have you asked your allies to do, and I've indicated the broad areas.

We've asked our allies to cooperate with us in military areas, in financial areas, in economic areas, in political and diplomatic. And I understand why you want to know more. But for me to indicate to you anything more than that would also be an indication to our enemy about what concrete steps allies may be taking. And one of the easiest ways for them to get around any steps our allies may be taking is for them to know about them.

So I wish somehow there was a way that I could share this information with people here and with the American people. But, as you know, any answer I would give to that would also be directly provided to our enemy. And I will not do that.

Q Ari, two things. One is, we're hearing reports of an American airliner that had to make an emergency landing in Chicago today. The FBI came on board, apparently, and took away three gentlemen. What kind of **state of alert** is the White House had, and law enforcement, about people who may still be flying, that may be a danger? And, secondly, has the President rescinded the order for the military to shoot down commercial airliners, if necessary?

MR. FLEISCHER: On the second point, I'm not going to address the exact status of the defense operations to protect the American people. Suffice it to say the United States remains on a very heightened status of alert to protect the traveling public. But that's an operational question so, therefore, I'm not going to get beyond what I have said.

On the first part of it, the President has tried every day in every way to warn the American people that this is a war and we are an open society. Obviously, the events of September 11th, a terrorist organization was able to penetrate our country and to attack. And being an open society, everybody does still need to be vigilant; people still need to take care and to remember that we are in a war footing. And it is a different time and a different era, unfortunately.

Q Does law enforcement, Ari, in the United States, does law enforcement believe that there may be a number of suspects still at large in the U.S. that may have participated in the Tuesday attack and may be planning future attacks?

MR. FLEISCHER: Concerns remain dealing with ongoing security. And that's why I think you've seen steps that are being taken by the Department of Transportation, the Federal Aviation Administration, to do everything possible to secure the traveling public, particularly in the air. So there's a reason for the stepped-up vigilance and for the stepped-up security. It's because there are causes for concern that remain.

Q There's a news report today that there's a division among the President's advisors about whether or how much to help the **airline industry**. As the President goes into this meeting, what is the current thinking about that? And is ironing this out one of the purposes of the meeting?

MR. FLEISCHER: Well, I think, as you can imagine in any major issue where it involves the health of an American industry, there are lots of factors that need to get considered. And the President will have a good opportunity today to start to address what the facts are. And as I indicated earlier, the meeting hasn't taken place yet. It will take place mid-to-late this afternoon, and you may want to check back with me after that.

Q Ari, the IMF cancelled their meetings today, and the Emir of Qatar is coming. Do you think the **WTO** ministerial should proceed as planned?

MR. FLEISCHER: I have no information about that. That, of course, is in Qatar and that's an entirely different security situation. So you can't put everything in the same category. Of course, the meeting that was cancelled is right here in Washington, D.C., and that meeting would have involved bringing down police from New York, bringing down police from Philadelphia. Obviously, there is a major strain on the police departments along the east coast and they've made their decision.

Helen.

Q What items on the President's **legislative agenda** are now on the back burner, shelved for the year?

MR. FLEISCHER: None. It was interesting -- none. It was interesting, at the meeting last week with the Cabinet, the meeting of the Cabinet was called for the purpose of discussing what the Cabinet members, again, in collecting information from Cabinet Secretaries about the status of combatting the attack on our country and dealing with it. At the end of the meeting, however, the President called on all the members of the Cabinet to take action on our domestic agenda.

The President reminded them that a patients' bill of rights remains important; that there are a series of initiatives that are pending up on the Hill that remain important. And he called on them to get done, including education reform, which the President reminded them remains a top priority domestically.

Q He doesn't expect to get it, surely?

MR. FLEISCHER: You know, Helen, I think it's interesting, the Congress still has a job to do and we still are a constitutional system and that's what has kept us strong and that's what is going to enable us to win. So there is a domestic agenda, the President is committed to it. I think it's fair to say that you'll hear less about it because of the dominance, obviously, of dealing with an attack on our country.

But the President told the Cabinet members to be dedicated to it and members of our staff are.

Q A couple of times in the past two or three days the President has talked about the need to **rebuild New York**, the need to do it as quickly as possible. It is his opinion that the World Trade Center, or something similar to it, should be rebuilt?

MR. FLEISCHER: I think it's too soon to say, John. And that's the type of conversation the President is going to want to have with New York officials and, of course, with the many private organizations who are headquarter in the World Trade Center.

But, obviously, the President has a real keen eye out for how to help New York and how to bring New York -- rebuild New York. But what form that will take, it's too soon to say, this is six days after the attack.

Q But is he of the mind, though, that if you did not rebuild that building, or a reasonable facsimile thereof, that it would be bowing to the terrorists?

MR. FLEISCHER: No. I think, again, the President is going to have serious discussions at the appropriate time with the Mayor of New York, with the Governor of New York, with the appropriate people who are responsible for such an endeavor. But what the President is making clear is not only for the symbolism of rebuilding New York in the wake of attack, but for the humanity of it and for the deserving nature of helping New York, he is intent to get it done.

Q Can I just follow up on Helen's question. **The President would like those issues addressed this year, patients' rights, education and everything that was on the plate, trade promotion authority, still this year?**

MR. FLEISCHER: That was his charge to the Cabinet members.

Q Now, wouldn't that foster some disunity on the Hill? I mean, a lot of those are very contentious issues and he's looking for a united Congress.

MR. FLEISCHER: You know, Keith, I guess that's one way to look at it. I don't think that's the way the President looks at it. And I think that in the wake of this there is a different mood in the Congress, and in the Presidency about working with each other and cooperating with each other. So I've made no such presumption. The issue should be, proceed with the people's business on the domestic front and work together.

Q Can you give us any kind of summary about the Pentagon meeting the President had today?

MR. FLEISCHER: The President received an update about the status of the **call up of the Reserves**, the number of people involved, the activities that they will be working in. The President, of course, listed many of those activities -- you heard him, himself, when he was talking about engineering roles, he went through -- protecting

the harbors. He went through the whole list of activities which the Reserves are helping in. And also talked about the employers and the families, the difficulty that a call-up can impose on them. And the President expressed his gratitude for those who provide such a vital service.

It's interesting because the Reserves really do play a tremendous role in our nation's ability to defend itself. It's not a passive role, it's not a small role -- it's an integral role. And that's what they talked about.

Q Ari, you know the eyes of the world are on **Wall Street** today. It's been closed for six days, after the terrorist incident. Is the President being appraised -- I know Secretary O'Neill was over there for the opening, but is the President being appraised continually of the **behavior of the markets**, not just the averages?

MR. FLEISCHER: You know, I did not ask him when we went over to the Pentagon if he was aware what stocks were trading at, at that moment. But, of course, the President is keenly aware of the first day of the markets opening, and the importance of the markets working and functioning. It's a terribly important topic. That's why Secretary O'Neill has been so involved in it and will continue to be.

Q Will he be at the meeting this afternoon, the economic meeting?

MR. FLEISCHER: Secretary O'Neill? I believe the meeting is of the White House staff that works with all the Cabinet Secretaries. But, again, the meeting will be in a couple of hours.

Q Ari, can you elaborate a little bit on the **President's remarks today** about wanted dead or alive? I mean, could you explain his intent? Is he essentially issuing an appeal for anyone to hunt down and possibly kill bin Laden?

MR. FLEISCHER: I don't think you can elaborate. I think they were pretty plainly spoken.

Q How about in addition to that, then, if we want to go through the same imagery, is there any consideration of a federal bounty, a reward?

MR. FLEISCHER: There's nothing that I've heard about like that.

Q To follow up on that, yesterday afternoon the President used the term, find the perpetrators and bringing them to justice. Was he talking about a form of justice in which you police, the international community polices, brings them to an international sense of justice in terms of judicial justice, or is he talking about specifically just military strikes, obliteration?

MR. FLEISCHER: Well, and the President said that again today, he said that remark in the context of justice. He added that, as you heard, in his comments. I think that justice comes in many different shapes and forms. And the President has stressed his opinion about a couple of those different shapes and forms that it could come in.

Q The comments that the President and his senior advisors have made about the increased security, the increased awareness that we will have to follow now have been careful to note that we don't want this country's freedoms to be eroded by the terrorist attack, we want to remain America. And, yet, the presence of five or four Middle East nationals on a domestic flight is exceptionally rare.

Are the rules different for non-Americans? Should that trigger now questions -- Middle East nationals on domestic flights in large numbers, should that trigger questions? And are non-Americans in this heightened sense, this more aware time, to undergo more close scrutiny than members of the Arab American community -- non-Americans to undergo more scrutiny than they did in the past?

MR. FLEISCHER: Well, I think when you look at the fact that there are lines, sometimes people are told to get to their flights four hours early, that way they can all go through the same security review, I think it's perfectly clear that these provisions apply to one and to all. As a matter of law enforcement, anybody who is believed to be violating the laws of the United States will be held accountable and responsible. And the laws target law-breakers.

Q -- whether we can be more focused on non-Americans in this time. I'm trying not to get to profiling; I'm trying not to get to the diminution of civil liberties. But is the scrutiny more on non-Americans than it can be on Americans?

MR. FLEISCHER: Well, I think the scrutiny is on those who violate the law. And whether that's in the form of immigration, whether it's in the form of anything else that would give the law enforcement community reason to believe that there are threats. But I remind you, again, that the precautions that have been put in place apply to

one and to all.

And, again, the President -- also, there's a reminder here when he goes to the mosque this afternoon that it still is a time to remind all Americans about the role of civil justice in our society, about the role we all play as individuals in treating our neighbors fairly and in making no presumptions about guilt. And that's one of the reasons the President is going. He wants to stand shoulder to shoulder with the American Arab community and Muslims to say that they, too, are patriots and they, too, are victims of this attack.

Q But, Ari, one of the hijackers was an American.

MR. FLEISCHER: And I repeat my answer: law enforcement will target those who break the law.

Q Ari, on the issue of bringing -- potentially bringing someone like Osama bin Laden to justice, he's already under indictment in New York. Does the President believe that it's, as a security matter, that it's even possible to try Osama bin Laden in the United States, particularly in New York? Does he think a trial is even a viable option?

MR. FLEISCHER: I think we'll just have to see what steps unfold and in what manner this is dealt with.

Q Does he want him tried, or does he want him --

MR. FLEISCHER: As the President said, dead or alive.

Q Right, but this is not a hypothetical. I mean, he's under indictment in New York, currently. If he were to be produced, there's a real question, if you talk to former prosecutors, current prosecutors about the ability of the United States to even try such a person, to secure a courthouse, to be able to put somebody like that on trial --

MR. FLEISCHER: David, I hope the United States has to deal with this. I hope the United States has to face the fact that Osama bin Laden is found, either dead or alive, and then it's a question we will actively have to deal with. Until that time, I'm not going to speculate about any trials in the United States. I just refer you to the words of the President and the words of the Vice President on this very specific matter.

Q I'm not asking for details, but has the President settled on a course of action, or is that still under debate within the administration?

MR. FLEISCHER: I'm not going to discuss the timing of it --

Q That's not the question. Has he settled on --

MR. FLEISCHER: To answer that could be a clue that something could be imminent or it could be a long time from now. So I'm not going to get into giving status reports on the President's decision-making process.

Q Ari, when the President said, "wanted dead or alive," did he have a preference as to whether -- (laughter.)

MR. FLEISCHER: I did not hear him express any preference.

Q Ari, has the President, vis-a-vis the "dead or alive" comment, has the President lifted the **directive that forbids the use of assassination**?

MR. FLEISCHER: That directive is in effect. And I also want to add that it does not limit the United States' ability to act in its self-defense.

Q -- has been interpreted to limit our ability to target a specific individual at a specific time?

MR. FLEISCHER: I'll just refer you to my words. It is in effect, but it does not limit America's ability to act in self-defense.

Q Are you saying we haven't prohibited assassination?

MR. FLEISCHER: I've answered the question in the context in which it was asked.

Q Can we follow?

Q Let me follow up on that point. You said it doesn't limit the U.S. ability to act in self-defense. Does going after a prime -- going after someone who we believe is responsible or behind the Trade Center fall under that directive? Is that an act of self-defense?

MR. FLEISCHER: I'm just going to repeat my words, and others will figure out the exact implications of them. But it does not inhibit the nation's ability to act in self-defense.

Q Can you give us a copy of that order?

Q Would going after bin Laden be an act of self-defense?

MR. FLEISCHER: This is a legal matter and I'm sure the lawyers will have more to say if they want to. But that's the answer, Ron. It does not -- the executive order does not limit the United States' ability to act in self-defense.

Q And is going after bin Laden an act of self-defense?

MR. FLEISCHER: I'm not going to define all the steps that may or may not be taken.

Q Ari, we like to think of ourselves as a civilized world, so why does the administration feel that it is appropriate to encourage, globally, people to go kill someone else?

MR. FLEISCHER: Jean, our nation has been attacked and we're at war, and to win a war it is vital for the United States to engage in it. And, unfortunately, having had the first blow taken at our nation, our nation will defend itself. And defending itself means acts which involve the lives of others. We will defend ourself. And the United States will act in self-defense, and that is why.

Q The President's visit to the Islamic center you mentioned has an important domestic purpose. Does it have an international purpose, as well? How concerned is the President that in defending ourselves we could ignite, not among the government of the region, but among the people of the region, a kind of religious conflict, a holy war?

MR. FLEISCHER: Well, I think it's fair to say that any actions the President takes domestically have international repercussions. The world is looking to us to see how we react to the fight against terrorism. The world will follow America's lead in many cases. And we will continue to work directly with many of those other nations.

But I remind you, also, Terry, that many of those nations have their own threats from within and they have to ask themselves if they fail to act against terrorism, will that further embolden the terrorists and send a signal that they can get away with more?

Q But is there a concern that this could degenerate into a conflict, not between terrorism and civilization, but between Islam and Christianity?

MR. FLEISCHER: This attack had nothing to do with Islam. This attack was a perversion of Islam.

Q Ari, if you could just come back to **the coalition you're trying to put together here** -- and the President has used that phrase a few times. How does this differ from the kind of coalitions put together in the Persian Gulf time? Do you envision a different role for, say, the close and traditional allies, the NATO allies, and then, obviously, this other group that you are going to -- who tend to be, in large cases, either Arab states or states that encircle Afghanistan?

MR. FLEISCHER: I think that's a very good question. The biggest difference is while the United States is talking to coalition allies and asking for various things, the war to be fought is a very different war. In 1991, the Persian Gulf War was much more a traditional war. It involved a lengthy period of aerial attacks on Iraq, as part of a broad coalition, followed by a ground force invasion of Iraq, organized by a large coalition of nations, including Arab nations, in that case.

What is different in this war, as the President has said, as the Vice President has said, as the Secretary of Defense said yesterday on one of the shows, is a war on terrorism does not involve those traditional targets.

There may be some elements of that, but there will be some things that don't involve overt military action of that nature.

And what that means is that some nations are going to contribute in ways more identical to 1991. Others are going to contribute in ways that are much more limited, but they have real contributions to make on that front, on the political front, on the diplomatic front, on the financial front. So different nations will contribute in different ways. But just because one nation contributes more or less doesn't make them any more or less an important part of the coalition.

Q Ari, can you clarify one thing for me? **Going back to this "dead or alive," the Vice President said yesterday that he wouldn't mind seeing Osama bin Laden dead, but that he would have to consult more with the White House lawyers.** Is the description that you gave us based on a recent interpretation by the White House legal counsel staff as recently as yesterday? Or is this the standing policy of this administration? Can you clarify --

MR. FLEISCHER: I couldn't tell you the exact genesis, the date of that. But that is the policy.

Q Two-part. The President does not want the State Department to keep pressuring Israel to negotiate with Arafat, does he, since that would be to tell Israel, do as we say, not as we are preparing to do?

MR. FLEISCHER: You know, I've thought about this a lot, and they really are very different circumstances. In the case of Israel, and the situation there, you have a lengthy process that was involved in bringing the partners together, toward peace, a process that both have committed themselves to. So the President does see here an opportunity to help address the problems of the Middle East, and he does believe that the patterns in the Middle East need to rededicate themselves to the Mitchell Accords and to the peace process.

Q The Baltimore Sun reports that radio stations in Washington and Baltimore and elsewhere owned by Maryland multi-millionaire Kathy Hughes are, "broadcasting African-Americans either endorsing or excusing the acts of terrorists who took thousands of lives and who are expressing sympathy with both bin Laden and the Palestinians."

And my question is, does the President, who stated, we are at war, believe it would be wrong for the FCC, which already take action on pornography, to contact Mrs. Hughes? Or does the President believe we were wrong after another war to send to federal prison Axis Sally and Tokyo Rose?

MR. FLEISCHER: I have not heard these reports, so I'm not going to comment on things that I have not --

Q Well, they were in the Baltimore Sun.

MR. FLEISCHER: I'm not going to comment on things that I haven't heard. But if you have anything that would demonstrate that, I'd be interested to see it.

Q Two questions. There was a wire report that Berlusconi said he had talked to the White House or the President about **a G-8 meeting** here, sounding somewhat imminent, and that the White House has agreed to it. Do you know anything about that?

MR. FLEISCHER: No, there's nothing. I think there was some conversation, I saw a report on the wire that someone is proposing a G-8 meeting on the ministerial level, but I don't know what the status of that is. That's something that, obviously, if it's ministerial, it's Treasury.

Q What about at the leader level?

MR. FLEISCHER: No, there just was a G-8 meeting and I don't anticipate any upcoming ones, other than previously scheduled.

Q The President, in his remarks at the Pentagon, used some fairly graphic language talking about the terrorists slitting the throat of a woman who was on one of the planes. Is he talking about a specific incident or was it imagery or what --

MR. FLEISCHER: You know, I have not talked to the President since he said that, but I know I'm aware of public reports involving things that were said on cell phones with passengers on the flight in southwest Pennsylvania.

Q So there wasn't something -- I mean, do you know which flight he was talking about or was this just general --

MR. FLEISCHER: I just indicated. I just said.

Q But it's based on press reports?

MR. FLEISCHER: Well, I indicated I haven't talked to the President to see beyond that. But you all have heard those same reports.

Q On the meeting this afternoon with the **economic team**, when you said that they're considering what steps, if any, to consider in the way of an economic stimulus package, is it possible the administration might be considering the appropriateness of encouraging proposals to encourage the sell-off of assets at a time when, in fact, there is a concern about major sell-offs?

MR. FLEISCHER: Well, again, I think you have to let the meeting take place and see what information is presented to the President and what his reflections are. I'll be there; I'll do my best to give you some type of information.

Q Ari, speaking of civilized nations and religion, America heeded the call that President Bush gave this week, talking about going to the church house or going to the place of worship and praying. Many of those who prayed this week were praying to prevent war. What does the President, who is a devout Christian, say to these people as they're praying that there is no more bloodshed?

MR. FLEISCHER: I think that, also, is a great question. I've thought about that a lot, as somebody who works here, frankly. And I just think it's really -- it has to be said, but it's unfortunate to say -- that one of the reasons all of us are here and enjoy what we do and have the lifestyles we lead is because somebody in a generation before answered the call. And, unfortunately, in our history, there has been a call to war at times. And it's a call that a peace-loving nation and a free nation like the United States never -- ever -- wants to get involved in or answer.

But make no mistake: the United States has been attacked, and the United States will answer the call.

Q The Bible says, turn the other cheek.

MR. FLEISCHER: This nation will be defended. That way, we can have a Bible to continue to live by and to listen to, as well as a Koran, or as well as everybody else who comes to this country so we can protect their way of life.

Q Ari, just a few days ago, the President talked about Osama bin Laden as a suspect. What has happened in the past few days to bring a finer point on his sense that this is the perpetrator and that this is the person who is responsible, and this is what he wants to tell the American people?

MR. FLEISCHER: Well, I can't share that information with you, of course, and that deals with anything that would involve how the United States has learned information. If I were to answer that question, that would be information our enemy would love to have about how we get the information we get.

Q Just to clarify, this is what the President wants to tell the American people, that this is the mastermind of this, this is the person who is responsible, and that he is worth, dead or alive, rather than being brought to a court of justice?

MR. FLEISCHER: People have asked him questions, and he's answered them. People have said, is Osama bin Laden a suspect, and he's answered your questions directly. But this is why I caution you that, ask away on the topic of Osama bin Laden -- but that is not all this is about. This is about something so much bigger and broader than any one person. And as I think the Vice President could not have made it plainer yesterday, that if Osama bin Laden was dead, this war would continue on, because it does not stop with him.

Q Ari, does the President consider the possibility that by declaring these acts of war, he might prevent some of the businesses in the New York area that were harmed from collecting on insurance? Is there any contingency plan, perhaps, to help those businesses out if they have catastrophe insurance, but cannot collect because this was deemed an act of war?

MR. FLEISCHER: Well, number one, the President has called this an act of war because it is, and our nation

previously has dealt with the consequences of acts of war. And as a result of our dealing with those consequences, we've led the world every time. We will do so again. But there are **economic implications** to all of this, and that's one of the reasons the President is meeting today with his economic team.

But, fundamentally, the President knows that America is a nation of patriots. And as he said today at the Pentagon, corporations have to pay more attention to just the bottom line, to profits and losses. He said that in the context of those who allow the Reservists to come up. But everybody in this country is going to be asked to chip in, in one way or another.

Q Ari, is the Vice President, personally, taking part in **the NSC meeting** here at the White House today? Was he there? Was he present?

MR. FLEISCHER: That was earlier this morning, and he did.

Q He was here?

MR. FLEISCHER: Yes.

Q Ari, going back to the **President's trip to Islamic center**. There have been some incidents of Indian Sikhs and Indian Muslims were also under attack. And one Sikh was shot dead in Phoenix, and other -- now, also the Prime Minister of India called President Bush. They spoke on the phone yesterday. So could you share their conversation and what the President is going to take action against those -- Indian Sikhs who look like Osama bin Laden?

MR. FLEISCHER: No, the President spoke with President Vajpayee yesterday, and it's just another reminder that everybody in this country is an immigrant here, and everybody may have come at a different time and from a different place. But for this President, it doesn't matter how recently you've been here, everyone here is just as American as the next.

And I think at a time like this, it's incumbent on leaders -- and that's why he is going to go to the Islamic Center today -- to say that to the American people. I indicated earlier that in several of the private meetings I've been in with the President and, for example, at the meeting with those who represented New York and Virginia and Pennsylvania, the areas that were hit, the President said, it is your job as leaders to go out and remind people that all of us have to speak out and remind Americans not to act violently toward our fellow citizens just because of their ethnicity or the color of their skin.

Q Just to follow, I'm sorry, almost every Hindu temple around the country, including this area, they've been having prayers and they are sending message to President Bush that they are united and they are with the American people, including yesterday. The Indian Ambassador, he spoke clearly that India is with the United States. And tomorrow, all over India, they will observe prayers for the victims in New York and Washington.

MR. FLEISCHER: And I can report to you, the President, he has noted this and he's been touched by it. I've heard the President comment about the prayers and the candle-lightings around the world, the fact that the American National Anthem was sung at the Elysee. And these are powerful signals that the world is sending as the world stands as one.

Q Ari, just a couple weeks ago the U.S. government was condemning Israel for hunting down and killing people that they said were terrorists, they said they were acting in their self-defense, that a war had been declared on them. And we were saying that was wrong. Now it seems that we're making the exact same argument the Israelis were. Has the U.S. changed its position on this?

MR. FLEISCHER: No, that's basically Les's first question. The difference clearly is that the two parties there had pledged to each other and to the United States to engage in a peace process. That process has begun, and when the two parties are committed to that peace process, the President believes the best course is to help them and urge them to honor that peace process.

I don't think there's any peace process that was ever begun between those who committed this act and the United States.

Thank you, everybody.

END 2:00 P.M. EDT

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