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THE WHITE HOUSE
Office of the Press Secretary

PRESS BRIEFING
BY
LARRY SPEAKES

July 3, 1985

The Briefing Room

9:20 A.M. EDT

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9:30 A.M. EDT

#1482-7/3

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July 3, 1985

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9:20 A.M. EDT

MR. SPEAKES: Today the President has mostly meetings with staff.

Secretary Shultz is coming in to talk with the President. He does it regularly, and that is what he is doing today -- doing it regularly.

I will brief at 12:00 noon and I will at that time have an announcement concerning the United States and the Soviet Union. Secretary Shultz will brief for cameras in OEOB 450 at 1:30 p.m.

There will be no briefings here Thursday and Friday.

The President is planning on leaving for Camp David at 10:00 a.m. on Friday. The White House Press Office will close immediately thereafter, and operate by phone duty from thereon.

Q You won't have a 9:15 that morning either?

MR. SPEAKES: I won't have nothing that morning -- no briefings is no briefings.

Q When is the Shultz meeting with the President, Larry?

MR. SPEAKES: He is in for a couple of different sessions this morning with the President, so he is going to be around here for most of the morning.

Q Will we have a walk-over from here?

Q Is he going to do a July 4th speech of some kind?

MR. SPEAKES: No July 4th speech. We do -- and this afternoon we will have the traditional message to the American people on the Fourth of July, that we will release here.

Q Are you offering -- is the United States government offering a reward of up to \$5 million?

MR. SPEAKES: I don't have any comment on that specific report, but I would point out to you that Congress last year authorized the Secretary of State to pay up to \$500,000 each -- to individuals furnishing information leading to the arrest or conviction of any person for committing, conspiring, or attempting to commit an act of terrorism overseas. A total of \$5 million was authorized for such purposes.

Q Is that \$500,000 per person?

MR. SPEAKES: Yes.

Q Larry, does the -- would the United States consider any action that would involve kidnapping them to get them out of Lebanon?

MORE

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MR. SPEAKES: I would assume, and you may assume, that the United States would do -- anything the United States did would be within the bounds of United States' law, and I am not sure that that falls under the United States' law.

Q What about any other unilateral action on our part, apart from asking the Lebanese to help?

MR. SPEAKES: The State Department said that we are prepared to take unilateral action. They did not expand on it, nor will I.

Q Does the United States know the names of these people, as reported in an Israeli news report?

MR. SPEAKES: Secretary Shultz said we did.

Q What do you mean by "not sure that falls under United States Law"? In other words --

MR. SPEAKES; Kidnapping?

Q -- there is no law in the U.S. saying you cannot kidnap in Beirut?

MR. SPEAKES: No, the other way around. I don't think it is permitted under U.S. law.

Q Can I ask you something else about the seven that are there and the sort of less-than-subtle threats to their lives if the President follows through on this Beirut airport business? Do you consider that it would be a threat to their lives?

MR. SPEAKES: You are saying the Islamic Jihad statement yesterday, but I don't think we would comment on what Islamic Jihad has to say.

Q Well, the President went out of his way in his news conference to say that he would do nothing to endanger the lives of the TWA -- does that hold true for the seven?

MR. SPEAKES: Certainly any decisions we take, we will take into consideration what effect it might have on the safety of those who are held.

Q Do you believe --

Q You are still planning to go ahead with our efforts to try to close the airport in Beirut?

MR. SPEAKES: Secretary of Transportation yesterday announced a number of steps that we hope would lead to that. We're in consultations with other allied governments and those who do business -- or have the potential of doing business with the Beirut Airport.

Q Well, do you -- you say you have no comment on the Islamic Jihad statement, but do you have to take it seriously, or is it -- do you think it's just something that's irrelevant here?

MR. SPEAKES: Sam, it remains to be seen.

Q But you are -- the answer to the question previous is you are going ahead with the plans to close down Beirut Airport?

MR. SPEAKES: Yes, we are.

Q Larry, if there is, in fact, a reward for the capture and conviction of these hijackers, would that not apply to a government? Does it only apply to individuals -- I mean, can you award --

MR. SPEAKES: It says individuals, but this is a UPI wire story and so I don't know whether to trust it or not.

Q Well, of course, you have all the --

MR. SPEAKES: Pardon?

Q Do you have whatever information there might be available to -- government?

Q Take that back.

MR. SPEAKES: Okay, I take it back. If it was an AP wire story I wouldn't trust it -- (laughter) -- I wouldn't trust it any more. (Laughter.)

Q I mean, just -- would this apply to either action by agents of our government or of another government?

MR. SPEAKES: What do you mean?

Q In other words, if --

MR. SPEAKES: Do the agents get the rewards?

Q -- Delta Force or if the Lebanese government does it, does that money --

MR. SPEAKES: I don't know whether people that are operating in their government capacity are eligible for the reward or not. I guess -- what's the old phrase -- that this cash prize is not available to members of the family and employees of this -- (laughter) -- network.

Q Larry, are you saying we can't identify Shultz today

--

MR. SPEAKES: No, no. On the record for cameras. Big as life.

Q Is there a set procedure for announcing this reward money that Congress wrote into the law, or is it just available now that Congress has approved the legislation?

MR. SPEAKES: It's available, as I understand it, and I guess it has to be authorized -- the payment of it would have to be authorized. So, it is available. I really don't know the particulars of the law or --

Q Is it dead or alive or what?

MR. SPEAKES: Pardon?

Q Dead or alive?

MR. SPEAKES: I saw that -- who was that? Somebody this morning was talking about dead or alive would suit them -- one -- some -- oh, it was -- what is that fellow that worked for Carter -- the lawyer?

Q Eisenstadt?

MR. SPEAKES: No, no, no.

Q Bob --

Q Peter Calloway --

Q Hill?

Q Peter Hill.

Q -- Cutler.

Q Lloyd Cutler --

MR. SPEAKES: No, -- Cutler. Yes, Cutler -- talking about dead or alive.

Q Cutler said what?

MR. SPEAKES: He's talking about dead or alive.

Q -- take the money out of the Mengele fund.

Q You no commented the \$5 million.

MR. SPEAKES: No commented that the Reagan administration is considering offering cash rewards. I just pointed out that it is available, that's a fact.

Q Have you -- can you either confirm or shed some light on the accuracy of the Oberdorfer-Hoffman report which I read this morning. It said the scenario was that Assad --

MR. SPEAKES: Were you in on that story?

Q At the bottom.

Q Yes, I notice who contributes.

MR. SPEAKES: I see.

Q They often get the main key to the story. But, at any rate, that Assad, in fact, took it upon himself to unilaterally guarantee that the Lebanese prisoners in Israel would be returned and he informed the United States that he intended to do that if it's all right with us. So then we called up

Shimon Peres and had that conversation, after which we then informed Assad it was all right with us. And Assad then went ahead on that tenuous --

MR. SPEAKES: I don't know whether that's what the story reports. But your portrayal of it is not an accurate portrayal of the way it happened.

Q Well, how did it happen? What was our contact with Shimon Peres after the original Assad suggestion?

MR. SPEAKES: I don't know the timing on them vis-a-vis Assad. But we'd been in frequent contact with the government of Syria, and the phone call that Shultz had from Peres was announced. So -- it was on the record and announced that they did it. So I don't -- I can't tell which came first or whatever. But if your -- attend to imply linkage, you're barking up the wrong tree.

Q Well, it sounds right, doesn't it?

MR. SPEAKES: No, it's not. I can guar-an-tee that.

Q Can you tell us if there's truth to the reports that the Ayatollah Khomeini had a key role in convincing the Hezbollah to go along with the Syrian proposal?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: There have been a couple of backgrounders -- and I would stay with the BACKGROUND to say that we don't know that. (Laughter.) People have said on background we cannot confirm that.

Q That's wrong, isn't it? Excuse me, but I know of one backgrounder, the transcript of which I read --

Q Larry, what was that --

Q -- even though I didn't attend --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Some have said we had some indication of it.

Q There was one Senior Official said there was an indication that Iran had been --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: That's right. And others have said --

Q -- put some pressure.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: And others have said we can't make that linkage, so --

Q I heard another one say that.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: -- is an indication or linkage, so it would -- speaking on background, we have not made that conclusion, firmly.

Q Well, what can you tell us about it on the record?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Nothing. No more than I could tell you on background. (Laughter.)

Q Can't you tell us that you haven't made that conclusion on the record?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: No, I'd rather stay on background.

Q You said you haven't -- can't make that linkage

firmly. Can you make it tenuously at this point?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: No.

Q Can you --

Q Is there any --

Q Sorry, go ahead.

Q -- further indications of any kind of progress on getting the other seven out --

ON THE RECORD.

MR. SPEAKES: David, I don't want to get into the business of saying whether you do or not. Because some days it looks good and some days it doesn't look good, in a situation like this, not this one specifically.

Q Do you still believe that Assad is pursuing it earnestly?

MR. SPEAKES: Yes, we do. We've asked him to do so, and he said he would, and that's where we stand.

Q Is it correct we don't know, as one Senior Official here said yesterday, we do not know where they are --

MR. SPEAKES: Well, when Senior Officials comment, I would leave it on Senior Officials to -- leave it on you to take the word of a Senior Official. And I don't think --

Q Well, I asked because another Senior Official on the record, Mr. McFarlane, in a television interview, said, "Yes, they move around, but we know where they are."

MR. SPEAKES: As we've often described, the Middle East is a complex and fluid situation there and perhaps both could be right if you look at them in their context.

Pat.

Q Larry, would we consider dropping our plans for closing the airport if these other seven hostages were released? Is there that kind of a deal in the works?

MR. SPEAKES: No deals:

Q Did the President send congratulatory notes to Moscow?

MR. SPEAKES: On -- Oh, on the new people. Do you know that? I don't --

MR. SIMS: I expect one will go today.

Q What was the question?

Q What was the question?

MR. SPEAKES: Did he send Mr. Gromyko -- I don't have the pronunciation guide today. Sorry.

Q Eddie --

MR. SPEAKES: Eddie, yes. Fast Eddie.

Q That was the answer --

Nelson?

MR. SPEAKES: -- will expect to go today. Yes, Assad.

Q To Gromyko, wouldn't it be?

Q Did Syria or did President Assad know of the actions we were going to take on the Beirut Airport before we took it?

MR. SPEAKES: I don't know whether they got a diplomatic notification or not. I just don't know.

Q What is it?

Q Follow-up is --

MR. SPEAKES: What did he know? When did he know? I really don't know. We did do some cables overnight on Sunday, but I don't know whether they went to Syria or not.

Q Larry?

Yes?

Q Richard Viguerie has called for the resignation of Secretary Shultz --

Q Hmm.

Q Hmm. (Laughter.)

Q -- saying that the Secretary's failure to take swift and sure reaction after the hostage-taking defeated U.S. policy and made this a humiliation and a victory for the forces of terror. Does the President agree with Mr. Viguerie?

MR. SPEAKES: No.

Q Is it Shultz who is making these decisions, by the way?

MR. SPEAKES: Which decisions?

Q Well, I mean -- Mike said that Viguerie said that it was Shultz's fault or something. Doesn't the President make these decisions?

MR. SPEAKES: He was accused of no decisions. Maybe Viguerie is mad at Shultz and not at the President, because the President makes the decisions.

Q Does the President retain confidence in the Secretary?

MR. SPEAKES: He does.

Q Will the President be at any staff meetings today, particularly with Shultz -- talking about further measures in Lebanon, is that on the agenda?

MR. SPEAKES: I don't know, David, whether they will. Shultz usually comes in with a fairly wide range of agenda, because he comes in once a week for 30 minutes, if not more often just for a private one-on-one. I'm sure they'll discuss the summit prospects and so forth.

Paul?

Q The closing of the Beirut Airport -- at what point would such punishment or action be halted?

MR. SPEAKES: Would what?

Q At what point would such action be halted?

MR. SPEAKES: The closing of the Beirut Airport?

Q Yes.

Q What would it take to reopen it after it was closed?

MR. SPEAKES: I would assume when we are convinced that it is safe, it no longer a safe haven, or a contributor to terrorism and hijacking in the world.

Q Would the United States like to render it inoperative, unuseful for aircraft to land there?

MR. SPEAKES: We have begun steps which have been announced, and that's where we stand at the -- that's the state of the play at the moment.

Q But in terms of the physical facilities --

MR. SPEAKES: My answer once again is, we've begun diplomatic steps, and that is our state of the play at the moment.

Pat?

Q Larry, do you think that the seven remaining hostages are in graver danger now than they were last week, before we made these --

MR. SPEAKES: Can't make that judgement, Pat.

Paul?

Q The allies, are they going along, or balking at the actions thus far?

MR. SPEAKES: We've just begun consultations, so I can't give you a status report.

Thank you very much.

THE PRESS: Thank you.

END

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