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## Press Briefing by Scott McClellan

The James S. Brady Briefing Room



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Press Briefing

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Q Scott, I'd like to ask about this Syracuse study on the terrorism prosecution that shows a very big increase in prosecutions, but, frankly, just a handful of prison sentences of any length. Isn't this an indictment on what we're being told is a war on terror?

**MR. McCLELLAN:** Well, first of all, the United States is winning the war on terrorism with unrelenting focus and unprecedented cooperation. Prevention of future terrorist attacks is our highest priority, and the President has been leading that effort to improve information-sharing and cooperation. Those efforts have greatly increased today. We are better able to connect the dots.

And let me just mention a few things -- I'm coming to your specific question, but I think it's important to put this in context. We are disrupting, arresting, and detaining potential terrorist threats. The FBI and our partners, both here and abroad, have identified, disrupted and neutralized over 100 terrorist threats and cells. Worldwide two-thirds of al Qaeda's senior leadership has been captured or killed. Worldwide more than 3,000 operatives have been incapacitated. Four alleged terror cells in Buffalo, Detroit, Seattle, and Portland have been broken up; 287 individuals have been criminally charged in terrorism investigations since the September 11th attacks. Already, 155 individuals have been convicted, or have pled guilty, including shoe-bomber Richard Reid and American Taliban John Walker Lindh. And over 515 individuals linked to the September

11th investigation have been deported.

Q The study -- I appreciate --

MR. McCLELLAN: You don't want to focus on the fact that this is all part of what relates to --

Q I'd like to ask about --

MR. McCLELLAN: This relates directly to the study, Mark.

Q I appreciate the study -- I'd like to ask specifically about the fact that there are --

MR. McCLELLAN: And I appreciate your question.

Q -- there are 6,400 cases that were referred to the Justice Department. Of those, the conviction rate was something like 8 percent. The median prison sentence was 14 days and only five people were sentenced to 20 years or more.

MR. McCLELLAN: Let me back up and then I'm going to come to that specifically. We are gathering information by leveraging criminal charges and long prison sentences. When individuals realize that they face a long prison term, they often try to cut their prison time by pleading guilty and cooperating with the government. Since September 11th, we have obtained criminal plea agreements from more than 15 individuals who must and will continue to cooperate with the government in its terrorist investigations. These individuals have provided critical intelligence about al Qaeda and other terrorist groups, safe houses, training camps, recruitment and tactics in the U.S. and the operations of those terrorists who mean to do harm to American citizens.

One individual has given us intelligence on weapons stored here in the United States. Another cooperator has identified locations in the U.S. being scouted or cased for potential attacks by al Qaeda. And we're also dismantling the financial terrorist -- the terrorist financial network in many ways.

But the bottom line is that investigations and prosecutions of individuals suspected of ties to international terrorism have significantly increased since September 11th. The President made it clear to the government that prevention of future terrorist attacks is the number one priority. Law enforcement officials are more proactive now at stopping terrorist incidents before they occur. Terrorism is now being disrupted at earlier stages. And while this is resulting in shorter sentences for some individuals, it also results in greater prevention of future terrorist attacks, and protection of America's families and communities.

Early arrests and prosecutions have also led to a wealth of intelligence that is not reflected in the study that you mentioned. So I think that the conclusions of the study are somewhat premature. Many of the more serious terrorism prosecutions continue to this very day. And I think the study itself points out that more serious offenses and cases ought to require more time to complete.

Q If I could just ask you about tomorrow's visit. Does the President expect to bring up the currency issue with the Premier?

**MR. McCLELLAN: First of all,** the President looks forward to establishing a personal relationship with Premier Wen and working together with him to promote common goals, as well as address some differences. I think the two leaders will discuss the full agenda of political, security and economic issues on the U.S.-China agenda.

Excuse me? I thought you had a question.

Q -- update on what that is a little bit more, on details?

MR. McCLELLAN: I'm getting to that. I was just seeing if John had another question.