



United States Department of State

Washington, D.C. 20520

May 1, 2017

Case No. F-2016-11026
Segments: P-0002, PA-0003, PA-0004,
L-00012, L-00013, NEA/AC-0001,
NEA/AC-0002, NEA/AC-0003

Mr. William F. Marshall
425 Third Street SW, Suite 800
Washington, DC 20024

Dear Mr. Marshall:

I refer to our letter dated March 13, 2017, regarding the release of certain Department of State ("the Department") records under of the Freedom of Information Act ("FOIA"), 5 U.S.C. § 552. The Department has retrieved an additional 35 documents responsive to your request. After reviewing these documents, we have determined that 18 may be released in full and 17 may be released with exemptions.

Where we have made excisions, the applicable exemptions are marked on the document. An enclosure explains the FOIA exemptions and other grounds for withholding material. In some cases, two or more exemptions may apply to the same document. All non-exempt material that is reasonably segregable from exempt material has been released. All released material is enclosed.

We will keep you informed as your case progresses. If you have any questions, your attorney may contact Trial Attorney Deepthy Kishore at (202) 616-8470 or deepthy.c.kishore@usdoj.gov. Please refer to the case number, F-2016-11026, and the civil action number, 16-cv-02027, in all correspondence regarding this case.

Sincerely,

Susan P. Westmar for

Eric F. Stein, Director
Office of Information Programs and Services

Enclosures: As stated

FOIA Exemptions

- (b)(1) Information specifically authorized by an executive order to be kept secret in the interest of national defense or foreign policy. Executive Order 13526 includes the following classification categories:
- 1.4(a) Military plans, systems, or operations
 - 1.4(b) Foreign government information
 - 1.4(c) Intelligence activities, sources or methods, or cryptology
 - 1.4(d) Foreign relations or foreign activities of the US, including confidential sources
 - 1.4(e) Scientific, technological, or economic matters relating to national security, including defense against transnational terrorism
 - 1.4(f) U.S. Government programs for safeguarding nuclear materials or facilities
 - 1.4(g) Vulnerabilities or capabilities of systems, installations, infrastructures, projects, plans, or protection services relating to US national security, including defense against transnational terrorism
 - 1.4(h) Weapons of mass destruction
- (b)(2) Related solely to the internal personnel rules and practices of an agency
- (b)(3) Specifically exempted from disclosure by statute (other than 5 USC 552), for example:
- | | |
|----------------|---|
| ARMSEXP | Arms Export Control Act, 50a USC 2411(c) |
| CIA PERS/ORG | Central Intelligence Agency Act of 1949, 50 USC 403(g) |
| EXPORT CONTROL | Export Administration Act of 1979, 50 USC App. Sec. 2411(c) |
| FS ACT | Foreign Service Act of 1980, 22 USC 4004 |
| INA | Immigration and Nationality Act, 8 USC 1202(f), Sec. 222(f) |
| IRAN | Iran Claims Settlement Act, Public Law 99-99, Sec. 505 |
- (b)(4) Trade secrets and confidential commercial or financial information
- (b)(5) Interagency or intra-agency communications forming part of the deliberative process, attorney-client privilege, or attorney work product
- (b)(6) Personal privacy information
- (b)(7) Law enforcement information whose disclosure would:
- (A) interfere with enforcement proceedings
 - (B) deprive a person of a fair trial
 - (C) constitute an unwarranted invasion of personal privacy
 - (D) disclose confidential sources
 - (E) disclose investigation techniques
 - (F) endanger life or physical safety of an individual
- (b)(8) Prepared by or for a government agency regulating or supervising financial institutions
- (b)(9) Geological and geophysical information and data, including maps, concerning wells

Other Grounds for Withholding

- NR Material not responsive to a FOIA request excised with the agreement of the requester

From: Curran, Andrea M
Sent: Tuesday, May 10, 2016 10:05 AM
To: Jones, Eric M
Subject: RE: URGENT: Brightcove Video -- Daily Press Briefing - December 2, 2013

RELEASE IN FULL

Thanks!

From: Forgerson, Luke A
Sent: Monday, May 09, 2016 6:41 PM
To: Curran, Andrea M; Jones, Eric M
Cc: Brown, Cynthia A; McAdams, Lisa A; Jackson, Jeff
Subject: RE: URGENT: Brightcove Video -- Daily Press Briefing - December 2, 2013

Just wanted to close the loop on this. Eric has resolved this.

Jeff, will connect with you early tomorrow.

Thanks, all!

From: Forgerson, Luke A
Sent: Monday, May 09, 2016 5:29 PM
To: Curran, Andrea M; Jones, Eric M (PACE) (JonesEM@state.gov)
Cc: Brown, Cynthia A (brownca@state.gov); McAdams, Lisa A (mcadamsla@state.gov)
Subject: URGENT: Brightcove Video -- Daily Press Briefing - December 2, 2013
Importance: High

Eric/Andrea --

Need assistance on this ASAP.

Can one of you call me or come to my desk please?

Thanks!

From: Forgerson, Luke A
Sent: Monday, May 09, 2016 5:21 PM
To: Curran, Andrea M; Jones, Eric M (PACE) (JonesEM@state.gov)
Cc: Brown, Cynthia A (brownca@state.gov); McAdams, Lisa A (mcadamsla@state.gov)
Subject: Brightcove Video -- Daily Press Briefing - December 2, 2013
Importance: High

Andrea,

Can you please check minute 26:58 of this video? Come see me if you have questions. Can you also find it on YouTube. (If you need assistance, please let me know.)

<http://video.state.gov/en/video/2886914568001>

Fischer, Kyle G

From: U.S. Department of State <usstatebpa@subscriptions.fcg.gov>
Sent: Monday, December 02, 2013 7:46 PM
To: Curran, Andrea M
Subject: Collected Department Releases: Daily Press Briefing - December 2, 2013

RELEASE IN FULL

You are subscribed to Collected Releases for U.S. Department of State. This information has recently been updated, and is now available.

Collected Department Releases: Daily Press Briefing - December 2, 2013

12/02/2013 06:28 PM EST

Jen Psaki
 Spokesperson
 Daily Press Briefing
 Washington, DC
 December 2, 2013



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- BAHRAIN
 - Nabeel Rajab

TRANSCRIPT:

1:54 p.m. EST

MS. PSAKI: Hi, everyone. Happy --

QUESTION: Happy belated birthday.

MS. PSAKI: Thank you. Thank you very much. Twenty-two. It's glorious. (Laughter.)

QUESTION: And you will be 22 for the next --

MS. PSAKI: I will be.

QUESTION: What, 10, 15 years?

MS. PSAKI: At least, at least. Well, I have nothing at the top, so Matt, let's go to what's on your mind.

QUESTION: Let's see. I have a lot --

MS. PSAKI: Okay.

QUESTION: -- but nothing is really worth starting with, so let's just start with the Secretary's trip.

MS. PSAKI: Okay.

QUESTION: Both -- excluding the middle stop in Moldova, at the beginning, how much of the NAC do you expect is going to be concentrated on Afghanistan and then talking about the BSA? Will there be any Afghan

officials there to talk with? And then -- well, that'll be that one question for --

MS. PSAKI: Okay. Well, we'll clearly, as we typically do, be doing a briefing en route about the trip and about our visit to the NATO Ministerial tomorrow, where we will venture to have more specific details about who will be attending. Obviously, Afghanistan and the ongoing presence there post-2014 of the United States and of NATO will certainly be a big topic of discussion. But I will let our briefers outline more specifics en route to Brussels.

QUESTION: All right. Well, I was going to ask about the Middle East but -- as well, the stop in Israel and the PA. But if you're just -- are you going to give me the same answer, wait for the briefing on the plane?

MS. PSAKI: I likely will, yes.

QUESTION: Okay. Well, then never mind.

MS. PSAKI: Okay.

QUESTION: And then quickly on Afghanistan --

MS. PSAKI: Sure, Lesley.

QUESTION: Is -- what further is happening as far as trying to resolve this issue with Afghanistan?

MS. PSAKI: Well --

QUESTION: As far as -- is it true that --

MS. PSAKI: The BSA.

QUESTION: The -- exactly.

MS. PSAKI: The signing, I assume.

QUESTION: Is it true that Special Envoy Dobbins has gone -- is on his way to Afghanistan?

MS. PSAKI: I don't have any announcements at this point on travel for him or anyone else. Obviously, our team on the ground, Ambassador Cunningham and others, have been in close contact. At this point, we've made our position clear, and so have the Afghan people. Signing the BSA soon is the path forward, as we've said many times, to sustaining a partnership between the United States and Afghanistan to support Afghans in achieving lasting peace, security, and development. That's the message that we're conveying at every level. And as we've said before but important to reiterate here, given it's a week later now: We -- deferring the signature of the agreement until after next year's election is not viable. It would not provide Afghans with the certainty that they deserve regarding their future in the critical months leading to the elections, nor would it provide the United States and NATO allies the clarity necessary for a potential post-2014 military presence.

So we're continuing to convey that. Our team on the ground is certainly hard at work. I don't have any travel announcements. If that changes, we'll certainly let all of you know.

QUESTION: Has Secretary spoken to President Karzai in the last couple of days on BSA?

MS. PSAKI: He has not spoken with him in the last couple of days.

QUESTION: And the Pentagon today said that this is not the end of it; after BSA is signed, the U.S. and Afghanistan have to negotiate and sign their agreement called SOFA, and that would be done by the State Department. Has any process started on SOFA, signing of SOFA with Afghanistan?

MS. PSAKI: I'd have to look more specifically at what they said. Maybe you're referring to the NATO SOFA that they may have to negotiate and sign, I believe, as a step? But for our purposes, there's the signing; it goes through parliament, then it would have to be signed again. Obviously, as you all are very familiar with, this doesn't outline a specific number for a troop presence, so there would be a great deal of planning in regards to that that DOD would certainly be very engaged with. But in terms of that, I'd have to look at specifically what they said. I'm not familiar with that --

QUESTION: Is December 21st the redline, the deadline for signing of BSA, after which you will begin preparing for all troops pull out from Afghanistan post 2014.

MS. PSAKI: I am not going to get into new redlines or deadlines today, I will say. But on the trip question, well, as you all know, a decision hasn't been made. You would know if it had been. It's not our preference, but no troops is certainly a potential outcome for Afghanistan if there is no BSA. So that is, again, not our preference, but natural that planning would have to take place for all different options.

QUESTION: Have you tried to understand why President Karzai is doing what he's doing or conducting himself the way he has? Do you have a clearer picture than we do, for instance?

MS. PSAKI: I don't know that I have any further insight than you do. Obviously, the Secretary spoke with him last week, as you all well know. We continue to press our case for why this should be signed as quickly as possible, but I don't have any analysis of particular actions or comments in Afghanistan.

QUESTION: So you think that he's perhaps more concerned about his personal safety post the elections?

MS. PSAKI: I will let you, Said, do your own analysis. I don't have any other analysis on it.

Do we have any more on Afghanistan?

QUESTION: Just the trip?

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: For those of us who are interested in Moldova --

MS. PSAKI: Yes.

QUESTION: -- could you just tell us why stop in Moldova? What's the importance? We see the winery, et cetera.

MS. PSAKI: Sure. Moldova is a country that has taken a number of important reform steps in recent years. They have -- they're taking steps to help grow their economy, and wine is obviously a significant export. But they have a number of exports they also work with. And given the steps they've taken, the Secretary felt it would be an important opportunity to pay a visit. You'd have to check my history and facts here, but I believe he may be, if not the first, one of the first Secretaries to pay a bilateral visit to Moldova.

QUESTION: And also it comes, obviously, right after Ukraine decided not to sign the agreement with the EU.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: Moldova did. So you could read into this that the Secretary wants to buck them up or give them something, a sign of support.

MS. PSAKI: Well, we had planned this trip – this trip was in the works before that decision was made. But certainly, they have put a number of reforms in place and they're working hard on their economy and the – if – the Secretary felt it was important to highlight that.

QUESTION: Following on that --

QUESTION: Okay. Can I go over just to Afghanistan for one very briefly?

MS. PSAKI: Sure. Okay, and then we'll go to Anne.

QUESTION: I was gone last week so I'm – most of last week, so what – did the Secretary speak with Karzai before or after Ambassador Rice was there?

MS. PSAKI: Let's see. He spoke with Karzai – President Karzai – I'd have to look back. I believe it was prior to her visit. Let me double check that for you to make sure.

QUESTION: So the last senior official to speak with Karzai, as far as you know, was Ambassador Rice.

MS. PSAKI: I believe that's correct, yes.

QUESTION: Just following on the Moldova for Ukraine substitution, in saying that Secretary Kerry would not, as had been widely expected, attend the OSCE – when you said that, I don't know, about 10 days ago or so --

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: -- we were just at the very beginning of this whole episode.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: And at that point you said it was scheduling issues that had – it would force his cancellation. Are you sticking with that? Is that still the case? Or might there be some policy implications to his decision not to go to the OSCE?

MS. PSAKI: I am sticking with that. I'm just looking at Lesley here in my – corner of my eye. I am sticking with that. I don't have any new guidance for you on that front. Assistant Secretary Nuland is still planning to attend and travel there after joining us for the first part of the visit.

QUESTION: On Syria?

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: Is it --

QUESTION: Can you tell us the -- oh, sorry.

QUESTION: Sorry. Just on this charade -- charade, for Lesley -- of scheduling reasons, is it not the case that not doing -- not going on this trip -- not going to Kyiv is a sign of displeasure?

MS. PSAKI: I will let you do your own reporting, Matt. I don't have any more analysis or comments on it from here.

QUESTION: But there was --

QUESTION: And one more quick one on Ukraine.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: Obviously, we're seeing the demonstrations, violent crackdown. .

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: What's the response from the State Department?

MS. PSAKI: Well, we're of course, naturally, closely monitoring the ongoing demonstrations, not only in Kyiv but in cities around Ukraine. As you know, since the demonstrations began on November 21st, there have been an increasing number of violent incidents, including against journalists. We stress there is no room, and we continue to stress there is no room for violence in a country that aspires to a democratic future. We continue to call on all-sides to maintain calm, and on Ukrainian authorities to ensure that members of the public and the press are able to safely and peacefully exercise their rights of speech and assembly.

As I mentioned a little bit before, we still have -- Assistant Secretary Nuland is still planning to travel there. The Ukrainian foreign ministry announced that the ministerial is proceeding as planned.

QUESTION: But there was --

QUESTION: Are you sure that Ukraine is a country that aspires to a democratic future?

MS. PSAKI: Any country that may aspire, certainly, these are important values to follow through on.

QUESTION: Right. But are you still convinced that Ukraine aspires to a westward-looking, democratic future?

MS. PSAKI: Well, we will see, Matt. Time will tell. Actions speak louder than words.

QUESTION: Do you -- does this --

QUESTION: Do you still stand by the comments made by Ambassador Nuland in her speech to the Atlantic Council a couple of weeks ago and also comments from this podium that it is your belief that Ukraine should be following the path towards joining some kind of association agreement with the EU?

MS. PSAKI: Sure. Our view has not changed on that. Obviously, there have been a lot of events that have

happened since then, but --

QUESTION: And do you believe that the demonstrations on the streets are actually -- that's what they want? I mean, it seems to be that they're demonstrating because they're angry that the government hasn't taken this path that's been laid out for them.

MS. PSAKI: I would point you to the comments of the demonstrators, of which there have been many. I don't want to speak on their behalf, but our position hasn't changed on what steps they could take. Obviously, it's up to Ukraine to take those steps.

QUESTION: So -- but, I mean, the United States is -- if you don't want to give your backing to them -- at least sympathetic to what the demonstrators are asking for.

MS. PSAKI: Again, the demonstrators are saying a range of things, so I don't -- beyond what we've stated publicly many times, I don't have any other further public statements on our position, which has been stated by Assistant Secretary Nuland and by other officials in the past several weeks.

QUESTION: Given the estimates of some 300,000 people who were demonstrating across the country on Sunday, and given that they all seem, to a person, to be saying that the government is ignoring their wish to be more closely aligned with Europe, isn't it a bit disingenuous for this building to suggest that they need to show any restraint? They're not the ones who are bludgeoning people with battering rams and turning rubber bullets on the police. It seems they're taking the brunt of everything that's been happening.

MS. PSAKI: I don't think I took sides. I think I said that it's important for all sides to maintain calm, that there's no place for violence in a country that aspires to a democratic future. So I don't -- I would disagree with the premise of your claims.

QUESTION: What does this building think of the prime minister's -- call for his security forces to show restraint and seemingly to be missing in action when on Sunday there was more violence heaped upon the demonstrators, particularly in Kyiv?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I think I just expressed what our view is of violence against demonstrators, so that's what our view is.

QUESTION: Can I -- has the Secretary spoken to somebody in Ukraine, his counterpart?

MS. PSAKI: He has not in the last several days. I can check if there's been any other calls I'm not aware of.

QUESTION: Because one of the big issues for Ukraine is tearing itself away from Russia and looking towards Western Europe for economic support. And one of the big things is that the president of Ukraine is heading to China to look for that. And if -- I was wondering if the U.S. had offered them kind of -- some kind of assurance or reassurance economically that they could be better off by signing these deals and with the support -- and the U.S. would support any kind of reform through the International Monetary Fund.

MS. PSAKI: Well, aside from public statements we've made, which, as Jo referenced, is -- that our belief is that European integration is the surest course to economic growth and strengthening Ukraine's democracy. That's still our belief. That's been consistently our belief. But beyond that, I'm not aware of any other discussions. Obviously, there's a lot of -- that's going on with the EU and with Russia, and beyond that we have made our position clear.

QUESTION: And what is the building's position on the detention of Yulia Tymoshenko?

MS. PSAKI: Well, we have consistently spoken about this in the past and expressed our concern about her detention. I know this was also a component that was potentially being worked through as an element of Ukraine getting into the EU. So we've consistently expressed concern, encouraged them to take steps forward. Obviously, there hasn't been progress on that on the ground.

QUESTION: I'm sorry, what did you say was the surest way to economic growth?

MS. PSAKI: I said European integration is the surest course to economic growth and strengthening --

QUESTION: Did you give the same advice to the Greeks?

(Laughter.)

MS. PSAKI: Matt. Behave.

Do we have any more on Ukraine or Afghanistan, since we touched on that too?

QUESTION: Still on Ukraine.

MS. PSAKI: Okay.

QUESTION: The Russians have proposed that the EU, Ukraine, and Russia get together to discuss some of these problems. Would the United States be in favor of that, some kind of a trilateral discussion to discuss the economic situation and political differences?

MS. PSAKI: It wouldn't involve the United States, so I don't have a particular position. I'm happy to talk to our team and see if we have a view on that.

Ukraine or Afghanistan? Okay, should we move on to Syria? Let's go to Margaret.

QUESTION: Thank you. Jeff, the OPCW said over the past few days that the U.S. has stepped up, that they're going to give operational support, offering up financing. Can you give us some more detail on that?

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm. Well, I don't know if it will be satisfying, but let me try. (Laughter.) Well, as you know, the United States is committed to supporting the international community's efforts to destroy Syria's chemical weapons in the safest, most efficient and effective means possible. We have offered and are currently outfitting a U.S. vessel with field-deployable hydrolysis system technology to support the OPCW's efforts. We are in close contact with the OPCW and our international partners and remain confident that we can meet the milestones for destruction set out by the OPCW. Of course, the OPCW remains -- and the UN -- remain the lead coordinators on reaching out to countries and coordinating steps forward and any timeline, et cetera.

QUESTION: But on the financing, what is it exactly that we're offering? Is that a chunk of change? Is that financing and loans, or --

MS. PSAKI: Well, we've offered -- we've offered in the -- prior to this, we have offered -- we have given 6 million to the OPCW and the UN Trust Fund, both in financial contributions and in kind, so I think we gave some materials as well. But this, of course, would be a DOD vessel. So I would point you to them on the

specific costs. This, at this point, is an offer. So I think that's still being worked through.

QUESTION: So – but beyond the vessel, the OPCW says the cost is going to be between 35 to 40 million euros for the private contractors who would actually be --

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: -- be doing the disposal themselves. So is any of that money coming through the State Department, or is the State Department topped out at \$6 million?

MS. PSAKI: Well, we've said we'd be open to exploring additional ways to provide assistance. I don't have any announcements today of additional assistance we're planning to provide, but that certainly is something we're in discussions with the OPCW about.

QUESTION: So we can understand correctly, it is a commercial vessel, correct, that they are trying --

MS. PSAKI: It is a --

QUESTION: -- (inaudible) --

MS. PSAKI: -- U.S. Government vessel, not a commercial vessel.

QUESTION: Right.

MS. PSAKI: But there is a part of this – and this may be what you're asking about – which is the OPCW reaching out to commercial companies about the destruction capabilities.

QUESTION: Okay.

QUESTION: So what – so DOD is outfitting its own boat, which will be staffed with DOD personnel who will do this?

MS. PSAKI: I'd have to check on the specifics of that. I think some of it may still be work – be going through the process of being worked out, Matt, because they've offered – but obviously, how it would be staffed and the materials and the money – I mean, all of those are pieces that are still being discussed.

QUESTION: Do you actually have a timeline and the location for where this would happen?

MS. PSAKI: I don't have a location. That's still being discussed. The timeline, as you know, is – the next deadline is – not deadline, it's a target – is December 31st. And that is to get all of the chemical weapons out. But in terms of when the next step would be, I don't have a timeline of that.

Anne.

QUESTION: I realize part of this is kind of DOD-flavored, but you might know the answer.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: So is it proper to call this a warship, or is it a military-owned, but not non-warship ship?

(Laughter.)

MS. PSAKI: That is a very specific ship question. I would hesitate to answer incorrectly. I'd have to check on specifically how we categorize it. I don't believe it is a warship, but let me see if we can get more specification on how we – what we call it exactly.

QUESTION: Okay. And on the policy side, I mean, is there any disappointment here that after casting about to – for a friend here, it ends up being the U.S. having to essentially do this on its own?

MS. PSAKI: I wouldn't categorize it that way. I mean, certainly this is a priority for the U.S., as it is for the international community, to destroy and eliminate the chemical weapons. The OPCW is still talking to countries. There are countries that have made public comments about their willingness to help, so we'll see how that all shakes out. And certainly, we'd welcome the support or contribution of other countries.

QUESTION: Well, I'd imagine from your perspective, it should be a shared priority among many nations who would also share the same goal of the ultimate destruction, right? I mean, everybody was waving a flag when that – when the thing was signed.

MS. PSAKI: Certainly, and there are countries, as you know, throughout that have been open to contributing that couldn't for a variety of reasons, whether it's regulations or capacity or resources. But they're still talking to countries about contributing and being a part of this, and certainly we're hopeful of that as well.

QUESTION: So if the question is: "Are you surprised that you've been left holding the bag on this, once again," --

MS. PSAKI: We're not holding the bag yet, Matt.

QUESTION: -- the answer would be no, you're not surprised. You expected your friends in Europe to wimp out.

MS. PSAKI: Well, we made clear we were open to contributing from the beginning, Matt. There are other countries that have expressed an openness to contributing in some capacity. They're all going to make their decisions about what that will – what will – that will entail, and we'll let the OPCW decide how all of it will work together.

QUESTION: What about Russia, who you made this deal with and has been instrumental, as you say, in helping move this towards a resolution? Why can't Russia contribute in a significant way like you can?

MS. PSAKI: I'm not familiar with what they have contributed or what they've committed to contribute or what they have not. Obviously, there are financial ways – there are a number of ways to contribute. We certainly welcome any country's contribution. There are different ways that each country can do that.

QUESTION: Are you in touch with the Russians specifically about making an – a contribution?

MS. PSAKI: I'm not sure. I'd have to check on that and see if it's a discussion that's been a part of the regular discussions with Foreign Minister Lavrov.

QUESTION: Jen, still on Syria.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: Yesterday, Mike Rogers, the chair of the Intelligence Committee, warned that there are many jihadis that are Americans and Europeans and Westerners and so on, that they go back and forth and so on. Are you concerned about these jihadis being trained in Syria and now they come back to the United States and perhaps organize terrorist acts?

MS. PSAKI: I haven't seen his comments specifically. I know - I believe he may have been on a Sunday show yesterday. I haven't read them fully. We've - we're naturally concerned, as you know, about extremists whether they're going in and certainly and if they're coming out. I talked a little bit, I think it was a week or two ago, about ways that we coordinate with our international partners in the region to kind of track this and efforts we undertake to make sure we're watching, but of course we're concerned. I don't have any other specifics for you.

QUESTION: Are you pressing your partners in this case, like the Saudis and the Gulf Cooperation Council countries, that have been supplying arms and money in the past for these extremist groups - are you pressing them not to do so?

MS. PSAKI: We have consistently, and all the countries, as you know, have agreed repeatedly to contribute assistance through the SMC.

QUESTION: Finally, yesterday there was a report in the *Telegraph*, *The London Telegraph*, that says basically the Free Syrian Army now is becoming a group of warlords and accumulating money and gangs and so on and have no interest, really, in reaching a settlement. Is that your assessment, or are you still working very closely with General Idris?

MS. PSAKI: We are still working very closely with General Idris, we're still working towards a Geneva conference in January, and we still believe there's no military solution, as you know.

More on Syria?

QUESTION: Still on Syria.

MS. PSAKI: Or - go ahead, Roz.

QUESTION: Still on Syria, the Iranian Foreign Minister Zarif did an interview with Al Jazeera this morning. And when it came to Geneva II, he said that while Iran is, quote: not begging to attend the talks in January, it would attend if invited. My first question: Would the U.S. be willing to invite Iran to take part in these talks? And if so, what does the U.S. believe that Iran could bring to this situation to try to end the civil war?

MS. PSAKI: Well, no decisions have been made about participation yet. There's another trilateral meeting on December 20th coming up that we'll be participating in with the UN and the Russians. Our position hasn't changed on Iran's participation or whether we believe they should be invited. They have not endorsed the Geneva communique. That's a condition we feel is necessary, but obviously this will continue to be discussed at the next trilateral meeting.

QUESTION: But given the - that the UN is now estimating that upwards of 120-25,000 people may have been killed in the civil war to date --

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: -- is there some sort of leverage that Tehran could bring to the table to try to induce the Assad regime to, if nothing else, stop the killing and try to at least put in some sort of ceasefire?

MS. PSAKI: Well, this goes back to the premise that attendees should be endorsing the Geneva communique, because that is what the purpose and the goal of the conference is. So, I don't have any speculation on what leverage they may or may not have, but the conversations we have had with them in recent weeks have been about their nuclear program and moving towards a first-step agreement on that. They've not been focused on Syria. And our position on whether or not they should attend the Geneva conference in January hasn't changed.

QUESTION: But you do feel that if they do endorse Geneva I, there's a great deal of value for Iran's participation --

MS. PSAKI: Well, we'd have to --

QUESTION: -- considering that it is --

MS. PSAKI: We'd have to evaluate it, Said. I don't want to get ahead of --

QUESTION: But it's a very ally of the regime. It supports other elements that help the regime in its fight, like Hezbollah so on.

MS. PSAKI: If that is a step they take, we can have a robust discussion in here about it.

QUESTION: Jen, are there any contacts currently between the United States Government and the Syrian regime? I mean, I know Secretary Kerry spoke months and months ago --

MS. PSAKI: Sure.

QUESTION: -- to Foreign Minister Muallem. Is there anything going on at the moment?

MS. PSAKI: And we have for some time, as you know, have had different channels, but I don't have anything specific for you. I can check if there have been any recent contacts on any level.

QUESTION: So there were reports over the weekend that some European countries are quietly beginning to --

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: -- reopen diplomatic conversations or channels with the Syrian regime because, I think, the fear is that this is just so blocked at the moment that they're --

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: -- it's not going anywhere.

MS. PSAKI: Well, let me see if there have been any contacts at any level of the regime. We've -- they have happened in the past, as you mentioned, so I will see if there's more to report on that.

QUESTION: Can I go back to the Iranians and taking part in Geneva? I mean, I think over the last week or so, when there's been, like, various bouts of violence in Syria, that the Iranian Government has said that there needs to be a political solution to the situation in Syria. So don't you think that Iran is making more positive comments? I mean, I don't think the Russians have gone far beyond saying that there needs to be a political solution. They haven't said anything about President Assad leaving (inaudible).

MS. PSAKI: Well, the whole premise – I mean the whole goal is to create a transitional governing body. That's the goal of a Geneva conference. So, certainly, they haven't embraced that as the focus of the Geneva communique, and --

QUESTION: Well, even though the Russians have agreed to a political transition, your definition of a transition is far different from the -- than the Russians' definition of a transition. So if the Iranians were to say, like, okay, we accept a political transition, I mean, does that really mean that they --

MS. PSAKI: It's not just about a political transition. It's about embracing the Geneva communique, which they have not done. If they do that, we will evaluate whether or not we'd support their -- an invitation to them to attend the conference.

QUESTION: Zarif also told us that his country is not interested in aggravating any sectarian tensions between Shiite and Sunni, between Alawite and other major Islamic communities; that they're trying to, in their efforts, promote more harmony, more peace. Does that add any -- does that change the complexion at all, particularly in Syria?

MS. PSAKI: I don't want to speak too specifically to an interview I haven't yet seen yet, and neither has anyone on our team. Broadly speaking, obviously we took a significant step forward with the first-step agreement on their nuclear program, but there are remaining concerns that we have, as you all are familiar with, whether it's their involvement in support of the regime in Syria or humanitarian issues, and so that has not changed that. I can take a closer look once we see the transcript of the interview and see if we have more comments on Foreign Minister Zarif's comments.

QUESTION: You're saying your team does not watch Al Jazeera?

MS. PSAKI: Well, that is not true; we do. However, I believe there's only been a very short clip that has played of this interview that I'm sure will get lots of attention once it all plays.

QUESTION: Beyond the interview, he's freely reaching out. He visited Kuwait. He's reaching out to the other Gulf countries. He wants to visit Saudi Arabia. I mean, there is an effort underway to alleviate their fears and actually encourage them towards participating in Geneva II to make it a success. You must have some sort of a reading of this effort.

MS. PSAKI: I don't have any particular reading of it for you, Said. Our position, I think, has been pretty clear on whether or not they attend the Geneva conference.

QUESTION: I have another really quick logistics thing. On the December 20th meeting, that's Wendy Sherman and that -- it's the same iteration?

MS. PSAKI: It is that level. Exactly, yes. Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: Is that new or was that announced last week or something --

MS. PSAKI: I believe we talked about it last week as being the next meeting.

QUESTION: On China – (inaudible).

QUESTION: Please, Jen, can we stay on Iran, please?

MS. PSAKI: Sure. Let's stay on Iran and then we can go to China.

QUESTION: On the 6th of February in this room, I had a very brief exchange with your predecessor, Victoria Nuland --

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: -- about Iran. And with your indulgence, I will read it in its entirety for the purpose of the record and so you can respond to it.

"Rosen: There have been reports that intermittently, and outside of the formal P5+1 mechanisms, the Obama Administration, or members of it, have conducted direct secret bilateral talks with Iran. Is that true or false?"

"Nuland: We have made clear, as the Vice President did at Munich, that in the context of the larger P5+1 framework, we would be prepared to talk to Iran bilaterally. But with regard to the kind of thing that you're talking about on a government-to-government level, no."

That's the entirety of the exchange.

As we now know, senior state department officials had, in fact, been conducting direct, secret bilateral talks with senior officials of the Iranian Government in Oman, perhaps dating back to 2011 by that point.

So the question today is a simple one: When the briefer was asked about those talks and flatly denied them from the podium, that was untrue, correct?

MS. PSAKI: I mean, James, I -- that -- you're talking about a February briefing, so 10 months ago. I don't think we've outlined or confirmed contacts or specifics beyond a March meeting. I'm not going to confirm others beyond that at this point. So I don't know that I have any more for you.

QUESTION: Do you stand by the accuracy of what Ms. Nuland told me, that there had been no government-to-government contacts, no secret direct bilateral talks with Iran as of the date of that briefing, February 6th? Do you stand by the accuracy of that?

MS. PSAKI: James, I have no new information for you today on the timing of when there were any discussions with any Iranian officials.

QUESTION: Let me try it one last way, Jen --

MS. PSAKI: Okay.

QUESTION: -- and I appreciate your indulgence.

MS. PSAKI: Sure.

QUESTION: Is it the policy of the State Department, where the preservation or the secrecy of secret negotiations is concerned, to lie in order to achieve that goal?

MS. PSAKI: James, I think there are times where diplomacy needs privacy in order to progress. This is a good example of that. Obviously, we have made clear and laid out a number of details in recent weeks about discussions and about a bilateral channel that fed into the P5+1 negotiations, and we've answered questions on it, we've confirmed details. We're happy to continue to do that, but clearly, this was an important component leading up to the agreement that was reached a week ago.

QUESTION: Since you, standing at that podium last week, did confirm that there were such talks, at least as far back as March of this year, I don't see what would prohibit you from addressing directly this question: Were there secret direct bilateral talks between the United States and Iranian officials in 2011?

MS. PSAKI: I don't have anything more for you today. We've long had ways to speak with the Iranians through a range of channels, some of which you talked – you mentioned, but I don't have any other specifics for you today.

QUESTION: One more on Iran?

QUESTION: *The Los Angeles Times* and *Politico* have reported that those talks were held as far back as 2011. Were those reports inaccurate?

MS. PSAKI: I'm not sure which reports you're talking about. Are you talking about visits that the Secretary and others made to Oman, or are you talking about other reports?

QUESTION: I'm talking about U.S. officials meeting directly and secretly with Iranian officials in Oman as far back as 2011. *The Los Angeles Times* and *Politico* have reported those meetings. Were those reports inaccurate?

MS. PSAKI: I have nothing more for you on it, James, today.

QUESTION: One more on Iran?

MS. PSAKI: On Iran? Let's just finish Iran and then we can go to China. Go ahead, Roz.

QUESTION: One of – one more on Iran. Foreign Minister Zarif said, directly contradicting the Obama Administration's contention that sanctions worked, he told our interviewer that when the sanctions were first imposed, Iran had 200 working centrifuges. Today, they have more than 19,000. What is this building's reaction to his comment that sanctions did not work and did not bring Iran to the negotiating table?

MS. PSAKI: Well, again, I would like to look more closely at the context of the comments. But, just as reminder, President Rouhani and others have talked about how the impact – how growing the economy and putting an end – doing – bringing an end to the sanctions is something that was a priority for them in order to help the economy and the Iranian people. There's no question, if you look just at the facts of the impact of oil revenues, the impact on their economic growth was large that there was a huge impact of – that there – the sanctions had an enormous impact, and that that was a driving factor in bringing the Iranians back to the negotiating table.

In terms of progress made on their efforts to develop a nuclear weapon, whether through centrifuges or at their various facilities, that to me sounds like a separate question. Obviously, there was concerns about steps they were taking and progress they were making, which was why it was so important to come to an

acceptable agreement that would halt and roll back the progress of their program.

QUESTION: Just to follow up on that, though --

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: -- Secretary Kerry, when he did his round robin of interviews after the announcement of the deal in Geneva, more than once stated that when Iran had reached out to the Bush-Cheney Administration in 2003, Iran was only in possession of 164 centrifuges. Now, he would go on to say, they have 19,000, and this therefore represents the best possible deal that could be secured.

Isn't it a fact that since the Obama-Biden Administration took office, 70 percent of Iran's centrifuges have been installed?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I'd have to look at the statistics, James, but we have not questioned the fact that Iran has made progress on enrichment and on developing a nuclear weapon. We have not questioned that. That's one of the reasons why we stepped up sanctions over the past couple of years. The President and Secretary Kerry were big proponents of that. We worked with the international community to do just that to put that necessary pressure in place.

The point I was trying to make to Roz is that -- what she's asking sounds to me like two separate questions, so that was --

QUESTION: Right. I'm pursuing the separate one part that she carved out, and that is to say -- and if this is untrue, I'd be grateful to be disabused of the notion -- but the great bulk of Iran's progress in the development of its enrichment program has taken place under President Obama's watch, correct?

MS. PSAKI: I'd have to check on the specific numbers. The --

QUESTION: You're not prepared to dispute that statement, as --

MS. PSAKI: Well, James, I think what we're focused on at this point is the fact that we're now at a point where we are halting and rolling back the progress of their program and we're working towards a comprehensive agreement to bring an end to it. I can't speculate for you what would happen without -- what would have happened without sanctions. I would venture to guess --

QUESTION: (Inaudible) sanctions.

MS. PSAKI: But they were being paired together, so that's why I'm bringing it into the conversation.

QUESTION: But the context of the question was exactly: "The Obama Administration says we showed up because our economy is falling apart. I'm here to tell you that's not the case. We have our own reasons for coming."

MS. PSAKI: Well, we will take a close look at his comments and we'll have more to say about them once we do.

QUESTION: Can I just go back to the Geneva meeting and --

MS. PSAKI: Sure.

QUESTION: -- December 20th with Wendy Sherman?

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: This is --

MS. PSAKI: It's that level -- in terms of specific attendance, I'll have to just double-check that for you.

QUESTION: Oh, okay.

MS. PSAKI: Yeah.

QUESTION: This is going to be the first of the political meetings towards the next -- the comprehensive agreement --

MS. PSAKI: Well, they also --

QUESTION: -- or this is the technical discussions?

MS. PSAKI: No, no, no.

QUESTION: No, this is Syria.

MS. PSAKI: This is -- sorry, this is Syria.

QUESTION: Oh, I'm sorry.

MS. PSAKI: This is Syria.

QUESTION: Excuse me. I'm sorry.

MS. PSAKI: So this is the pre-Geneva. No, it's okay. It's confusing. Lots of Genevas.

QUESTION: Okay. But I did have an Iran question, actually.

QUESTION: But is there any new -- I mean --

QUESTION: Yeah.

QUESTION: -- when is it that you're going to start to negotiate the comprehensive deal with Iran?

MS. PSAKI: Well, right now, what we're focused on is the technical discussions leading up to the start of the six-month --

QUESTION: Right.

QUESTION: So do you have a date for those?

MS. PSAKI: I don't yet have a date on those.

QUESTION: Or a place?

MS. PSAKI: I don't yet have a place. It's being worked through. Hopefully we'll have an update for you all in the coming days.

QUESTION: And can I ask -- I don't know if you had seen the reports that the new British envoy to Iran is actually going to visit Tehran tomorrow. I wondered what the --

MS. PSAKI: I haven't seen that.

QUESTION: Well, I wanted a U.S. reaction to this following on to the question I asked last week about how far along the line you are prepared to go with your new diplomatic relations or not with Iran.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm. I still don't have any prediction of any step beyond what step we've already taken, which is being a part of the P5+1 agreement on the first step here with Iran. Obviously, different countries are going to make their own decisions, and as with most issues, we certainly support that.

QUESTION: Would it be helpful, though? Do you believe it's helpful that the British envoy could be going to Tehran?

MS. PSAKI: I don't know that I have that level of analysis on it. I don't have all the details on what the purpose of the trip is or what they hope to accomplish. And obviously, every country will make their own decisions about diplomatic relationships.

QUESTION: Jen, one more on the --

QUESTION: East China Sea?

QUESTION: -- secret negotiations with Iran.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: I apologize if you've already addressed this, but there have been reports that the secret negotiations that the U.S. was engaging in with Iran created a feeling of resentment among P5+1 allies such as France, and then that contributed to a rift among the P5+1 and made it difficult to reach consensus within that group. Do you have a reaction to that or a comment on that?

MS. PSAKI: I don't want to speak to anonymous reports about what may or may not be the feelings by other countries, but I will reiterate for you that this was -- these discussions were fed into the P5+1 process. That is the process that we ultimately all worked through to achieve a first-step agreement here. The P5+1 members, as well as our friends in Israel, were briefed early this fall.

As to the discussions, we have always been clear we've been open to bilateral discussions with Iran; that there are a range of channels to do that through; that if anything got serious, that we would certainly be briefing our important partners on that; and that's exactly what we did in this case.

QUESTION: Jen --

QUESTION: And when did the talks begin?

MS. PSAKI: James, you're so tricky over there. (Laughter.)

QUESTION: Can I ask about China?

MS. PSAKI: Let me just say one thing, though, for James. It's important here too – and then I promise we'll go to China – it's important here also to note, though, that these really picked up after President Rouhani's election, that in terms of the discussion of specific pieces about how to move forward, what kind of – what an agreement could look like, that's when it picked up. So I understand that's not answering your question, but I felt it was important to --

QUESTION: But just on the basis of methodology and removing the specifics of Iran and who's president or who's Secretary of State, if you were able to stand there at the podium last week and say, "Yes, I'm confirming a certain set of talks that occurred in March," explain to me what is it that prohibits you from saying, yes or no, that a certain set of talks occurred two years ago?

MS. PSAKI: If I have more details for you, James, I will – happy to share them.

QUESTION: I didn't ask you – I'm asking for your thinking about why you're not addressing the question, not the specifics of the meetings. What is it that prohibits you from addressing a question about meetings that are two years old?

MS. PSAKI: I'm not going to do a psychiatrist chair today.

Go ahead. On China?

QUESTION: What about the couch? (Laughter.)

QUESTION: Thank you, Jen. So as we know, the U.S. Government has already told U.S. carriers to comply with China's requirements before any flights pass through the new air defense zone established by the Chinese Government. So does that mean the U.S. Government has recognized this new air defense zone established by the Chinese Government?

MS. PSAKI: So let me be absolutely as clear as I can be here because I know there's been a range of reporting. It has been – some of it has been inaccurate, to no fault of – perhaps it's our fault for not explaining it well enough. So we are not – the State Department is not the point of contact with airlines. The FAA is the point of contact with airlines. There has not been any information that has been put out or confirmed that I am aware of that has conveyed what has or has not been communicated in that capacity to airlines.

There is – for safety and security of passengers, U.S. carriers operate internationally – operate consistently as a process with the notices to airmen issued by foreign countries, as is the case in this case. Their concerns are about the safety and security of passengers. That is different from what the U.S. Government policy is. It is not – this in no way indicates U.S. Government acceptance of China's requirements in the newly declared ADIZ and has absolutely no bearing on the firm and consistent U.S. Government position that we do not accept the legitimacy of China's requirements.

This is a case where China announced this in an uncoordinated fashion. It's inconsistent with standard practice. And their requirements for operating exceed internationally accepted practice in this capacity. So I don't know how much more clear that it is, but it does contradict a bit your question, so I wanted –

QUESTION: It looks like we received the statement or the Q&A from the State Department, so it looks like

it's from the U.S. Government. And also, you are saying --

MS. PSAKI: Well, in that statement, which I certainly was well aware of, what was conveyed in there is that for safety and -- for the safety and security of passengers, U.S. carriers operate consistently internationally with the notices to airmen issued by foreign governments. It did not convey that -- anything specific about what had been communicated to airlines. It did not convey that the U.S. Government supported this effort. So I'm very familiar with the statement you're referring to, and there were a lot of -- there were some assumptions made.

QUESTION: So (inaudible) --

QUESTION: Okay. It looks like --

QUESTION: -- that the FAA did not instruct airlines to comply with the Chinese regulations?

MS. PSAKI: I would point you to the FAA for what they did or did not communicate to commercial airlines.

QUESTION: Okay. Well, the FAA is part of the U.S. Government, is it not?

MS. PSAKI: They are. They --

QUESTION: Yes.

MS. PSAKI: Certainly, they are not housed in the State Department, however. (Laughter.)

QUESTION: So -- I understand that, but the State Department does have a representative -- you're familiar with the ICAO?

MS. PSAKI: I am not.

QUESTION: Okay. It's in Montreal.

MS. PSAKI: Okay.

QUESTION: It's a good excuse to get to Montreal --

MS. PSAKI: Good.

QUESTION: -- if you ever want to go up there.

MS. PSAKI: I will take that advice.

QUESTION: It's the International Civilian -- it's the civilian airline -- the UN agency for airlines. Do you know if the United States is going to use its membership in the ICAO to oppose this Chinese decision?

MS. PSAKI: I don't.

QUESTION: And if you don't know, could you ask?

MS. PSAKI: Yeah, I'm happy to check on that for you, Matt. Absolutely.

QUESTION: And when you say that the U.S. Government does not accept the legitimacy of the Chinese requirements --

MS. PSAKI: Well, it doesn't accept -- yeah, the Chinese requirements, right.

QUESTION: Right. That's what you said.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: Doesn't that -- if the FAA has been telling airlines that they have to comply with this, or that they should comply with it, how is that not accepting -- the government accepting the legitimacy?

MS. PSAKI: Well, there's a whole field of regulations and regulatory policy that I am certainly far from an aviation expert, as it evidenced by your Montreal question. So I would point you to them on that.

Evidence of the fact that the U.S. Government does not accept China's requirement is by the fact that the announcement will not change how the United States conducts military operations in the region, which is something DOD announced last week. And that is certainly a U.S. Government decision to make.

QUESTION: So does that mean that U.S. Government planes will not obey the -- or will not follow the Chinese requirements if they're flying through this airspace?

MS. PSAKI: Military planes?

QUESTION: Say the Secretary of State flying on an Air Force plane to Seoul or to Tokyo will not notify the --

MS. PSAKI: I am not aware of any upcoming Seoul trip coming up.

QUESTION: Well, the Vice President is there right now, or in Tokyo, at least. Are you saying that his plane, an Air Force plane, will not follow the requirements of the Chinese?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I am saying military planes would not, and that level of specificity I'd certainly have to check and see where that falls in.

QUESTION: What is this episode -- what impact is this episode having on U.S.-Sino relations?

MS. PSAKI: There are times when we agree and there are times when we disagree, as you know. We've made clear our concerns about not only what was announced but how this was announced, the fact that there was no prior notice. As you also know, Vice President Biden is in the region now on a prior planned trip. He will, of course, be meeting with key leaders to discuss a range of issues. Certainly, this could be a topic of discussion, but there are a number of other issues that we discuss both with China and other partners in the region.

QUESTION: And has the pivot to Asia worked? Is this evidence of the pivot working?

MS. PSAKI: I wouldn't categorize this into -- I wouldn't put this in the evaluation category of whether or not it worked. Our pivot to Asia, or rebalance to Asia, means focusing on Asia and the important partnership we have with Asia, with countries in the region, the economic and strategic partners. And nothing is further

evidence of that than the Vice President's trip there, the fact that, as you know, the Secretary will be going back to Asia soon, that he was just there a couple of months ago with Secretary Hagel. So that is evidence of our commitment to the region. And we work with them on a – countries in the region on a broad range of issues.

QUESTION: But as we survey the last five years of this Administration, would you say that China is less aggressive in its serial commission of human rights abuses, currency manipulation, cyber warfare against U.S. businesses and government, territorial aggression, or is it better than it used to be?

MS. PSAKI: I'm not going to do an evaluation of that. Obviously, we work with them on economic issues, we work with them on strategic issues. There are still issues, including human rights, including this issue we're talking about now, that we express concerns about when warranted, and we'll continue to do that. But we know that the relationship is a vital one and one that we need to keep plugging away at even when we disagree.

QUESTION: Jen, could I (inaudible) for a second?

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: Is it fair to characterize the U.S. position as being that aside from the official policy, for the purposes of safety and avoiding some kind of unfortunate incident, that commercial carriers should abide by the Chinese ADIZ requirements?

MS. PSAKI: I don't have – I'd point you again to the FAA on more specifics than what I just conveyed. There are a range of regulations and policies that, of course, they oversee or are in place, but our general position as a U.S. Government is that we don't accept China's requirements. And obviously, the military – actions of military exercises is evidence of that.

QUESTION: Jen, this comes from --

QUESTION: Sorry, sorry. Just a quick follow-up on that.

MS. PSAKI: Go ahead.

QUESTION: It looks like the two main U.S. airlines are complying with – are taking steps to comply. Delta and United are the two that have flight routes through the area, which seems to have kind of created a little bit of confusion/consternation in Japan over a perceived rift with Japanese policy, which is to not allow U.S. commercial airliners to file their flight plans with China. Do you have a – do you have any kind of reassurance or any kind of response to that?

MS. PSAKI: We coordinate closely with Japan and with South Korea and all of the countries in the region about a range of issues. And certainly on this issue, we have been in touch with Japan and will continue to be. This is – for specific actions of individual commercial airliners, I would point you to them or the FAA on any regulations.

QUESTION: But – so you're not – but you're not afraid for the safety or concerned about the safety of U.S. citizens on flights that are flying through the area?

MS. PSAKI: Well, certainly safety and security of citizens should be of concern to everyone. Obviously, there are policies in place and regulations in place because of that. But we don't oversee airline regulations.

The FAA does, so I would point you to them.

QUESTION: (Inaudible.) Did the United States Government -- the position has changed toward this ADIZ, or not changed? What is the position to ADIZ now?

MS. PSAKI: It has not changed. We -- China announced the ADIZ without prior consultations even though the newly-announced ADIZ overlaps with parts of longstanding ADIZs of Japan, the Republic of Korea, and Taiwan, and includes territory administered by Japan. As I mentioned, we -- the fact that China's announcement has caused confusion and increased the risk of accidents only further underscores the validity of concerns and the need for China to rescind the procedures. It's consistently been our position and one we have communicated both publicly and privately. I know there was some confusion over the weekend about airlines and specifically.

QUESTION: Jen, you said that you are not still -- not accepting China's new air defense zone. But I wonder, like, Japan has its own air defense zone, and also part of it covers Taiwan. But it looks like the U.S. doesn't say anything about it. So do you think there is sort of a double standard? Why do you react so strongly to China's air defense zone?

MS. PSAKI: Well, one of the reasons is that they announced this without prior consultations. It was inconsistent with longstanding procedure and process. And obviously, it overlaps with a number of other longstanding air defense zones of some other neighboring countries.

QUESTION: Jen --

QUESTION: Jen, you do not contest the ability of China to declare such a identification zone; it's just the manner in which they did it, or the extent?

MS. PSAKI: No. I think I have -- I've just consistently said that we believe they should rescind the procedures. I've just -- I've also stated a couple of times that we don't accept China's requirements. So I think I've made that pretty clear.

QUESTION: (Inaudible.)

QUESTION: Is the first --

QUESTION: In response to the -- China's declaration of its own ADIZ, the South Korean Government is poised to expand its own ADIZ, so-called KADIZ, to the South China Sea. What is the position of the United States? Would you encourage it or discourage it?

MS. PSAKI: I haven't seen those reports, or I don't even know if they're reports or if there's been an announcement. I haven't seen any announcement, I guess I should say. So let me check into that, and --

QUESTION: They say they have already started consultations with the United States.

MS. PSAKI: I'd have to check into it and see if we have more to say on that.

QUESTION: Is this the first time the U.S. has called --

QUESTION: Jennifer, you talk about safety --

QUESTION: -- for the zone to be rescinded?

MS. PSAKI: I'd have to check on that for you, Roz.

QUESTION: Can we change topic?

QUESTION: No.

QUESTION: You talk about safety. Are you really concerned that the Chinese may down an airliner or something?

MS. PSAKI: I'm not predicting that, but certainly there is -- they created these Air Defense Identification Zones, they've asked for prior flight plans. So of course, the security and safety is part of the regulatory process, and -- but I don't have any predictions. It's just the question of abiding by it.

QUESTION: Is it a real concern, downing an airliner?

MS. PSAKI: I don't think I have any more for you on that question.

QUESTION: Jen, when you're taking that question that Roz had --

MS. PSAKI: Sure.

QUESTION: -- could you also check whether the United States actually is directly asking the Chinese to rescind it?

MS. PSAKI: Happy to. Sure.

QUESTION: Thank you.

QUESTION: Well, at least --

QUESTION: Apart from the specific concerns about how this was announced without any prior notice, its excessiveness, at least in terms of other regulations, and the safety risks that you say it cause, do you have any -- are there broader concerns about this area being identified as essentially the entire East China Sea? Is the U.S. concerned that the Chinese are looking at anything on a map that has the word "China" in it as all their own?

MS. PSAKI: Well, part of the concern is certainly that it overlaps with parts of other --

QUESTION: Right. But in terms of territorial claims --

MS. PSAKI: As well as territory administered by Japan, sure.

QUESTION: Right, right. But in terms of China's territorial claims, are you concerned that this is the first step or could be a first step towards actually moving in some kind of forceful way to take control of areas of territory and ocean maritime space that it says that it owns?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I don't want to make a prediction of that.

QUESTION: No, but I'm asking if you were concerned --

MS. PSAKI: But --

QUESTION: -- that this is a step in that direction, apart from the specific problems with the no prior notice and all that other -- the safety concerns.

MS. PSAKI: But one of the specific problems is also that this includes area -- territory administered by Japan, it includes overlapping area with other countries in the region. So certainly, that does touch on what your question is here. In terms of a prediction of what it will mean in the future, I certainly wouldn't venture to make that at this point.

QUESTION: Right. Well, the Chinese say that they would be well within their rights also to declare one of these zones over the entire -- over the South China Sea. Are you concerned about the possibility of that?

MS. PSAKI: Well, you're familiar with what our position is on that, and we've long --

QUESTION: Well, that's over the territorial disputes over the -- it's a question of sovereignty for these little atolls and bits of rock.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: Would you be as opposed as you are to this if the Chinese did it for the South China Sea, or is that a hypothetical question that you will wait to bash the Chinese over the head for once they -- if and when they do it?

MS. PSAKI: It is a hypothetical question at this stage in time.

QUESTION: All right.

QUESTION: One more thing. Just one more thing on that. China at the same time has announced they sent a fighter jet against United States and Japanese aircraft last week. Did you comment on that?

MS. PSAKI: I am not familiar with that specific report. In -- where, exactly?

QUESTION: If it's true, are you concerned about these Chinese announcement?

MS. PSAKI: I'd have to look at the specific report, and that may be a DOD question.

James.

QUESTION: Given that China makes this declaration --

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: -- and we regard it as thoroughly problematic, if not illegal, and therefore we have on our hands a dispute with the Chinese --

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: -- which is to be adjudicated somehow in a nonviolent way, wasn't it a kind of a provocative

act for the United States to fly B-52s through that very zone in a short time thereafter?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I would point you to DOD on that, but I would reiterate the fact that we have made clear that this action, this announcement, is not going to change our military exercises. And that is an example of that.

QUESTION: So other than taking -- other than the Vice President, are you aware -- or has there been at this point any conversations that you're aware of in this -- from this building with the Chinese directly? It's kind of on Jill's question. And if not, do you expect them or is this going to be left up to the Vice President when he goes to --

MS. PSAKI: Let me check. I know we have expressed concerns. I mentioned this last week, Matt, so let me just make sure you have it.

QUESTION: Jen, the -- Secretary Kerry did meet on Wednesday with a senior Chinese official?

MS. PSAKI: I'd have to --

QUESTION: On Wednesday, the vice premier.

QUESTION: Lu.

QUESTION: Yeah.

MS. PSAKI: I'd have to look back at that. It seems like a long time ago.

QUESTION: I know it does. And it was happening on Wednesday.

MS. PSAKI: Deputy Secretary Burns met last week with a Chinese official where this was a topic of discussion. Also, Assistant Secretary Russel spoke with the ambassador about a week ago, and Ambassador Locke has also been in touch, of course, on the ground. In terms of specific contacts over the last couple of days, I'm happy to check and see what else we can read out for all of you.

QUESTION: Are you taking this to the UN in any forum there?

MS. PSAKI: I don't have any prediction of that, James, at this point in time.

QUESTION: New topic?

QUESTION: So it's strictly a bilateral or a multilateral thing, but outside the auspices of the UN is how you're going to seek to resolve it?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I don't have anything for you on it at this point. We're taking this day by day. I conveyed for you what we've done and what we've communicated. But obviously, we're taking steps day by day.

QUESTION: But is that a kind of -- is that a consideration?

MS. PSAKI: Not that I'm aware of, Elise. But obviously, we're taking this day by day.

QUESTION: Can we change --

QUESTION: New subject?

MS. PSAKI: Sure, Jill. Go ahead.

QUESTION: I'm still on China. Can you actually clarify this? China's argument is that we institute the ADIZ that other countries have already instituted. If you're saying that China does not have a right to do that, they can say, well, what's good for the goose is good for the gander. And it doesn't seem like you have a legal foot to stand on. If you're opposed to the way in which they did it or the extent of it, these can be a subject of debate. And China has said we can get rid of our ADIZ if the Japanese get rid of theirs. I mean, something like that could happen. But somehow -- are you really saying that you do not accept -- you do not give China the right to declare a defense identification zone?

MS. PSAKI: I think I've thoroughly outlined what our concerns are, so I'm not sure I have much more to add to your question.

QUESTION: Just on another topic, Jen -- sorry.

MS. PSAKI: Well, we were going to go to Jill next, and then I'm happy to go to you.

QUESTION: North Korea?

MS. PSAKI: Sure.

QUESTION: Merrill Newman.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: You've seen probably, or read at least, his so-called confession. Do you have any comments about that, any reaction? And what is the latest on his status?

MS. PSAKI: Well, the latest is -- and let me do this first and then I'll do the second part. On November 30th, North Korea permitted the Embassy of Sweden, our protecting power, to consular access to Merrill Newman. It -- and given his advanced age and health conditions, we continue to urge North Korea to release him so he may return home and reunite with his family.

We, of course, have seen the Korean Central News Agency report regarding Mr. Newman's detention. According to the report, he apologized for the misunderstanding that led him -- led to his detention. We don't have any other further information regarding the reason for his detention. But again, given his age and health, we continue to call for North Korea to release him as quickly as possible.

QUESTION: Do you believe that the North Korean -- that that apology was -- that he wrote and that was released by the North Koreans -- do you believe that he wrote that of his own volition and that he -- and do you have reason to believe that all of those things in that apology are true?

MS. PSAKI: We just don't have any other further analysis. We've seen the same reports all of you have seen, of course, about his interview and the publication of that, but I don't have any other further analysis on it.

QUESTION: Are you aware if that -- the subject of his quote, unquote "confession" came up in the meeting

with the Swedes?

MS. PSAKI: I don't have anything more on it, but I'm happy to check and see if there's more detail we can outline for all of you.

QUESTION: Did the Swedes as for and did Mr. Newman sign a PAW?

MS. PSAKI: A Privacy Act waiver?

QUESTION: Correct.

MS. PSAKI: Yes, he did. That is why I am able to talk about him now.

QUESTION: Okay. So then if -- since he has signed the waiver, would you take it back to your -- whoever it is that liaises with the Swedes on this --

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: I assume it's EAP, but I guess it could also be EUR -- and find out if Mr. Newman, in his discussions with the Swedes, talked at all about or said that he had freely made this alleged confession and when it was that he recorded this or when it --

MS. PSAKI: I am happy to take that and see if there's more we can share.

Go ahead, Lesley.

QUESTION: Also, did the Swedes report back in what condition he is in? Has he been tortured? Anything today? And how long did they meet with him, and was it in a jail? Was it in a --

QUESTION: Guest house.

QUESTION: -- government -- a guest house?

QUESTION: A jailhouse guest house.

MS. PSAKI: A guest house. I don't have many specifics on that. I'm happy to also check with Matt's questions and to see if there's more we can share on that as well.

QUESTION: But didn't it include a --

QUESTION: But they did say -- the Swedes did say that he --

QUESTION: -- physical examination of him?

QUESTION: The Swedes did, I think, say that he was --

MS. PSAKI: I believe they've spoken publicly about it.

QUESTION: -- that he was treated -- that's he's being treated (inaudible), right?

MS. PSAKI: Right. I've seen those comments as well. So I don't have any other specifics on it, but if

there's more we share beyond what they've said publicly, I'm happy --

QUESTION: Including whether or not there was a physical examination of him during this consular access?

QUESTION: I just want to get back to his confession. I mean, it is kind of written in language that kind of fits the narrative that North Korea has been saying, and I'm just wondering if you think that he wrote this. Are you -- I mean, there's often times that you would say, like, oh this person seemed under duress --

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: -- or something like that. So I mean, I'm just -- about this particular confession, do you have any reason to believe that he did not confess to all of those things?

MS. PSAKI: I don't -- I certainly understand why you're asking. I don't have any particular analysis on it at this stage. I will see if this is something that our team is looking into, and if there's more we can say about it specifically.

QUESTION: And what is this building doing to secure his release beyond calling for his release from imprisonment? I mean, Ambassador King had tried months ago to go --

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: -- for the other American under detention, Kenneth Bae. What's actually being done to get them out?

MS. PSAKI: Well, our Swedish protecting power just visited with him two days ago, and obviously that's an important component of reaching out to citizens who are detained in North Korea. We certainly do continue to call for his release. I don't have any other predictions or announcements on travel or visits of other officials at this point to tell you about.

QUESTION: But beyond those consular visits, I mean, is there any outreach to the Chinese specially on behalf of Mr. Newman?

MS. PSAKI: I don't have more I can outline for all of you, but I can check and see if there is any more to tell.

QUESTION: Have they been helpful the past with Kenneth Bae or with others? The Chinese (inaudible)?

MS. PSAKI: They have been helpful, but there's not more specifics I can outline.

QUESTION: Through the Swedes are elsewhere, has North Korea communicated any demands or requests of the United States that have to do with Newman or -- as a prelude to his possible release?

MS. PSAKI: I don't have any more specifics on the contact with the Swedes and kind of what the discussion entailed beyond confirming --

QUESTION: Well, any -- in any forum, have they asked for anything from the United States?

MS. PSAKI: I don't have any details on it. I am happy to check if there's any more to share with all of you.

QUESTION: But you guys are in touch with the North Koreans directly, just to confirm?

MS. PSAKI: Well, we – as you know, we've long had a channel, but we've been working in this case through our Swedish protective – protecting power.

QUESTION: But you have been in touch with the North Koreans specifically on his matter?

MS. PSAKI: On this specific case, not that I'm aware of, but I'm happy to check if there's anything more on that.

QUESTION: Are you in touch with Mr. Newman's family?

MS. PSAKI: We are. We have been. Let me see if I have the detail of when we last spoke with him – with his family. I don't have that detail for you. I'm happy to put that in the pocket of things I'm going to check on.

QUESTION: And have they asked for you to help facilitate any kind of visit by them to North Korea, given that this gentleman's actually – I mean, he's quite elderly --

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: -- so you would imagine that if – there would be concern enough to try and travel to visit him.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm. I'm not aware of a request that they've made about that specifically, but we can see.

QUESTION: So all the attention, really, is on this Mr. Newman. But as we've said, Kenneth Bae has been held for quite a long time.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm. You're right.

QUESTION: So in your efforts working with the Swedes or working to try and get the release, I mean, are you emphasizing because of Mr. Newman's age and health that you need to get him out right away, or are they part of a package that you think that they --

MS. PSAKI: I mean, we'd certainly like to see them both released as quickly as possible. In terms of that level of detail, I just don't have that.

QUESTION: These American citizens being held against their will in a rogue state, they're hostages, right?

MS. PSAKI: I mean, they're being held by the governments. The governments have confirmed that, so I don't know that I need to categorize it further, James.

QUESTION: You don't regard them as hostages?

MS. PSAKI: Do we have another topic?

QUESTION: Yes. Could I move onto the --

QUESTION: (Off-mike.) (Laughter.)

QUESTION: -- the Secretary's trip.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: Okay. The portion to the West Bank and to Israel.

MS. PSAKI: Yeah.

QUESTION: Yes. If you have more to share with us -- today or yesterday, President Abbas, the president of the Palestinian Authority, was so impressed with the Geneva success, now he's suggesting a format, perhaps another Geneva, where the Palestinian-Israeli issue could be resolved. Would you look kindly at this suggestion?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I haven't seen those comments from him specifically. I know this has been an idea floated out there. Our focus remains on the direct negotiations between the Israelis and the Palestinians. We're a facilitator in that effort. There are certainly a number of countries who have a great investment and great interest in the success -- in a successful outcome here, including the Arab League, including many other countries that want to contribute to growing the Palestinian economy. But that's our focus, not on planning yet another conference.

QUESTION: And a Palestinian member of the Israeli Knesset, Mr. Ahmed Tibi, claims that the 20,000 housing that the Israelis announced and they put on hold were actually not put on hold, that there is -- construction is ongoing. Do you have any information on that?

MS. PSAKI: I don't have anything new on that. I'd have to look into that for you.

Scott?

QUESTION: (Inaudible.)

MS. PSAKI: Oh.

QUESTION: Can we stay on stay on that?

MS. PSAKI: Yeah.

QUESTION: Just on this idea of not necessarily a Geneva-type conference for the peace process, but just the idea of internationalizing the process, would the United States -- would the Administration object to an internationalization of the peace process?

MS. PSAKI: Well, it's hard to know exactly what that means. Obviously, as you all are well aware, there's direct negotiations between the Israelis and the Palestinians now. That's what our focus is on, so certainly that's not a path we're pursuing.

QUESTION: Well, I think that the point that -- right, it's not a path that you're pursuing --

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: -- but the point that people who are suggesting that this might be a way to go, the point that they make is that the United States has been the sole and unique arbiter, mediator, facilitator, whatever you

want to call it, of Israeli-Palestinian peace talks going back decades.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: And you haven't gotten anything out of it. There's been no success. It's been one failure after another. Is it perhaps not time to try something new, is the argument that these people would make.

MS. PSAKI: Well, Matt, obviously, many people are going to make different arguments about how it should proceed. We're less than halfway through the nine-month timeline here. There are a number of countries that are engaged and invested, including, of course, the Arab League, who, as you know, are in very close contact with the Palestinians and engaged in this effort. There are many who are engaged with the Israelis in this effort. So our focus remains on the direct negotiations, and I don't think we're at this point speculating on a different alternative forum.

QUESTION: Well, let me -- okay. Well, let me put it this way: Is it still the position of the Administration that the United States has unique leverage and influence with both sides that makes it the only logical or capable, competent, credible mediator for peace between Israel and the Palestinians?

MS. PSAKI: I don't know that we've ever stated it exactly like that. We're playing a facilitator role which both sides are comfortable with. There are other countries engaged with this effort and certainly in touch with the Israelis and the Palestinians. I expect that will continue. But in the meantime, we'll continue to play the facilitator role as long as it's productive.

QUESTION: Do you believe, does the Administration believe that the United States still has leverage and influence with Israel or the Palestinians? I mean, you say, in reference to other questions about, say, Mr. Newman or Mr. Bae in North Korea --

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: -- that the Chinese have influence with the North Koreans and you would like to go through them, maybe after you're done yelling at them about their air defense zone. But do you still think that the United States -- does the Administration believe that it has influence and leverage with either Israel or the Palestinians?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I think we have a close relationship with both. And obviously, we're at this point because both sides decided to come to the table. I don't think it's about leverage. There's -- it's in the interest of both sides to come to an agreement on the final status issues, and that's what they're working to do at this point.

QUESTION: Jen, could I just ask -- there was an agreement --

MS. PSAKI: Sure.

QUESTION: -- reached last week between the EU and Israel which will allow Israel to actually touch some funding for scientific research. There have been some problems because the EU wanted to bar all research in areas of -- in the West Bank --

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: -- settlement areas in the West Bank. Is there an -- I mean, does the American -- do America -- does America believe that this is a good agreement for the EU and Israel, given that Secretary Kerry has

always mentioned that he fears an increasing isolation of Israel on the international stage?

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm. I haven't talked to our team about it, so I'd have to talk to them and see if we have any particular view on the agreement last week.

QUESTION: And is -- what is the message that Secretary Kerry's going to be bringing with him when he visits Israel later on this week?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I think he'll be talking to both sides about the importance of staying firm with the timeline and working through the tough and difficult issues that they're doing at the negotiating table, and reiterating the importance of coming to a peaceful end to the final negotiations. And of course, when he's meeting with Prime Minister Netanyahu, they'll certainly be discussing the recent P5+1 agreement with Iran and having an ongoing dialogue about that as well.

QUESTION: And have there been any meetings, direct talks between the Israelis and Palestinians, since the resignation of the Palestinian team?

MS. PSAKI: I don't have any updates on meetings at this point. I'll see if there's any more we want to provide to all of you in terms of specific meetings and timing of that.

QUESTION: But I mean, since the last time the Secretary's been there, there's been another announcement of new settlement construction.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: There's been the resignation of the Palestinian -- it just seems that without him actually physically there holding their hand for hours at a time, that they're not able to sustain it on their own.

MS. PSAKI: Well, they've had many meetings when he has not been there. So obviously, we didn't expect this to be easy. We certainly are aware of some bumps in the road of late, but both sides have also reaffirmed their commitment to seeing this through.

QUESTION: Would you really call those bumps in the road, though? I mean, particularly on the -- actually, on either side, whether it's the Israelis continuing to announce settlement construction or the Palestinians' full negotiating team just giving up, it just doesn't seem as if --

MS. PSAKI: Well, when the negotiating -- and that's a good example. The negotiating team -- President Abbas reaffirmed his own commitment to seeing this through --

QUESTION: But it just --

MS. PSAKI: -- whether it was them or whether it was other officials in their place. So they're continuing to move forward.

QUESTION: It just doesn't seem like they have the -- while they may have the desire and the dream that there'll be a peace deal. The motivation to actually do the hard work day in and day out doesn't seem to be there. And so it does seem as if Secretary Kerry is the one holding this together personally, and isn't there, like, a limit to how much he can do?

MS. PSAKI: Sure. That's why he has a team to help work through it every day.

QUESTION: Well, I meant more the parties themselves.

MS. PSAKI: You're right, but there also is a long timeframe we still have left. One of the reasons committing to the nine-month timeframe was so important is because we knew there would be challenging periods throughout the process. But both sides remain committed to that, and so we'll continue to work through it.

QUESTION: But it doesn't sound like – unless you could disabuse us of the notion, it doesn't sound like since Secretary Kerry's last trip in early November that there have actually been any direct talks.

MS. PSAKI: I wouldn't jump to that conclusion. We just have always said we wouldn't confirm every meeting.

QUESTION: Sure.

MS. PSAKI: So let me see if I can confirm any meetings since that point for all of you.

QUESTION: Jen, could you tell us if Ambassador Indyk is there now? Is he there? Is he in the region? Is he – Ambassador Indyk, where --

MS. PSAKI: He's here. I saw him this morning.

QUESTION: He's here. Okay.

MS. PSAKI: Okay. Let's just do one or two more here.

Scott.

QUESTION: What is the U.S. view of what's going on in Thailand right now?

MS. PSAKI: Well, we certainly deeply regret the loss of life in Bangkok due to politically motivated violence. We condemn violence as a means to achieve political objectives and urge all sides to exercise restraint and respect the rule of law. We are concerned about the continuing political tension in Thailand, and we are following the situation closely.

Peaceful protest and freedom of expression are important aspects of democracy, of course. Violence and seizure of public or private property, however, are not acceptable means of resolving political differences. We firmly believe all parties should work together to resolve differences through peaceful dialogue in ways that strengthen democracy and rule of law.

Ambassador Kenney spoke with the prime minister and – has spoken with the prime minister and opposition leaders to also encourage restraint and peaceful dialogue. You may have also seen that the U.S. Embassy in Bangkok issued a security message for U.S. citizens in Thailand explaining that large political demonstrations may continue in coming day – in the coming days, including at government facilities, in and outside of central Bangkok, and is advising them to avoid areas of demonstration and to exercise caution.

QUESTION: Following his talk with the prime minister, one of the main opposition leaders said that he would accept nothing short of her resignation. Is that a responsible position in the eyes of the United States?

MS. PSAKI: We just continue to encourage all parties to work together to resolve their differences. We, of course, have seen his comments, but I don't think we're going to weigh in further at this point, aside from

encouraging restraint on the ground.

QUESTION: Would you weigh in on the general amnesty bill that the ruling party failed to get through parliament, which was one of the instigations for this?

MS. PSAKI: I know – I don't know if I've spoken to that in the past, Scott. I'd have to – I don't have anything for you on it at this particular moment, but I'm happy to follow up post-briefing.

Okay, let's do two more here. In the back, you've been very patient.

QUESTION: Thank you. Michael Vincent from the Australian Broadcasting Corporation. What's the U.S. response to the Australian Government's rejection of the U.S. company Archer Daniels Midland's bid for GrainCorp?

MS. PSAKI: Well, we are disappointed by the Government of Australia's decision to reject Archer Daniels Midland's proposed acquisition of GrainCorp. We do not – we do note that the Australian Treasurer Joe Hockey has expressed openness to approving an increase in ADM's current share in GrainCorp. The United States is the largest foreign investor – foreign direct investor in Australia, with 132 billion in investment projects to date, and we look forward to working closely with Australia's government to build stronger ties and investment – stronger trade and investment ties.

QUESTION: Just a quick follow-up.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: Did – unrelated matter, but has the U.S. Government accepted private medical, legal, or religious information on Australian citizens as offered by Australian intelligence agencies?

MS. PSAKI: I don't have anything further or anything for you on a range of reports. I'm certainly not going to comment on any of them. As you know, we're undergoing our own review of these processes, which we expect to conclude by the end of the year.

QUESTION: Jen, back to ADM for a second.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: Did – was this issue, this proposed sale, bid by ADM raised at the AUSMIN ministerial meetings?

MS. PSAKI: It's a good question, Matt. I'd have to check. It wasn't one raised while I was there, but let me check and see if it was.

QUESTION: And if it was, did – was – were you given any indication that this is the way your closest antipodal ally was going to go?

MS. PSAKI: I will check and see if it was even raised.

Okay, let's do one more. Go ahead, Samir.

QUESTION: Do you have a reaction to the draft constitution in Egypt today?

MS. PSAKI: Sure.

QUESTION: Can I throw a Bahrain question at the end of that?

MS. PSAKI: Sure. Why not?

Well, we continue to track the constitutional process with interest, and we'll examine the document carefully once it is finalized and sent to President Mansour, which we understand will occur tomorrow. The Egyptian people, of course, will decide the fate of the draft constitution in a referendum. We will continue to support a transition process that leads to an inclusive civilian government selected through free, fair, and transparent elections, and civilian government based on the rule of law, fundamental freedoms, accountability, and an open and competitive economy. So we will see when it is transferred, and we will take a close look at it.

Bahrain.

QUESTION: Yeah. Do you have any view on the government --

QUESTION: A quick one on Egypt. Hold on. I'm sorry, Matt. You don't have any comment on the prohibition of religious parties in Egypt?

MS. PSAKI: Again, we'll wait to comment on it until it's been officially transferred. Obviously, there are steps in there we may be complimentary of and others we may not be.

QUESTION: Yes, please.

QUESTION: Does the decision of the -- not to release this human rights campaigner when he was eligible to be released? It was yesterday or today.

MS. PSAKI: Let me see. I think I have something on this. One moment, Matt.

QUESTION: Mm-hmm. You can get it -- if you just want to make it a TQ, that's fine.

MS. PSAKI: Yeah, that's fine. I believe I have something on it for you. Let's see. We continue to encourage Bahrain to take the necessary steps to promote reconciliation among Bahrainis, including permitting all sectors of society to voice their political views in a peaceful manner. We have seen reports that the head of the Bahrain Center for Human Rights Nabeel Rajab -- is that who you're talking about -- okay --

QUESTION: (Inaudible.)

MS. PSAKI: -- was denied early release today in Bahrain. We understand that he has served 18 months of his two-year prison sentence and is scheduled to be released in May of next year. We remain deeply concerned about the three-year prison sentence for leading illegal gatherings. We urge the Government of Bahrain to protect the universal rights of freedom of expression and assembly, just as we urge all elements of Bahraini society to engage in peaceful expressions of political opinion.

QUESTION: Do you think that he should've been released as was -- as he could've been today?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I believe we are concerned about his -- we were concerned about his three-year prison sentence, I believe. Let me check and see, but I believe that's what we're implying here.

QUESTION: I mean, this is not the first. I mean, there have been several other opposition activists and so

forth that have been detained. I mean, does this cast doubt on your encouraging words earlier in the year about Bahrain's commitment to political reforms?

MS. PSAKI: Well, we certainly are encouraging them to take some step – to take necessary steps to promote reconciliation. And obviously, each time that there is a case like this, we have expressed concern. So I don't have any analysis as to what that will mean longer-term or about the overall relationship, but each time there has been an incident, we have certainly expressed our concern.

QUESTION: Well, but each time – you say each time that there's been an incident. I mean, there's a pattern of incidents. I mean, does that say something about their actual commitment to reforms?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I don't have any more analysis on it for you.

Thanks, everyone.

QUESTION: Thank you.

(The briefing was concluded at 3:18 p.m.)

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TRANSCRIPT:

1:54 p.m. EST

MS. PSAKI: Hi, everyone. Happy --

QUESTION: Happy belated birthday.

MS. PSAKI: Thank you. Thank you very much. Twenty-two. It's glorious. (Laughter.)

QUESTION: And you will be 22 for the next --

MS. PSAKI: I will be.

QUESTION: What, 10, 15 years?

MS. PSAKI: At least, at least. Well, I have nothing at the top, so Matt, let's go to what's on your mind.

QUESTION: Let's see. I have a lot --

MS. PSAKI: Okay.

QUESTION: -- but nothing is really worth starting with, so let's just start with the Secretary's trip.

MS. PSAKI: Okay.

QUESTION: Both -- excluding the middle stop in Moldova, at the beginning, how much of the NAC do you expect is going to be concentrated on Afghanistan and then talking about the BSA? Will there be any Afghan

officials there to talk with? And then -- well, that'll be that one question for --

MS. PSAKI: Okay. Well, we'll clearly, as we typically do, be doing a briefing en route about the trip and about our visit to the NATO Ministerial tomorrow, where we will venture to have more specific details about who will be attending. Obviously, Afghanistan and the ongoing presence there post-2014 of the United States and of NATO will certainly be a big topic of discussion. But I will let our briefers outline more specifics en route to Brussels.

QUESTION: All right. Well, I was going to ask about the Middle East but -- as well, the stop in Israel and the PA. But if you're just -- are you going to give me the same answer, wait for the briefing on the plane?

MS. PSAKI: I likely will, yes.

QUESTION: Okay. Well, then never mind.

MS. PSAKI: Okay.

QUESTION: And then quickly on Afghanistan --

MS. PSAKI: Sure, Lesley.

QUESTION: Is -- what further is happening as far as trying to resolve this issue with Afghanistan?

MS. PSAKI: Well --

QUESTION: As far as -- is it true that --

MS. PSAKI: The BSA.

QUESTION: The -- exactly.

MS. PSAKI: The signing, I assume.

QUESTION: Is it true that Special Envoy Dobbins has gone -- is on his way to Afghanistan?

MS. PSAKI: I don't have any announcements at this point on travel for him or anyone else. Obviously, our team on the ground, Ambassador Cunningham and others, have been in close contact. At this point, we've made our position clear, and so have the Afghan people. Signing the BSA soon is the path forward, as we've said many times, to sustaining a partnership between the United States and Afghanistan to support Afghans in achieving lasting peace, security, and development. That's the message that we're conveying at every level. And as we've said before but important to reiterate here, given it's a week later now: We -- deferring the signature of the agreement until after next year's election is not viable. It would not provide Afghans with the certainty that they deserve regarding their future in the critical months leading to the elections, nor would it provide the United States and NATO allies the clarity necessary for a potential post-2014 military presence.

So we're continuing to convey that. Our team on the ground is certainly hard at work. I don't have any travel announcements. If that changes, we'll certainly let all of you know.

QUESTION: Has Secretary spoken to President Karzai in the last couple of days on BSA?

MS. PSAKI: He has not spoken with him in the last couple of days.

QUESTION: And the Pentagon today said that this is not the end of it; after BSA is signed, the U.S. and Afghanistan have to negotiate and sign their agreement called SOFA, and that would be done by the State Department. Has any process started on SOFA, signing of SOFA with Afghanistan?

MS. PSAKI: I'd have to look more specifically at what they said. Maybe you're referring to the NATO SOFA that they may have to negotiate and sign, I believe, as a step? But for our purposes, there's the signing; it goes through parliament, then it would have to be signed again. Obviously, as you all are very familiar with, this doesn't outline a specific number for a troop presence, so there would be a great deal of planning in regards to that that DOD would certainly be very engaged with. But in terms of that, I'd have to look at specifically what they said. I'm not familiar with that --

QUESTION: Is December 21st the redline, the deadline for signing of BSA, after which you will begin preparing for all troops pull out from Afghanistan post 2014.

MS. PSAKI: I am not going to get into new redlines or deadlines today, I will say. But on the trip question, well, as you all know, a decision hasn't been made. You would know if it had been. It's not our preference, but no troops is certainly a potential outcome for Afghanistan if there is no BSA. So that is, again, not our preference, but natural that planning would have to take place for all different options.

QUESTION: Have you tried to understand why President Karzai is doing what he's doing or conducting himself the way he has? Do you have a clearer picture than we do, for instance?

MS. PSAKI: I don't know that I have any further insight than you do. Obviously, the Secretary spoke with him last week, as you all well know. We continue to press our case for why this should be signed as quickly as possible, but I don't have any analysis of particular actions or comments in Afghanistan.

QUESTION: So you think that he's perhaps more concerned about his personal safety post the elections?

MS. PSAKI: I will let you, Said, do your own analysis. I don't have any other analysis on it.

Do we have any more on Afghanistan?

QUESTION: Just the trip?

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: For those of us who are interested in Moldova --

MS. PSAKI: Yes.

QUESTION: -- could you just tell us why stop in Moldova? What's the importance? We see the winery, et cetera.

MS. PSAKI: Sure. Moldova is a country that has taken a number of important reform steps in recent years. They have -- they're taking steps to help grow their economy, and wine is obviously a significant export. But they have a number of exports they also work with. And given the steps they've taken, the Secretary felt it would be an important opportunity to pay a visit. You'd have to check my history and facts here, but I believe he may be, if not the first, one of the first Secretaries to pay a bilateral visit to Moldova.

QUESTION: And also it comes, obviously, right after Ukraine decided not to sign the agreement with the EU.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: Moldova did. So you could read into this that the Secretary wants to buck them up or give them something, a sign of support.

MS. PSAKI: Well, we had planned this trip – this trip was in the works before that decision was made. But certainly, they have put a number of reforms in place and they're working hard on their economy and the – if – the Secretary felt it was important to highlight that.

QUESTION: Following on that --

QUESTION: Okay. Can I go over just to Afghanistan for one very briefly?

MS. PSAKI: Sure. Okay, and then we'll go to Anne.

QUESTION: I was gone last week so I'm – most of last week, so what – did the Secretary speak with Karzai before or after Ambassador Rice was there?

MS. PSAKI: Let's see. He spoke with Karzai – President Karzai – I'd have to look back. I believe it was prior to her visit. Let me double check that for you to make sure.

QUESTION: So the last senior official to speak with Karzai, as far as you know, was Ambassador Rice.

MS. PSAKI: I believe that's correct, yes.

QUESTION: Just following on the Moldova for Ukraine substitution, in saying that Secretary Kerry would not, as had been widely expected, attend the OSCE – when you said that, I don't know, about 10 days ago or so --

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: -- we were just at the very beginning of this whole episode.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: And at that point you said it was scheduling issues that had – it would force his cancellation. Are you sticking with that? Is that still the case? Or might there be some policy implications to his decision not to go to the OSCE?

MS. PSAKI: I am sticking with that. I'm just looking at Lesley here in my – corner of my eye. I am sticking with that. I don't have any new guidance for you on that front. Assistant Secretary Nuland is still planning to attend and travel there after joining us for the first part of the visit.

QUESTION: On Syria?

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: Is it --

QUESTION: Can you tell us the -- oh, sorry.

QUESTION: Sorry. Just on this charade -- charade, for Lesley -- of scheduling reasons, is it not the case that not doing -- not going on this trip -- not going to Kyiv is a sign of displeasure?

MS. PSAKI: I will let you do your own reporting, Matt. I don't have any more analysis or comments on it from here.

QUESTION: But there was --

QUESTION: And one more quick one on Ukraine.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: Obviously, we're seeing the demonstrations, violent crackdown.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: What's the response from the State Department?

MS. PSAKI: Well, we're of course, naturally, closely monitoring the ongoing demonstrations, not only in Kyiv but in cities around Ukraine. As you know, since the demonstrations began on November 21st, there have been an increasing number of violent incidents, including against journalists. We stress there is no room, and we continue to stress there is no room for violence in a country that aspires to a democratic future. We continue to call on all sides to maintain calm, and on Ukrainian authorities to ensure that members of the public and the press are able to safely and peacefully exercise their rights of speech and assembly.

As I mentioned a little bit before, we still have -- Assistant Secretary Nuland is still planning to travel there. The Ukrainian foreign ministry announced that the ministerial is proceeding as planned.

QUESTION: But there was --

QUESTION: Are you sure that Ukraine is a country that aspires to a democratic future?

MS. PSAKI: Any country that may aspire, certainly, these are important values to follow through on.

QUESTION: Right. But are you still convinced that Ukraine aspires to a westward-looking, democratic future?

MS. PSAKI: Well, we will see, Matt. Time will tell. Actions speak louder than words.

QUESTION: Do you -- does this --

QUESTION: Do you still stand by the comments made by Ambassador Nuland in her speech to the Atlantic Council a couple of weeks ago and also comments from this podium that it is your belief that Ukraine should be following the path towards joining some kind of association agreement with the EU?

MS. PSAKI: Sure. Our view has not changed on that. Obviously, there have been a lot of events that have

happened since then, but --

QUESTION: And do you believe that the demonstrations on the streets are actually -- that's what they want? I mean, it seems to be that they're demonstrating because they're angry that the government hasn't taken this path that's been laid out for them.

MS. PSAKI: I would point you to the comments of the demonstrators, of which there have been many. I don't want to speak on their behalf, but our position hasn't changed on what steps they could take. Obviously, it's up to Ukraine to take those steps.

QUESTION: So -- but, I mean, the United States is -- if you don't want to give your backing to them -- at least sympathetic to what the demonstrators are asking for.

MS. PSAKI: Again, the demonstrators are saying a range of things, so I don't -- beyond what we've stated publicly many times, I don't have any other further public statements on our position, which has been stated by Assistant Secretary Nuland and by other officials in the past several weeks.

QUESTION: Given the estimates of some 300,000 people who were demonstrating across the country on Sunday, and given that they all seem, to a person, to be saying that the government is ignoring their wish to be more closely aligned with Europe, isn't it a bit disingenuous for this building to suggest that they need to show any restraint? They're not the ones who are bludgeoning people with battering rams and turning rubber bullets on the police. It seems they're taking the brunt of everything that's been happening.

MS. PSAKI: I don't think I took sides. I think I said that it's important for all sides to maintain calm, that there's no place for violence in a country that aspires to a democratic future. So I don't -- I would disagree with the premise of your claims.

QUESTION: What does this building think of the prime minister's -- call for his security forces to show restraint and seemingly to be missing in action when on Sunday there was more violence heaped upon the demonstrators, particularly in Kyiv?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I think I just expressed what our view is of violence against demonstrators, so that's what our view is.

QUESTION: Can I -- has the Secretary spoken to somebody in Ukraine, his counterpart?

MS. PSAKI: He has not in the last several days. I can check if there's been any other calls I'm not aware of.

QUESTION: Because one of the big issues for Ukraine is tearing itself away from Russia and looking towards Western Europe for economic support. And one of the big things is that the president of Ukraine is heading to China to look for that. And if -- I was wondering if the U.S. had offered them kind of -- some kind of assurance or reassurance economically that they could be better off by signing these deals and with the support -- and the U.S. would support any kind of reform through the International Monetary Fund.

MS. PSAKI: Well, aside from public statements we've made, which, as Jo referenced, is -- that our belief is that European integration is the surest course to economic growth and strengthening Ukraine's democracy. That's still our belief. That's been consistently our belief. But beyond that, I'm not aware of any other discussions. Obviously, there's a lot of -- that's going on with the EU and with Russia, and beyond that we have made our position clear.

QUESTION: And what is the building's position on the detention of Yulia Tymoshenko?

MS. PSAKI: Well, we have consistently spoken about this in the past and expressed our concern about her detention. I know this was also a component that was potentially being worked through as an element of Ukraine getting into the EU. So we've consistently expressed concern, encouraged them to take steps forward. Obviously, there hasn't been progress on that on the ground.

QUESTION: I'm sorry, what did you say was the surest way to economic growth?

MS. PSAKI: I said European integration is the surest course to economic growth and strengthening --

QUESTION: Did you give the same advice to the Greeks?

(Laughter.)

MS. PSAKI: Matt. Behave.

Do we have any more on Ukraine or Afghanistan, since we touched on that too?

QUESTION: Still on Ukraine.

MS. PSAKI: Okay.

QUESTION: The Russians have proposed that the EU, Ukraine, and Russia get together to discuss some of these problems. Would the United States be in favor of that, some kind of a trilateral discussion to discuss the economic situation and political differences?

MS. PSAKI: It wouldn't involve the United States, so I don't have a particular position. I'm happy to talk to our team and see if we have a view on that.

Ukraine or Afghanistan? Okay, should we move on to Syria? Let's go to Margaret.

QUESTION: Thank you. Jen, the OPCW said over the past few days that the U.S. has stepped up, that they're going to give operational support, offering up financing. Can you give us some more detail on that?

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm. Well, I don't know if it will be satisfying, but let me try. (Laughter.) Well, as you know, the United States is committed to supporting the international community's efforts to destroy Syria's chemical weapons in the safest, most efficient and effective means possible. We have offered and are currently outfitting a U.S. vessel with field-deployable hydrolysis system technology to support the OPCW's efforts. We are in close contact with the OPCW and our international partners and remain confident that we can meet the milestones for destruction set out by the OPCW. Of course, the OPCW remains -- and the UN -- remain the lead coordinators on reaching out to countries and coordinating steps forward and any timeline, et cetera.

QUESTION: But on the financing, what is it exactly that we're offering? Is that a chunk of change? Is that financing and loans, or --

MS. PSAKI: Well, we've offered -- we've offered in the -- prior to this, we have offered -- we have given 6 million to the OPCW and the UN Trust Fund, both in financial contributions and in kind, so I think we gave some materials as well. But this, of course, would be a DOD vessel. So I would point you to them on the

specific costs. This, at this point, is an offer. So I think that's still being worked through.

QUESTION: So – but beyond the vessel, the OPCW says the cost is going to be between 35 to 40 million euros for the private contractors who would actually be --

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: -- be doing the disposal themselves. So is any of that money coming through the State Department, or is the State Department topped out at \$6 million?

MS. PSAKI: Well, we've said we'd be open to exploring additional ways to provide assistance. I don't have any announcements today of additional assistance we're planning to provide, but that certainly is something we're in discussions with the OPCW about.

QUESTION: So we can understand correctly, it is a commercial vessel, correct, that they are trying --

MS. PSAKI: It is a --

QUESTION: -- (inaudible) --

MS. PSAKI: -- U.S. Government vessel, not a commercial vessel.

QUESTION: Right.

MS. PSAKI: But there is a part of this – and this may be what you're asking about – which is the OPCW reaching out to commercial companies about the destruction capabilities.

QUESTION: Okay.

QUESTION: So what – so DOD is outfitting its own boat, which will be staffed with DOD personnel who will do this?

MS. PSAKI: I'd have to check on the specifics of that. I think some of it may still be work – be going through the process of being worked out, Matt, because they've offered – but obviously, how it would be staffed and the materials and the money – I mean, all of those are pieces that are still being discussed.

QUESTION: Do you actually have a timeline and the location for where this would happen?

MS. PSAKI: I don't have a location. That's still being discussed. The timeline, as you know, is – the next deadline is – not deadline, it's a target – is December 31st. And that is to get all of the chemical weapons out. But in terms of when the next step would be, I don't have a timeline of that.

Anne.

QUESTION: I realize part of this is kind of DOD-flavored, but you might know the answer.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: So is it proper to call this a warship, or is it a military-owned, but not non-warship ship?

(Laughter.)

MS. PSAKI: That is a very specific ship question. I would hesitate to answer incorrectly. I'd have to check on specifically how we categorize it. I don't believe it is a warship, but let me see if we can get more specification on how we -- what we call it exactly.

QUESTION: Okay. And on the policy side, I mean, is there any disappointment here that after casting about to -- for a friend here, it ends up being the U.S. having to essentially do this on its own?

MS. PSAKI: I wouldn't categorize it that way. I mean, certainly this is a priority for the U.S., as it is for the international community, to destroy and eliminate the chemical weapons. The OPCW is still talking to countries. There are countries that have made public comments about their willingness to help, so we'll see how that all shakes out. And certainly, we'd welcome the support or contribution of other countries.

QUESTION: Well, I'd imagine from your perspective, it should be a shared priority among many nations who would also share the same goal of the ultimate destruction, right? I mean, everybody was waving a flag when that -- when the thing was signed.

MS. PSAKI: Certainly, and there are countries, as you know, throughout that have been open to contributing that couldn't for a variety of reasons, whether it's regulations or capacity or resources. But they're still talking to countries about contributing and being a part of this, and certainly we're hopeful of that as well.

QUESTION: So if the question is: "Are you surprised that you've been left holding the bag on this, once again," --

MS. PSAKI: We're not holding the bag yet, Matt.

QUESTION: -- the answer would be no, you're not surprised. You expected your friends in Europe to wimp out.

MS. PSAKI: Well, we made clear we were open to contributing from the beginning, Matt. There are other countries that have expressed an openness to contributing in some capacity. They're all going to make their decisions about what that will -- what will -- that will entail, and we'll let the OPCW decide how all of it will work together.

QUESTION: What about Russia, who you made this deal with and has been instrumental, as you say, in helping move this towards a resolution? Why can't Russia contribute in a significant way like you can?

MS. PSAKI: I'm not familiar with what they have contributed or what they've committed to contribute or what they have not. Obviously, there are financial ways -- there are a number of ways to contribute. We certainly welcome any country's contribution. There are different ways that each country can do that.

QUESTION: Are you in touch with the Russians specifically about making an -- a contribution?

MS. PSAKI: I'm not sure. I'd have to check on that and see if it's a discussion that's been a part of the regular discussions with Foreign Minister Lavrov.

QUESTION: Jen, still on Syria.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: Yesterday, Mike Rogers, the chair of the Intelligence Committee, warned that there are many jihadis that are Americans and Europeans and Westerners and so on, that they go back and forth and so on. Are you concerned about these jihadis being trained in Syria and now they come back to the United States and perhaps organize terrorist acts?

MS. PSAKI: I haven't seen his comments specifically. I know -- I believe he may have been on a Sunday show yesterday. I haven't read them fully. We've -- we're naturally concerned, as you know, about extremists whether they're going in and certainly and if they're coming out. I talked a little bit, I think it was a week or two ago, about ways that we coordinate with our international partners in the region to kind of track this and efforts we undertake to make sure we're watching, but of course we're concerned. I don't have any other specifics for you.

QUESTION: Are you pressing your partners in this case, like the Saudis and the Gulf Cooperation Council countries, that have been supplying arms and money in the past for these extremist groups -- are you pressing them not to do so?

MS. PSAKI: We have consistently, and all the countries, as you know, have agreed repeatedly to contribute assistance through the SMC.

QUESTION: Finally, yesterday there was a report in the *Telegraph*, *The London Telegraph*, that says basically the Free Syrian Army now is becoming a group of warlords and accumulating money and gangs and so on and have no interest, really, in reaching a settlement. Is that your assessment, or are you still working very closely with General Idris?

MS. PSAKI: We are still working very closely with General Idris, we're still working towards a Geneva conference in January, and we still believe there's no military solution, as you know.

More on Syria?

QUESTION: Still on Syria.

MS. PSAKI: Or -- go ahead, Roz.

QUESTION: Still on Syria, the Iranian Foreign Minister Zarif did an interview with Al Jazeera this morning. And when it came to Geneva II, he said that while Iran is, quote: not begging to attend the talks in January, it would attend if invited. My first question: Would the U.S. be willing to invite Iran to take part in these talks? And if so, what does the U.S. believe that Iran could bring to this situation to try to end the civil war?

MS. PSAKI: Well, no decisions have been made about participation yet. There's another trilateral meeting on December 20th coming up that we'll be participating in with the UN and the Russians. Our position hasn't changed on Iran's participation or whether we believe they should be invited. They have not endorsed the Geneva communique. That's a condition we feel is necessary, but obviously this will continue to be discussed at the next trilateral meeting.

QUESTION: But given the -- that the UN is now estimating that upwards of 120-25,000 people may have been killed in the civil war to date --

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: -- is there some sort of leverage that Tehran could bring to the table to try to induce the Assad regime to, if nothing else, stop the killing and try to at least put in some sort of ceasefire?

MS. PSAKI: Well, this goes back to the premise that attendees should be endorsing the Geneva communiqué, because that is what the purpose and the goal of the conference is. So, I don't have any speculation on what leverage they may or may not have, but the conversations we have had with them in recent weeks have been about their nuclear program and moving towards a first-step agreement on that. They've not been focused on Syria. And our position on whether or not they should attend the Geneva conference in January hasn't changed.

QUESTION: But you do feel that if they do endorse Geneva I, there's a great deal of value for Iran's participation --

MS. PSAKI: Well, we'd have to --

QUESTION: -- considering that it is --

MS. PSAKI: We'd have to evaluate it, Said. I don't want to get ahead of --

QUESTION: But it's a very ally of the regime. It supports other elements that help the regime in its fight, like Hezbollah so on.

MS. PSAKI: If that is a step they take, we can have a robust discussion in here about it.

QUESTION: Jen, are there any contacts currently between the United States Government and the Syrian regime? I mean, I know Secretary Kerry spoke months and months ago --

MS. PSAKI: Sure.

QUESTION: -- to Foreign Minister Muallem. Is there anything going on at the moment?

MS. PSAKI: And we have for some time, as you know, have had different channels, but I don't have anything specific for you. I can check if there have been any recent contacts on any level.

QUESTION: So there were reports over the weekend that some European countries are quietly beginning to --

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: -- reopen diplomatic conversations or channels with the Syrian regime because, I think, the fear is that this is just so blocked at the moment that they're --

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: -- it's not going anywhere.

MS. PSAKI: Well, let me see if there have been any contacts at any level of the regime. We've -- they have happened in the past, as you mentioned, so I will see if there's more to report on that.

QUESTION: Can I go back to the Iranians and taking part in Geneva? I mean, I think over the last week or so, when there's been, like, various bouts of violence in Syria, that the Iranian Government has said that there needs to be a political solution to the situation in Syria. So don't you think that Iran is making more positive comments? I mean, I don't think the Russians have gone far beyond saying that there needs to be a political solution. They haven't said anything about President Assad leaving (inaudible).

MS. PSAKI: Well, the whole premise – I mean the whole goal is to create a transitional governing body. That's the goal of a Geneva conference. So, certainly, they haven't embraced that as the focus of the Geneva communique, and --

QUESTION: Well, even though the Russians have agreed to a political transition, your definition of a transition is far different from the – than the Russians' definition of a transition. So if the Iranians were to say, like, okay, we accept a political transition, I mean, does that really mean that they --

MS. PSAKI: It's not just about a political transition. It's about embracing the Geneva communique, which they have not done. If they do that, we will evaluate whether or not we'd support their – an invitation to them to attend the conference.

QUESTION: Zarif also told us that his country is not interested in aggravating any sectarian tensions between Shiite and Sunni, between Alawite and other major Islamic communities; that they're trying to, in their efforts, promote more harmony, more peace. Does that add any – does that change the complexion at all, particularly in Syria?

MS. PSAKI: I don't want to speak too specifically to an interview I haven't yet seen yet, and neither has anyone on our team. Broadly speaking, obviously we took a significant step forward with the first-step agreement on their nuclear program, but there are remaining concerns that we have, as you all are familiar with, whether it's their involvement in support of the regime in Syria or humanitarian issues, and so that has not changed that. I can take a closer look once we see the transcript of the interview and see if we have more comments on Foreign Minister Zarif's comments.

QUESTION: You're saying your team does not watch Al Jazeera?

MS. PSAKI: Well, that is not true; we do. However, I believe there's only been a very short clip that has played of this interview that I'm sure will get lots of attention once it all plays.

QUESTION: Beyond the interview, he's freely reaching out. He visited Kuwait. He's reaching out to the other Gulf countries. He wants to visit Saudi Arabia. I mean, there is an effort underway to alleviate their fears and actually encourage them towards participating in Geneva II to make it a success. You must have some sort of a reading of this effort.

MS. PSAKI: I don't have any particular reading of it for you, Said. Our position, I think, has been pretty clear on whether or not they attend the Geneva conference.

QUESTION: I have another really quick logistics thing. On the December 20th meeting, that's Wendy Sherman and that – it's the same iteration?

MS. PSAKI: It is that level. Exactly, yes. Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: Is that new or was that announced last week or something --

MS. PSAKI: I believe we talked about it last week as being the next meeting.

QUESTION: On China – (inaudible).

QUESTION: Please, Jen, can we stay on Iran, please?

MS. PSAKI: Sure. Let's stay on Iran and then we can go to China.

QUESTION: On the 6th of February in this room, I had a very brief exchange with your predecessor, Victoria Nuland --

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: -- about Iran. And with your indulgence, I will read it in its entirety for the purpose of the record and so you can respond to it.

"Rosen: There have been reports that intermittently, and outside of the formal P5+1 mechanisms, the Obama Administration, or members of it, have conducted direct secret bilateral talks with Iran. Is that true or false?"

"Nuland: We have made clear, as the Vice President did at Munich, that in the context of the larger P5+1 framework, we would be prepared to talk to Iran bilaterally. But with regard to the kind of thing that you're talking about on a government-to-government level, no."

That's the entirety of the exchange.

As we now know, senior state department officials had, in fact, been conducting direct, secret bilateral talks with senior officials of the Iranian Government in Oman, perhaps dating back to 2011 by that point.

So the question today is a simple one: When the briefer was asked about those talks and flatly denied them from the podium, that was untrue, correct?

MS. PSAKI: I mean, James, I -- that -- you're talking about a February briefing, so 10 months ago. I don't think we've outlined or confirmed contacts or specifics beyond a March meeting. I'm not going to confirm others beyond that at this point. So I don't know that I have any more for you.

QUESTION: Do you stand by the accuracy of what Ms. Nuland told me, that there had been no government-to-government contacts, no secret direct bilateral talks with Iran as of the date of that briefing, February 6th? Do you stand by the accuracy of that?

MS. PSAKI: James, I have no new information for you today on the timing of when there were any discussions with any Iranian officials.

QUESTION: Let me try it one last way, Jen --

MS. PSAKI: Okay.

QUESTION: -- and I appreciate your indulgence.

MS. PSAKI: Sure.

QUESTION: Is it the policy of the State Department, where the preservation or the secrecy of secret negotiations is concerned, to lie in order to achieve that goal?

MS. PSAKI: James, I think there are times where diplomacy needs privacy in order to progress. This is a good example of that. Obviously, we have made clear and laid out a number of details in recent weeks about discussions and about a bilateral channel that fed into the P5+1 negotiations, and we've answered questions on it, we've confirmed details. We're happy to continue to do that, but clearly, this was an important component leading up to the agreement that was reached a week ago.

QUESTION: Since you, standing at that podium last week, did confirm that there were such talks, at least as far back as March of this year, I don't see what would prohibit you from addressing directly this question: Were there secret direct bilateral talks between the United States and Iranian officials in 2011?

MS. PSAKI: I don't have anything more for you today. We've long had ways to speak with the Iranians through a range of channels, some of which you talked – you mentioned, but I don't have any other specifics for you today.

QUESTION: One more on Iran?

QUESTION: *The Los Angeles Times* and *Politico* have reported that those talks were held as far back as 2011. Were those reports inaccurate?

MS. PSAKI: I'm not sure which reports you're talking about. Are you talking about visits that the Secretary and others made to Oman, or are you talking about other reports?

QUESTION: I'm talking about U.S. officials meeting directly and secretly with Iranian officials in Oman as far back as 2011. *The Los Angeles Times* and *Politico* have reported those meetings. Were those reports inaccurate?

MS. PSAKI: I have nothing more for you on it, James, today.

QUESTION: One more on Iran?

MS. PSAKI: On Iran? Let's just finish Iran and then we can go to China. Go ahead, Roz.

QUESTION: One of – one more on Iran. Foreign Minister Zarif said, directly contradicting the Obama Administration's contention that sanctions worked, he told our interviewer that when the sanctions were first imposed, Iran had 200 working centrifuges. Today, they have more than 19,000. What is this building's reaction to his comment that sanctions did not work and did not bring Iran to the negotiating table?

MS. PSAKI: Well, again, I would like to look more closely at the context of the comments. But, just as reminder, President Rouhani and others have talked about how the impact – how growing the economy and putting an end – doing – bringing an end to the sanctions is something that was a priority for them in order to help the economy and the Iranian people. There's no question, if you look just at the facts of the impact of oil revenues, the impact on their economic growth was large that there was a huge impact of – that there – the sanctions had an enormous impact, and that that was a driving factor in bringing the Iranians back to the negotiating table.

In terms of progress made on their efforts to develop a nuclear weapon, whether through centrifuges or at their various facilities, that to me sounds like a separate question. Obviously, there was concerns about steps they were taking and progress they were making, which was why it was so important to come to an

acceptable agreement that would halt and roll back the progress of their program.

QUESTION: Just to follow up on that, though --

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: -- Secretary Kerry, when he did his round robin of interviews after the announcement of the deal in Geneva, more than once stated that when Iran had reached out to the Bush-Cheney Administration in 2003, Iran was only in possession of 164 centrifuges. Now, he would go on to say, they have 19,000, and this therefore represents the best possible deal that could be secured.

Isn't it a fact that since the Obama-Biden Administration took office, 70 percent of Iran's centrifuges have been installed?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I'd have to look at the statistics, James, but we have not questioned the fact that Iran has made progress on enrichment and on developing a nuclear weapon. We have not questioned that. That's one of the reasons why we stepped up sanctions over the past couple of years. The President and Secretary Kerry were big proponents of that. We worked with the international community to do just that to put that necessary pressure in place.

The point I was trying to make to Roz is that -- what she's asking sounds to me like two separate questions, so that was --

QUESTION: Right. I'm pursuing the separate one part that she carved out, and that is to say -- and if this is untrue, I'd be grateful to be disabused of the notion -- but the great bulk of Iran's progress in the development of its enrichment program has taken place under President Obama's watch, correct?

MS. PSAKI: I'd have to check on the specific numbers. The --

QUESTION: You're not prepared to dispute that statement, as --

MS. PSAKI: Well, James, I think what we're focused on at this point is the fact that we're now at a point where we are halting and rolling back the progress of their program and we're working towards a comprehensive agreement to bring an end to it. I can't speculate for you what would happen without -- what would have happened without sanctions. I would venture to guess --

QUESTION: (Inaudible) sanctions.

MS. PSAKI: But they were being paired together, so that's why I'm bringing it into the conversation.

QUESTION: But the context of the question was exactly: "The Obama Administration says we showed up because our economy is falling apart. I'm here to tell you that's not the case. We have our own reasons for coming."

MS. PSAKI: Well, we will take a close look at his comments and we'll have more to say about them once we do.

QUESTION: Can I just go back to the Geneva meeting and --

MS. PSAKI: Sure.

QUESTION: -- December 20th with Wendy Sherman?

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: This is --

MS. PSAKI: It's that level -- in terms of specific attendance, I'll have to just double-check that for you.

QUESTION: Oh, okay.

MS. PSAKI: Yeah.

QUESTION: This is going to be the first of the political meetings towards the next -- the comprehensive agreement --

MS. PSAKI: Well, they also --

QUESTION: -- or this is the technical discussions?

MS. PSAKI: No, no, no.

QUESTION: No, this is Syria.

MS. PSAKI: This is -- sorry, this is Syria.

QUESTION: Oh, I'm sorry.

MS. PSAKI: This is Syria.

QUESTION: Excuse me. I'm sorry.

MS. PSAKI: So this is the pre-Geneva. No, it's okay. It's confusing. Lots of Genevas.

QUESTION: Okay. But I did have an Iran question, actually.

QUESTION: But is there any new -- I mean --

QUESTION: Yeah.

QUESTION: -- when is it that you're going to start to negotiate the comprehensive deal with Iran?

MS. PSAKI: Well, right now, what we're focused on is the technical discussions leading up to the start of the six-month --

QUESTION: Right.

QUESTION: So do you have a date for those?

MS. PSAKI: I don't yet have a date on those.

QUESTION: Or a place?

MS. PSAKI: I don't yet have a place. It's being worked through. Hopefully we'll have an update for you all in the coming days.

QUESTION: And can I ask -- I don't know if you had seen the reports that the new British envoy to Iran is actually going to visit Tehran tomorrow. I wondered what the --

MS. PSAKI: I haven't seen that.

QUESTION: Well, I wanted a U.S. reaction to this following on to the question I asked last week about how far along the line you are prepared to go with your new diplomatic relations or not with Iran.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm. I still don't have any prediction of any step beyond what step we've already taken, which is being a part of the P5+1 agreement on the first step here with Iran. Obviously, different countries are going to make their own decisions, and as with most issues, we certainly support that.

QUESTION: Would it be helpful, though? Do you believe it's helpful that the British envoy could be going to Tehran?

MS. PSAKI: I don't know that I have that level of analysis on it. I don't have all the details on what the purpose of the trip is or what they hope to accomplish. And obviously, every country will make their own decisions about diplomatic relationships.

QUESTION: Jen, one more on the --

QUESTION: East China Sea?

QUESTION: -- secret negotiations with Iran.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: I apologize if you've already addressed this, but there have been reports that the secret negotiations that the U.S. was engaging in with Iran created a feeling of resentment among P5+1 allies such as France, and then that contributed to a rift among the P5+1 and made it difficult to reach consensus within that group. Do you have a reaction to that or a comment on that?

MS. PSAKI: I don't want to speak to anonymous reports about what may or may not be the feelings by other countries, but I will reiterate for you that this was -- these discussions were fed into the P5+1 process. That is the process that we ultimately all worked through to achieve a first-step agreement here. The P5+1 members, as well as our friends in Israel, were briefed early this fall.

As to the discussions, we have always been clear we've been open to bilateral discussions with Iran; that there are a range of channels to do that through; that if anything got serious, that we would certainly be briefing our important partners on that; and that's exactly what we did in this case.

QUESTION: Jen --

QUESTION: And when did the talks begin?

MS. PSAKI: James, you're so tricky over there. (Laughter.)

QUESTION: Can I ask about China?

MS. PSAKI: Let me just say one thing, though, for James. It's important here too – and then I promise we'll go to China – it's important here also to note, though, that these really picked up after President Rouhani's election, that in terms of the discussion of specific pieces about how to move forward, what kind of – what an agreement could look like, that's when it picked up. So I understand that's not answering your question, but I felt it was important to --

QUESTION: But just on the basis of methodology and removing the specifics of Iran and who's president or who's Secretary of State, if you were able to stand there at the podium last week and say, "Yes, I'm confirming a certain set of talks that occurred in March," explain to me what is it that prohibits you from saying, yes or no, that a certain set of talks occurred two years ago?

MS. PSAKI: If I have more details for you, James, I will – happy to share them.

QUESTION: I didn't ask you – I'm asking for your thinking about why you're not addressing the question, not the specifics of the meetings. What is it that prohibits you from addressing a question about meetings that are two years old?

MS. PSAKI: I'm not going to do a psychiatrist chair today.

Go ahead. On China?

QUESTION: What about the couch? (Laughter.)

QUESTION: Thank you, Jen. So as we know, the U.S. Government has already told U.S. carriers to comply with China's requirements before any flights pass through the new air defense zone established by the Chinese Government. So does that mean the U.S. Government has recognized this new air defense zone established by the Chinese Government?

MS. PSAKI: So let me be absolutely as clear as I can be here because I know there's been a range of reporting. It has been – some of it has been inaccurate, to no fault of – perhaps it's our fault for not explaining it well enough. So we are not – the State Department is not the point of contact with airlines. The FAA is the point of contact with airlines. There has not been any information that has been put out or confirmed that I am aware of that has conveyed what has or has not been communicated in that capacity to airlines.

There is – for safety and security of passengers, U.S. carriers operate internationally – operate consistently as a process with the notices to airmen issued by foreign countries, as is the case in this case. Their concerns are about the safety and security of passengers. That is different from what the U.S. Government policy is. It is not – this is in no way indicates U.S. Government acceptance of China's requirements in the newly declared ADIZ and has absolutely no bearing on the firm and consistent U.S. Government position that we do not accept the legitimacy of China's requirements.

This is a case where China announced this in an uncoordinated fashion. It's inconsistent with standard practice. And their requirements for operating exceed internationally accepted practice in this capacity. So I don't know how much more clear that it is, but it does contradict a bit your question, so I wanted –

QUESTION: It looks like we received the statement or the Q&A from the State Department, so it looks like

it's from the U.S. Government. And also, you are saying --

MS. PSAKI: Well, in that statement, which I certainly was well aware of, what was conveyed in there is that for safety and -- for the safety and security of passengers, U.S. carriers operate consistently internationally with the notices to airmen issued by foreign governments. It did not convey that -- anything specific about what had been communicated to airlines. It did not convey that the U.S. Government supported this effort. So I'm very familiar with the statement you're referring to, and there were a lot of -- there were some assumptions made.

QUESTION: So (inaudible) --

QUESTION: Okay. It looks like --

QUESTION: -- that the FAA did not instruct airlines to comply with the Chinese regulations?

MS. PSAKI: I would point you to the FAA for what they did or did not communicate to commercial airlines.

QUESTION: Okay. Well, the FAA is part of the U.S. Government, is it not?

MS. PSAKI: They are. They --

QUESTION: Yes.

MS. PSAKI: Certainly, they are not housed in the State Department, however. (Laughter.)

QUESTION: So -- I understand that, but the State Department does have a representative -- you're familiar with the ICAO?

MS. PSAKI: I am not.

QUESTION: Okay. It's in Montreal.

MS. PSAKI: Okay.

QUESTION: It's a good excuse to get to Montreal --

MS. PSAKI: Good.

QUESTION: -- if you ever want to go up there.

MS. PSAKI: I will take that advice.

QUESTION: It's the International Civilian -- it's the civilian airline -- the UN agency for airlines. Do you know if the United States is going to use its membership in the ICAO to oppose this Chinese decision?

MS. PSAKI: I don't.

QUESTION: And if you don't know, could you ask?

MS. PSAKI: Yeah, I'm happy to check on that for you, Matt. Absolutely.

QUESTION: And when you say that the U.S. Government does not accept the legitimacy of the Chinese requirements --

MS. PSAKI: Well, it doesn't accept -- yeah, the Chinese requirements, right.

QUESTION: Right. That's what you said.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: Doesn't that -- if the FAA has been telling airlines that they have to comply with this, or that they should comply with it, how is that not accepting -- the government accepting the legitimacy?

MS. PSAKI: Well, there's a whole field of regulations and regulatory policy that I am certainly far from an aviation expert, as it evidenced by your Montreal question. So I would point you to them on that.

Evidence of the fact that the U.S. Government does not accept China's requirement is by the fact that the announcement will not change how the United States conducts military operations in the region, which is something DOD announced last week. And that is certainly a U.S. Government decision to make.

QUESTION: So does that mean that U.S. Government planes will not obey the -- or will not follow the Chinese requirements if they're flying through this airspace?

MS. PSAKI: Military planes?

QUESTION: Say the Secretary of State flying on an Air Force plane to Seoul or to Tokyo will not notify the --

MS. PSAKI: I am not aware of any upcoming Seoul trip coming up.

QUESTION: Well, the Vice President is there right now, or in Tokyo, at least. Are you saying that his plane, an Air Force plane, will not follow the requirements of the Chinese?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I am saying military planes would not, and that level of specificity I'd certainly have to check and see where that falls in.

QUESTION: What is this episode -- what impact is this episode having on U.S.-Sino relations?

MS. PSAKI: There are times when we agree and there are times when we disagree, as you know. We've made clear our concerns about not only what was announced but how this was announced, the fact that there was no prior notice. As you also know, Vice President Biden is in the region now on a prior planned trip. He will, of course, be meeting with key leaders to discuss a range of issues. Certainly, this could be a topic of discussion, but there are a number of other issues that we discuss both with China and other partners in the region.

QUESTION: And has the pivot to Asia worked? Is this evidence of the pivot working?

MS. PSAKI: I wouldn't categorize this into -- I wouldn't put this in the evaluation category of whether or not it worked. Our pivot to Asia, or rebalance to Asia, means focusing on Asia and the important partnership we have with Asia, with countries in the region, the economic and strategic partners. And nothing is further

evidence of that than the Vice President's trip there, the fact that, as you know, the Secretary will be going back to Asia soon, that he was just there a couple of months ago with Secretary Hagel. So that is evidence of our commitment to the region. And we work with them on a – countries in the region on a broad range of issues.

QUESTION: But as we survey the last five years of this Administration, would you say that China is less aggressive in its serial commission of human rights abuses, currency manipulation, cyber warfare against U.S. businesses and government, territorial aggression, or is it better than it used to be?

MS. PSAKI: I'm not going to do an evaluation of that. Obviously, we work with them on economic issues, we work with them on strategic issues. There are still issues, including human rights, including this issue we're talking about now, that we express concerns about when warranted, and we'll continue to do that. But we know that the relationship is a vital one and one that we need to keep plugging away at even when we disagree.

QUESTION: Jen, could I (inaudible) for a second?

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: Is it fair to characterize the U.S. position as being that aside from the official policy, for the purposes of safety and avoiding some kind of unfortunate incident, that commercial carriers should abide by the Chinese ADIZ requirements?

MS. PSAKI: I don't have – I'd point you again to the FAA on more specifics than what I just conveyed. There are a range of regulations and policies that, of course, they oversee or are in place, but our general position as a U.S. Government is that we don't accept China's requirements. And obviously, the military – actions of military exercises is evidence of that.

QUESTION: Jen, this comes from --

QUESTION: Sorry, sorry. Just a quick follow-up on that.

MS. PSAKI: Go ahead.

QUESTION: It looks like the two main U.S. airlines are complying with – are taking steps to comply. Delta and United are the two that have flight routes through the area, which seems to have kind of created a little bit of confusion/consternation in Japan over a perceived rift with Japanese policy, which is to not allow U.S. commercial airliners to file their flight plans with China. Do you have a – do you have any kind of reassurance or any kind of response to that?

MS. PSAKI: We coordinate closely with Japan and with South Korea and all of the countries in the region about a range of issues. And certainly on this issue, we have been in touch with Japan and will continue to be. This is – for specific actions of individual commercial airliners, I would point you to them or the FAA on any regulations.

QUESTION: But – so you're not – but you're not afraid for the safety or concerned about the safety of U.S. citizens on flights that are flying through the area?

MS. PSAKI: Well, certainly safety and security of citizens should be of concern to everyone. Obviously, there are policies in place and regulations in place because of that. But we don't oversee airline regulations.

The FAA does, so I would point you to them.

QUESTION: (Inaudible.) Did the United States Government – the position has changed toward this ADIZ, or not changed? What is the position to ADIZ now?

MS. PSAKI: It has not changed. We – China announced the ADIZ without prior consultations even though the newly-announced ADIZ overlaps with parts of longstanding ADIZs of Japan, the Republic of Korea, and Taiwan, and includes territory administered by Japan. As I mentioned, we – the fact that China's announcement has caused confusion and increased the risk of accidents only further underscores the validity of concerns and the need for China to rescind the procedures. It's consistently been our position and one we have communicated both publicly and privately. I know there was some confusion over the weekend about airlines and specifically.

QUESTION: Jen, you said that you are not still – not accepting China's new air defense zone. But I wonder, like, Japan has its own air defense zone, and also part of it covers Taiwan. But it looks like the U.S. doesn't say anything about it. So do you think there is sort of a double standard? Why do you react so strongly to China's air defense zone?

MS. PSAKI: Well, one of the reasons is that they announced this without prior consultations. It was inconsistent with longstanding procedure and process. And obviously, it overlaps with a number of other longstanding air defense zones of some other neighboring countries.

QUESTION: Jen --

QUESTION: Jen, you do not contest the ability of China to declare such a identification zone; it's just the manner in which they did it, or the extent?

MS. PSAKI: No. I think I have – I've just consistently said that we believe they should rescind the procedures. I've just – I've also stated a couple of times that we don't accept China's requirements. So I think I've made that pretty clear.

QUESTION: (Inaudible.)

QUESTION: Is the first --

QUESTION: In response to the – China's declaration of its own ADIZ, the South Korean Government is poised to expand its own ADIZ, so-called KADIZ, to the South China Sea. What is the position of the United States? Would you encourage it or discourage it?

MS. PSAKI: I haven't seen those reports, or I don't even know if they're reports or if there's been an announcement. I haven't seen any announcement, I guess I should say. So let me check into that, and --

QUESTION: They say they have already started consultations with the United States.

MS. PSAKI: I'd have to check into it and see if we have more to say on that.

QUESTION: Is this the first time the U.S. has called --

QUESTION: Jennifer, you talk about safety --

QUESTION: -- for the zone to be rescinded?

MS. PSAKI: I'd have to check on that for you, Roz.

QUESTION: Can we change topic?

QUESTION: No.

QUESTION: You talk about safety. Are you really concerned that the Chinese may down an airliner or something?

MS. PSAKI: I'm not predicting that, but certainly there is -- they created these Air Defense Identification Zones, they've asked for prior flight plans. So of course, the security and safety is part of the regulatory process, and -- but I don't have any predictions. It's just the question of abiding by it.

QUESTION: Is it a real concern, downing an airliner?

MS. PSAKI: I don't think I have any more for you on that question.

QUESTION: Jen, when you're taking that question that Roz had --

MS. PSAKI: Sure.

QUESTION: -- could you also check whether the United States actually is directly asking the Chinese to rescind it?

MS. PSAKI: Happy to. Sure.

QUESTION: Thank you.

QUESTION: Well, at least --

QUESTION: Apart from the specific concerns about how this was announced without any prior notice, its excessiveness, at least in terms of other regulations, and the safety risks that you say it cause, do you have any -- are there broader concerns about this area being identified as essentially the entire East China Sea? Is the U.S. concerned that the Chinese are looking at anything on a map that has the word "China" in it as all their own?

MS. PSAKI: Well, part of the concern is certainly that it overlaps with parts of other --

QUESTION: Right. But in terms of territorial claims --

MS. PSAKI: As well as territory administered by Japan, sure.

QUESTION: Right, right. But in terms of China's territorial claims, are you concerned that this is the first step or could be a first step towards actually moving in some kind of forceful way to take control of areas of territory and ocean maritime space that it says that it owns?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I don't want to make a prediction of that.

QUESTION: No, but I'm asking if you were concerned --

MS. PSAKI: But --

QUESTION: -- that this is a step in that direction, apart from the specific problems with the no prior notice and all that other -- the safety concerns.

MS. PSAKI: But one of the specific problems is also that this includes area -- territory administered by Japan, it includes overlapping area with other countries in the region. So certainly, that does touch on what your question is here. In terms of a prediction of what it will mean in the future, I certainly wouldn't venture to make that at this point.

QUESTION: Right. Well, the Chinese say that they would be well within their rights also to declare one of these zones over the entire -- over the South China Sea. Are you concerned about the possibility of that?

MS. PSAKI: Well, you're familiar with what our position is on that, and we've long --

QUESTION: Well, that's over the territorial disputes over the -- it's a question of sovereignty for these little atolls and bits of rock.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: Would you be as opposed as you are to this if the Chinese did it for the South China Sea, or is that a hypothetical question that you will wait to bash the Chinese over the head for once they -- if and when they do it?

MS. PSAKI: It is a hypothetical question at this stage in time.

QUESTION: All right.

QUESTION: One more thing. Just one more thing on that. China at the same time has announced they sent a fighter jet against United States and Japanese aircraft last week. Did you comment on that?

MS. PSAKI: I am not familiar with that specific report. In -- where, exactly?

QUESTION: If it's true, are you concerned about these Chinese announcement?

MS. PSAKI: I'd have to look at the specific report, and that may be a DOD question.

James.

QUESTION: Given that China makes this declaration --

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: -- and we regard it as thoroughly problematic, if not illegal, and therefore we have on our hands a dispute with the Chinese --

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: -- which is to be adjudicated somehow in a nonviolent way, wasn't it a kind of a provocative

act for the United States to fly B-52s through that very zone in a short time thereafter?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I would point you to DOD on that, but I would reiterate the fact that we have made clear that this action, this announcement, is not going to change our military exercises. And that is an example of that.

QUESTION: So other than taking – other than the Vice President, are you aware – or has there been at this point any conversations that you're aware of in this – from this building with the Chinese directly? It's kind of on Jill's question. And if not, do you expect them or is this going to be left up to the Vice President when he goes to --

MS. PSAKI: Let me check. I know we have expressed concerns. I mentioned this last week, Matt, so let me just make sure you have it.

QUESTION: Jen, the – Secretary Kerry did meet on Wednesday with a senior Chinese official?

MS. PSAKI: I'd have to --

QUESTION: On Wednesday, the vice premier.

QUESTION: Lu.

QUESTION: Yeah.

MS. PSAKI: I'd have to look back at that. It seems like a long time ago.

QUESTION: I know it does. And it was happening on Wednesday.

MS. PSAKI: Deputy Secretary Burns met last week with a Chinese official where this was a topic of discussion. Also, Assistant Secretary Russel spoke with the ambassador about a week ago, and Ambassador Locke has also been in touch, of course, on the ground. In terms of specific contacts over the last couple of days, I'm happy to check and see what else we can read out for all of you.

QUESTION: Are you taking this to the UN in any forum there?

MS. PSAKI: I don't have any prediction of that, James, at this point in time.

QUESTION: New topic?

QUESTION: So it's strictly a bilateral or a multilateral thing, but outside the auspices of the UN is how you're going to seek to resolve it?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I don't have anything for you on it at this point. We're taking this day by day. I conveyed for you what we've done and what we've communicated. But obviously, we're taking steps day by day.

QUESTION: But is that a kind of – is that a consideration?

MS. PSAKI: Not that I'm aware of, Elise. But obviously, we're taking this day by day.

QUESTION: Can we change --

QUESTION: New subject?

MS. PSAKI: Sure, Jill. Go ahead.

QUESTION: I'm still on China. Can you actually clarify this? China's argument is that we institute the ADIZ that other countries have already instituted. If you're saying that China does not have a right to do that, they can say, well, what's good for the goose is good for the gander. And it doesn't seem like you have a legal foot to stand on. If you're opposed to the way in which they did it or the extent of it, these can be a subject of debate. And China has said we can get rid of our ADIZ if the Japanese get rid of theirs. I mean, something like that could happen. But somehow -- are you really saying that you do not accept -- you do not give China the right to declare a defense identification zone?

MS. PSAKI: I think I've thoroughly outlined what our concerns are, so I'm not sure I have much more to add to your question.

QUESTION: Just on another topic, Jen -- sorry.

MS. PSAKI: Well, we were going to go to Jill next, and then I'm happy to go to you.

QUESTION: North Korea?

MS. PSAKI: Sure.

QUESTION: Merrill Newman.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: You've seen probably, or read at least, his so-called confession. Do you have any comments about that, any reaction? And what is the latest on his status?

MS. PSAKI: Well, the latest is -- and let me do this first and then I'll do the second part. On November 30th, North Korea permitted the Embassy of Sweden, our protecting power, to consular access to Merrill Newman. It -- and given his advanced age and health conditions, we continue to urge North Korea to release him so he may return home and reunite with his family.

We, of course, have seen the Korean Central News Agency report regarding Mr. Newman's detention. According to the report, he apologized for the misunderstanding that led him -- led to his detention. We don't have any other further information regarding the reason for his detention. But again, given his age and health, we continue to call for North Korea to release him as quickly as possible.

QUESTION: Do you believe that the North Korean -- that that apology was -- that he wrote and that was released by the North Koreans -- do you believe that he wrote that of his own volition and that he -- and do you have reason to believe that all of those things in that apology are true?

MS. PSAKI: We just don't have any other further analysis. We've seen the same reports all of you have seen, of course, about his interview and the publication of that, but I don't have any other further analysis on it.

QUESTION: Are you aware if that -- the subject of his quote, unquote "confession" came up in the meeting

with the Swedes?

MS. PSAKI: I don't have anything more on it, but I'm happy to check and see if there's more detail we can outline for all of you.

QUESTION: Did the Swedes as for and did Mr. Newman sign a PAW?

MS. PSAKI: A Privacy Act waiver?

QUESTION: Correct.

MS. PSAKI: Yes, he did. That is why I am able to talk about him now.

QUESTION: Okay. So then if -- since he has signed the waiver, would you take it back to your -- whoever it is that liaises with the Swedes on this--

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: I assume it's EAP, but I guess it could also be EUR -- and find out if Mr. Newman, in his discussions with the Swedes, talked at all about or said that he had freely made this alleged confession and when it was that he recorded this or when it --

MS. PSAKI: I am happy to take that and see if there's more we can share.

Go ahead, Lesley.

QUESTION: Also, did the Swedes report back in what condition he is in? Has he been tortured? Anything today? And how long did they meet with him, and was it in a jail? Was it in a --

QUESTION: Guest house.

QUESTION: -- government -- a guest house?

QUESTION: A jailhouse guest house.

MS. PSAKI: A guest house. I don't have many specifics on that. I'm happy to also check with Matt's questions and to see if there's more we can share on that as well.

QUESTION: But didn't it include a --

QUESTION: But they did say -- the Swedes did say that he --

QUESTION: -- physical examination of him?

QUESTION: The Swedes did, I think, say that he was --

MS. PSAKI: I believe they've spoken publicly about it.

QUESTION: -- that he was treated -- that's he's being treated (inaudible), right?

MS. PSAKI: Right. I've seen those comments as well. So I don't have any other specifics on it, but if

there's more we share beyond what they've said publicly, I'm happy --

QUESTION: Including whether or not there was a physical examination of him during this consular access?

QUESTION: I just want to get back to his confession. I mean, it is kind of written in language that kind of fits the narrative that North Korea has been saying, and I'm just wondering if you think that he wrote this. Are you -- I mean, there's often times that you would say, like, oh this person seemed under duress --

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: -- or something like that. So I mean, I'm just -- about this particular confession, do you have any reason to believe that he did not confess to all of those things?

MS. PSAKI: I don't -- I certainly understand why you're asking. I don't have any particular analysis on it at this stage. I will see if this is something that our team is looking into, and if there's more we can say about it specifically.

QUESTION: And what is this building doing to secure his release beyond calling for his release from imprisonment? I mean, Ambassador King had tried months ago to go --

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: -- for the other American under detention, Kenneth Bae. What's actually being done to get them out?

MS. PSAKI: Well, our Swedish protecting power just visited with him two days ago, and obviously that's an important component of reaching out to citizens who are detained in North Korea. We certainly do continue to call for his release. I don't have any other predictions or announcements on travel or visits of other officials at this point to tell you about.

QUESTION: But beyond those consular visits, I mean, is there any outreach to the Chinese specially on behalf of Mr. Newman?

MS. PSAKI: I don't have more I can outline for all of you, but I can check and see if there is any more to tell.

QUESTION: Have they been helpful the past with Kenneth Bae or with others? The Chinese (inaudible)?

MS. PSAKI: They have been helpful, but there's not more specifics I can outline.

QUESTION: Through the Swedes are elsewhere, has North Korea communicated any demands or requests of the United States that have to do with Newman or -- as a prelude to his possible release?

MS. PSAKI: I don't have any more specifics on the contact with the Swedes and kind of what the discussion entailed beyond confirming --

QUESTION: Well, any -- in any forum, have they asked for anything from the United States?

MS. PSAKI: I don't have any details on it. I am happy to check if there's any more to share with all of you.

QUESTION: But you guys are in touch with the North Koreans directly, just to confirm?

MS. PSAKI: Well, we -- as you know, we've long had a channel, but we've been working in this case through our Swedish protective -- protecting power.

QUESTION: But you have been in touch with the North Koreans specifically on his matter?

MS. PSAKI: On this specific case, not that I'm aware of, but I'm happy to check if there's anything more on that.

QUESTION: Are you in touch with Mr. Newman's family?

MS. PSAKI: We are. We have been. Let me see if I have the detail of when we last spoke with him -- with his family. I don't have that detail for you. I'm happy to put that in the pocket of things I'm going to check on.

QUESTION: And have they asked for you to help facilitate any kind of visit by them to North Korea, given that this gentleman's actually -- I mean, he's quite elderly --

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: -- so you would imagine that if -- there would be concern enough to try and travel to visit him.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm. I'm not aware of a request that they've made about that specifically, but we can see.

QUESTION: So all the attention, really, is on this Mr. Newman. But as we've said, Kenneth Bae has been held for quite a long time.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm. You're right.

QUESTION: So in your efforts working with the Swedes or working to try and get the release, I mean, are you emphasizing because of Mr. Newman's age and health that you need to get him out right away, or are they part of a package that you think that they --

MS. PSAKI: I mean, we'd certainly like to see them both released as quickly as possible. In terms of that level of detail, I just don't have that.

QUESTION: These American citizens being held against their will in a rogue state, they're hostages, right?

MS. PSAKI: I mean, they're being held by the governments. The governments have confirmed that, so I don't know that I need to categorize it further, James.

QUESTION: You don't regard them as hostages?

MS. PSAKI: Do we have another topic?

QUESTION: Yes. Could I move onto the --

QUESTION: (Off-mike.) (Laughter.)

QUESTION: -- the Secretary's trip.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: Okay. The portion to the West Bank and to Israel.

MS. PSAKI: Yeah.

QUESTION: Yes. If you have more to share with us -- today or yesterday, President Abbas, the president of the Palestinian Authority, was so impressed with the Geneva success, now he's suggesting a format, perhaps another Geneva, where the Palestinian-Israeli issue could be resolved. Would you look kindly at this suggestion?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I haven't seen those comments from him specifically. I know this has been an idea floated out there. Our focus remains on the direct negotiations between the Israelis and the Palestinians. We're a facilitator in that effort. There are certainly a number of countries who have a great investment and great interest in the success -- in a successful outcome here, including the Arab League, including many other countries that want to contribute to growing the Palestinian economy. But that's our focus, not on planning yet another conference.

QUESTION: And a Palestinian member of the Israeli Knesset, Mr. Ahmed Tibi, claims that the 20,000 housing that the Israelis announced and they put on hold were actually not put on hold, that there is -- construction is ongoing. Do you have any information on that?

MS. PSAKI: I don't have anything new on that. I'd have to look into that for you.

Scott?

QUESTION: (Inaudible.)

MS. PSAKI: Oh.

QUESTION: Can we stay on stay on that?

MS. PSAKI: Yeah.

QUESTION: Just on this idea of not necessarily a Geneva-type conference for the peace process, but just the idea of internationalizing the process, would the United States -- would the Administration object to an internationalization of the peace process?

MS. PSAKI: Well, it's hard to know exactly what that means. Obviously, as you all are well aware, there's direct negotiations between the Israelis and the Palestinians now. That's what our focus is on, so certainly that's not a path we're pursuing.

QUESTION: Well, I think that the point that -- right, it's not a path that you're pursuing --

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: -- but the point that people who are suggesting that this might be a way to go, the point that they make is that the United States has been the sole and unique arbiter, mediator, facilitator, whatever you

want to call it, of Israeli-Palestinian peace talks going back decades.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: And you haven't gotten anything out of it. There's been no success. It's been one failure after another. Is it perhaps not time to try something new, is the argument that these people would make.

MS. PSAKI: Well, Matt, obviously, many people are going to make different arguments about how it should proceed. We're less than halfway through the nine-month timeline here. There are a number of countries that are engaged and invested, including, of course, the Arab League, who, as you know, are in very close contact with the Palestinians and engaged in this effort. There are many who are engaged with the Israelis in this effort. So our focus remains on the direct negotiations, and I don't think we're at this point speculating on a different alternative forum.

QUESTION: Well, let me -- okay. Well, let me put it this way: Is it still the position of the Administration that the United States has unique leverage and influence with both sides that makes it the only logical or capable, competent, credible mediator for peace between Israel and the Palestinians?

MS. PSAKI: I don't know that we've ever stated it exactly like that. We're playing a facilitator role which both sides are comfortable with. There are other countries engaged with this effort and certainly in touch with the Israelis and the Palestinians. I expect that will continue. But in the meantime, we'll continue to play the facilitator role as long as it's productive.

QUESTION: Do you believe, does the Administration believe that the United States still has leverage and influence with Israel or the Palestinians? I mean, you say, in reference to other questions about, say, Mr. Newman or Mr. Bae in North Korea --

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: -- that the Chinese have influence with the North Koreans and you would like to go through them, maybe after you're done yelling at them about their air defense zone. But do you still think that the United States -- does the Administration believe that it has influence and leverage with either Israel or the Palestinians?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I think we have a close relationship with both. And obviously, we're at this point because both sides decided to come to the table. I don't think it's about leverage. There's -- it's in the interest of both sides to come to an agreement on the final status issues, and that's what they're working to do at this point.

QUESTION: Jen, could I just ask -- there was an agreement --

MS. PSAKI: Sure.

QUESTION: -- reached last week between the EU and Israel which will allow Israel to actually touch some funding for scientific research. There have been some problems because the EU wanted to bar all research in areas of -- in the West Bank --

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: -- settlement areas in the West Bank. Is there an -- I mean, does the American -- do America -- does America believe that this is a good agreement for the EU and Israel, given that Secretary Kerry has

always mentioned that he fears an increasing isolation of Israel on the international stage?

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm. I haven't talked to our team about it, so I'd have to talk to them and see if we have any particular view on the agreement last week.

QUESTION: And is -- what is the message that Secretary Kerry's going to be bringing with him when he visits Israel later on this week?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I think he'll be talking to both sides about the importance of staying firm with the timeline and working through the tough and difficult issues that they're doing at the negotiating table, and reiterating the importance of coming to a peaceful end to the final negotiations. And of course, when he's meeting with Prime Minister Netanyahu, they'll certainly be discussing the recent P5+1 agreement with Iran and having an ongoing dialogue about that as well.

QUESTION: And have there been any meetings, direct talks between the Israelis and Palestinians, since the resignation of the Palestinian team?

MS. PSAKI: I don't have any updates on meetings at this point. I'll see if there's any more we want to provide to all of you in terms of specific meetings and timing of that.

QUESTION: But I mean, since the last time the Secretary's been there, there's been another announcement of new settlement construction.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: There's been the resignation of the Palestinian -- it just seems that without him actually physically there holding their hand for hours at a time, that they're not able to sustain it on their own.

MS. PSAKI: Well, they've had many meetings when he has not been there. So obviously, we didn't expect this to be easy. We certainly are aware of some bumps in the road of late, but both sides have also reaffirmed their commitment to seeing this through.

QUESTION: Would you really call those bumps in the road, though? I mean, particularly on the -- actually, on either side, whether it's the Israelis continuing to announce settlement construction or the Palestinians' full negotiating team just giving up, it just doesn't seem as if --

MS. PSAKI: Well, when the negotiating -- and that's a good example. The negotiating team -- President Abbas reaffirmed his own commitment to seeing this through --

QUESTION: But it just --

MS. PSAKI: -- whether it was them or whether it was other officials in their place. So they're continuing to move forward.

QUESTION: It just doesn't seem like they have the -- while they may have the desire and the dream that there'll be a peace deal. The motivation to actually do the hard work day in and day out doesn't seem to be there. And so it does seem as if Secretary Kerry is the one holding this together personally, and isn't there, like, a limit to how much he can do?

MS. PSAKI: Sure. That's why he has a team to help work through it every day.

QUESTION: Well, I meant more the parties themselves.

MS. PSAKI: You're right, but there also is a long timeframe we still have left. One of the reasons committing to the nine-month timeframe was so important is because we knew there would be challenging periods throughout the process. But both sides remain committed to that, and so we'll continue to work through it.

QUESTION: But it doesn't sound like – unless you could disabuse us of the notion, it doesn't sound like since Secretary Kerry's last trip in early November that there have actually been any direct talks.

MS. PSAKI: I wouldn't jump to that conclusion. We just have always said we wouldn't confirm every meeting.

QUESTION: Sure.

MS. PSAKI: So let me see if I can confirm any meetings since that point for all of you.

QUESTION: Jen, could you tell us if Ambassador Indyk is there now? Is he there? Is he in the region? Is he – Ambassador Indyk, where --

MS. PSAKI: He's here. I saw him this morning.

QUESTION: He's here. Okay.

MS. PSAKI: Okay. Let's just do one or two more here.

Scott.

QUESTION: What is the U.S. view of what's going on in Thailand right now?

MS. PSAKI: Well, we certainly deeply regret the loss of life in Bangkok due to politically motivated violence. We condemn violence as a means to achieve political objectives and urge all sides to exercise restraint and respect the rule of law. We are concerned about the continuing political tension in Thailand, and we are following the situation closely.

Peaceful protest and freedom of expression are important aspects of democracy, of course. Violence and seizure of public or private property, however, are not acceptable means of resolving political differences. We firmly believe all parties should work together to resolve differences through peaceful dialogue in ways that strengthen democracy and rule of law.

Ambassador Kenney spoke with the prime minister and – has spoken with the prime minister and opposition leaders to also encourage restraint and peaceful dialogue. You may have also seen that the U.S. Embassy in Bangkok issued a security message for U.S. citizens in Thailand explaining that large political demonstrations may continue in coming day – in the coming days, including at government facilities, in and outside of central Bangkok, and is advising them to avoid areas of demonstration and to exercise caution.

QUESTION: Following his talk with the prime minister, one of the main opposition leaders said that he would accept nothing short of her resignation. Is that a responsible position in the eyes of the United States?

MS. PSAKI: We just continue to encourage all parties to work together to resolve their differences. We, of course, have seen his comments, but I don't think we're going to weigh in further at this point, aside from

encouraging restraint on the ground.

QUESTION: Would you weigh in on the general amnesty bill that the ruling party failed to get through parliament, which was one of the instigations for this?

MS. PSAKI: I know – I don't know if I've spoken to that in the past, Scott. I'd have to – I don't have anything for you on it at this particular moment, but I'm happy to follow up post-briefing.

Okay, let's do two more here. In the back, you've been very patient.

QUESTION: Thank you. Michael Vincent from the Australian Broadcasting Corporation. What's the U.S. response to the Australian Government's rejection of the U.S. company Archer Daniels Midland's bid for GrainCorp?

MS. PSAKI: Well, we are disappointed by the Government of Australia's decision to reject Archer Daniels Midland's proposed acquisition of GrainCorp. We do not – we do note that the Australian Treasurer Joe Hockey has expressed openness to approving an increase in ADM's current share in GrainCorp. The United States is the largest foreign investor – foreign direct investor in Australia, with 132 billion in investment projects to date, and we look forward to working closely with Australia's government to build stronger ties and investment – stronger trade and investment ties.

QUESTION: Just a quick follow-up.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: Did – unrelated matter, but has the U.S. Government accepted private medical, legal, or religious information on Australian citizens as offered by Australian intelligence agencies?

MS. PSAKI: I don't have anything further or anything for you on a range of reports. I'm certainly not going to comment on any of them. As you know, we're undergoing our own review of these processes, which we expect to conclude by the end of the year.

QUESTION: Jen, back to ADM for a second.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: Did – was this issue, this proposed sale, bid by ADM raised at the AUSMIN ministerial meetings?

MS. PSAKI: It's a good question, Matt. I'd have to check. It wasn't one raised while I was there, but let me check and see if it was.

QUESTION: And if it was, did – was – were you given any indication that this is the way your closest antipodal ally was going to go?

MS. PSAKI: I will check and see if it was even raised.

Okay, let's do one more. Go ahead, Samir.

QUESTION: Do you have a reaction to the draft constitution in Egypt today?

MS. PSAKI: Sure.

QUESTION: Can I throw a Bahrain question at the end of that?

MS. PSAKI: Sure. Why not?

Well, we continue to track the constitutional process with interest, and we'll examine the document carefully once it is finalized and sent to President Mansour, which we understand will occur tomorrow. The Egyptian people, of course, will decide the fate of the draft constitution in a referendum. We will continue to support a transition process that leads to an inclusive civilian government selected through free, fair, and transparent elections, and civilian government based on the rule of law, fundamental freedoms, accountability, and an open and competitive economy. So we will see when it is transferred, and we will take a close look at it.

Bahrain.

QUESTION: Yeah. Do you have any view on the government --

QUESTION: A quick one on Egypt. Hold on. I'm sorry, Matt. You don't have any comment on the prohibition of religious parties in Egypt?

MS. PSAKI: Again, we'll wait to comment on it until it's been officially transferred. Obviously, there are steps in there we may be complimentary of and others we may not be.

QUESTION: Yes, please.

QUESTION: Does the decision of the -- not to release this human rights campaigner when he was eligible to be released? It was yesterday or today.

MS. PSAKI: Let me see. I think I have something on this. One moment, Matt.

QUESTION: Mm-hmm. You can get it -- if you just want to make it a TQ, that's fine.

MS. PSAKI: Yeah, that's fine. I believe I have something on it for you. Let's see. We continue to encourage Bahrain to take the necessary steps to promote reconciliation among Bahrainis, including permitting all sectors of society to voice their political views in a peaceful manner. We have seen reports that the head of the Bahrain Center for Human Rights Nabeel Rajab -- is that who you're talking about -- okay --

QUESTION: (Inaudible.)

MS. PSAKI: -- was denied early release today in Bahrain. We understand that he has served 18 months of his two-year prison sentence and is scheduled to be released in May of next year. We remain deeply concerned about the three-year prison sentence for leading illegal gatherings. We urge the Government of Bahrain to protect the universal rights of freedom of expression and assembly, just as we urge all elements of Bahraini society to engage in peaceful expressions of political opinion.

QUESTION: Do you think that he should've been released as was -- as he could've been today?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I believe we are concerned about his -- we were concerned about his three-year prison sentence, I believe. Let me check and see, but I believe that's what we're implying here.

QUESTION: I mean, this is not the first. I mean, there have been several other opposition activists and so

forth that have been detained. I mean, does this cast doubt on your encouraging words earlier in the year about Bahrain's commitment to political reforms?

MS. PSAKI: Well, we certainly are encouraging them to take some step – to take necessary steps to promote reconciliation. And obviously, each time that there is a case like this, we have expressed concern. So I don't have any analysis as to what that will mean longer-term or about the overall relationship, but each time there has been an incident, we have certainly expressed our concern.

QUESTION: Well, but each time – you say each time that there's been an incident. I mean, there's a pattern of incidents. I mean, does that say something about their actual commitment to reforms?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I don't have any more analysis on it for you.

Thanks, everyone.

QUESTION: Thank you.

(The briefing was concluded at 3:18 p.m.)

DPB # 196

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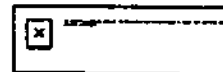
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From: State Department Press Office
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 To: State Department Press Office
 Subject: State Department Daily Press Briefing with Jen Psaki, Spokesperson - Monday, December 2, 2013

RELEASE IN FULL

On-Camera Daily Press Briefing Index
 Monday, December 2, 2013
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 Briefer: Jen Psaki, Spokesperson

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE
DAILY PRESS BRIEFING

DPB # 196

MONDAY, DECEMBER 2, 2013
(ON THE RECORD UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED)

1:54 p.m. EST

MS. PSAKI: Hi, everyone. Happy --

QUESTION: Happy belated birthday.

MS. PSAKI: Thank you. Thank you very much. Twenty-two. It's glorious. (Laughter.)

QUESTION: And you will be 22 for the next --

MS. PSAKI: I will be.

QUESTION: What, 10, 15 years?

MS. PSAKI: At least, at least. Well, I have nothing at the top, so Matt, let's go to what's on your mind.

QUESTION: Let's see. I have a lot --

MS. PSAKI: Okay.

QUESTION: -- but nothing is really worth starting with, so let's just start with the Secretary's trip.

MS. PSAKI: Okay.

QUESTION: Both -- excluding the middle stop in Moldova, at the beginning, how much of the NAC do you expect is going to be concentrated on Afghanistan and then talking about the BSA? Will there be any Afghan officials there to talk with? And then -- well, that'll be that one question for --

MS. PSAKI: Okay. Well, we'll clearly, as we typically do, be doing a briefing en route about the trip and about our visit to the NATO Ministerial tomorrow, where we will venture to have more specific details about who will be attending. Obviously, Afghanistan and the ongoing presence there post-2014 of the United States and of NATO will certainly be a big topic of discussion. But I will let our briefers outline more specifics en route to Brussels.

QUESTION: All right. Well, I was going to ask about the Middle East but -- as well, the stop in Israel and the PA. But if you're just -- are you going to give me the same answer, wait for the briefing on the plane?

MS. PSAKI: I likely will, yes.

QUESTION: Okay. Well, then never mind.

MS. PSAKI: Okay.

QUESTION: And then quickly on Afghanistan --

MS. PSAKI: Sure, Lesley.

QUESTION: Is -- what further is happening as far as trying to resolve this issue with Afghanistan?

MS. PSAKI: Well --

QUESTION: As far as -- is it true that --

MS. PSAKI: The BSA.

QUESTION: The -- exactly.

MS. PSAKI: The signing, I assume.

QUESTION: Is it true that Special Envoy Dobbins has gone -- is on his way to Afghanistan?

MS. PSAKI: I don't have any announcements at this point on travel for him or anyone else. Obviously, our team on the ground, Ambassador Cunningham and others, have been in close contact. At this point, we've made our position clear, and so have the Afghan people. Signing the BSA soon is the path forward, as we've said many times, to sustaining a partnership between the United States and Afghanistan to support Afghans in achieving lasting peace, security, and development. That's the message that we're conveying at every level. And as we've said before but important to reiterate here, given it's a week later now: We -- deferring the signature of the agreement until after next year's election is not viable. It would not provide Afghans with the certainty that they deserve regarding their future in the critical months leading to the elections, nor would it provide the United States and NATO allies the clarity necessary for a potential post-2014 military presence.

So we're continuing to convey that. Our team on the ground is certainly hard at work. I don't have any travel announcements. If that changes, we'll certainly let all of you know.

QUESTION: Has Secretary spoken to President Karzai in the last couple of days on BSA?

MS. PSAKI: He has not spoken with him in the last couple of days.

QUESTION: And the Pentagon today said that this is not the end of it; after BSA is signed, the U.S. and Afghanistan have to negotiate and sign their agreement called SOFA, and that would be done by the State Department. Has any process started on SOFA, signing of SOFA with Afghanistan?

MS. PSAKI: I'd have to look more specifically at what they said. Maybe you're referring to the NATO SOFA that they may have to negotiate and sign, I believe, as a step? But for our purposes, there's the signing; it goes through parliament, then it would have to be signed again. Obviously, as you all are very familiar with, this doesn't outline a specific number for a troop presence, so there would be a great deal of planning in regards to that that DOD would certainly be very engaged with. But in terms of that, I'd have to look at specifically what they said. I'm not familiar with that --

QUESTION: Is December 21st the redline, the deadline for signing of BSA, after which you will begin preparing for all troops pull out from Afghanistan post 2014.

MS. PSAKI: I am not going to get into new redlines or deadlines today, I will say. But on the trip question, well, as you all know, a decision hasn't been made. You would know if it had been. It's not our preference, but no troops is certainly a potential outcome for Afghanistan if there is no BSA. So that is, again, not our preference, but natural that planning would have to take place for all different options.

QUESTION: Have you tried to understand why President Karzai is doing what he's doing or conducting himself the way he has? Do you have a clearer picture than we do, for instance?

MS. PSAKI: I don't know that I have any further insight than you do. Obviously, the Secretary spoke with him last week, as you all well know. We continue to press our case for why this should be signed as quickly as possible, but I don't have any analysis of particular actions or comments in Afghanistan.

QUESTION: So you think that he's perhaps more concerned about his personal safety post the elections?

MS. PSAKI: I will let you, Said, do your own analysis. I don't have any other analysis on it.

Do we have any more on Afghanistan?

QUESTION: Just the trip?

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: For those of us who are interested in Moldova --

MS. PSAKI: Yes.

QUESTION: -- could you just tell us why stop in Moldova? What's the importance? We see the winery, et cetera.

MS. PSAKI: Sure. Moldova is a country that has taken a number of important reform steps in recent years. They have -- they're taking steps to help grow their economy, and wine is obviously a significant export. But they have a number of exports they also work with. And given the steps they've taken, the Secretary felt it would be an important opportunity to pay a visit. You'd have to check my history and facts here, but I believe he may be, if not the first, one of the first Secretaries to pay a bilateral visit to Moldova.

QUESTION: And also it comes, obviously, right after Ukraine decided not to sign the agreement with the EU.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: Moldova did. So you could read into this that the Secretary wants to buck them up or give them something, a sign of support.

MS. PSAKI: Well, we had planned this trip -- this trip was in the works before that decision was made. But certainly, they have put a number of reforms in place and they're working hard on their economy and the -- if -- the Secretary felt it was important to highlight that.

QUESTION: Following on that --

QUESTION: Okay. Can I go over just to Afghanistan for one very briefly?

MS. PSAKI: Sure. Okay, and then we'll go to Anne.

QUESTION: I was gone last week so I'm -- most of last week, so what -- did the Secretary speak with Karzai before or after Ambassador Rice was there?

MS. PSAKI: Let's see. He spoke with Karzai -- President Karzai -- I'd have to look back. I believe it was prior to her visit. Let me double check that for you to make sure.

QUESTION: So the last senior official to speak with Karzai, as far as you know, was Ambassador Rice.

MS. PSAKI: I believe that's correct, yes.

QUESTION: Just following on the Moldova for Ukraine substitution, in saying that Secretary Kerry would not, as had been widely expected, attend the OSCE -- when you said that, I don't know, about 10 days ago or so --

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: -- we were just at the very beginning of this whole episode.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: And at that point you said it was scheduling issues that had -- it would force his cancellation. Are you sticking with that? Is that still the case? Or might there be some policy implications to his decision not to go to the OSCE?

MS. PSAKI: I am sticking with that. I'm just looking at Lesley here in my -- corner of my eye. I am sticking with that. I don't have any new guidance for you on that front. Assistant Secretary Nuland is still planning to attend and travel there after joining us for the first part of the visit.

QUESTION: On Syria?

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: Is it --

QUESTION: Can you tell us the -- oh, sorry.

QUESTION: Sorry. Just on this charade -- charade, for Lesley -- of scheduling reasons, is it not the case that not doing -- not going on this trip -- not going to Kyiv is a sign of displeasure?

MS. PSAKI: I will let you do your own reporting, Matt. I don't have any more analysis or comments on it from here.

QUESTION: But there was --

QUESTION: And one more quick one on Ukraine.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: Obviously, we're seeing the demonstrations, violent crackdown.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: What's the response from the State Department?

MS. PSAKI: Well, we're of course, naturally, closely monitoring the ongoing demonstrations, not only in Kyiv but in cities around Ukraine. As you know, since the demonstrations began on November 21st, there have been an increasing number of violent incidents, including against journalists. We stress there is no room, and we continue to stress there is no room for violence in a country that aspires to a democratic future. We continue to call on all sides to maintain calm, and on Ukrainian authorities to ensure that members of the public and the press are able to safely and peacefully exercise their rights of speech and assembly.

As I mentioned a little bit before, we still have – Assistant Secretary Nuland is still planning to travel there. The Ukrainian foreign ministry announced that the ministerial is proceeding as planned.

QUESTION: But there was –

QUESTION: Are you sure that Ukraine is a country that aspires to a democratic future?

MS. PSAKI: Any country that may aspire, certainly, these are important values to follow through on.

QUESTION: Right. But are you still convinced that Ukraine aspires to a westward-looking, democratic future?

MS. PSAKI: Well, we will see, Matt. Time will tell. Actions speak louder than words.

QUESTION: Do you – does this --

QUESTION: Do you still stand by the comments made by Ambassador Nuland in her speech to the Atlantic Council a couple of weeks ago and also comments from this podium that it is your belief that Ukraine should be following the path towards joining some kind of association agreement with the EU?

MS. PSAKI: Sure. Our view has not changed on that. Obviously, there have been a lot of events that have happened since then, but --

QUESTION: And do you believe that the demonstrations on the streets are actually – that's what they want? I mean, it seems to be that they're demonstrating because they're angry that the government hasn't taken this path that's been laid out for them.

MS. PSAKI: I would point you to the comments of the demonstrators, of which there have been many. I don't want to speak on their behalf, but our position hasn't changed on what steps they could take. Obviously, it's up to Ukraine to take those steps.

QUESTION: So – but, I mean, the United States is – if you don't want to give your backing to them – at least sympathetic to what the demonstrators are asking for.

MS. PSAKI: Again, the demonstrators are saying a range of things, so I don't – beyond what we've stated publicly many times, I don't have any other further public statements on our position, which has been stated by Assistant Secretary Nuland and by other officials in the past several weeks.

QUESTION: Given the estimates of some 300,000 people who were demonstrating across the country on Sunday, and given that they all seem, to a person, to be saying that the government is ignoring their wish to be

more closely aligned with Europe, isn't it a bit disingenuous for this building to suggest that they need to show any restraint? They're not the ones who are bludgeoning people with battering rams and turning rubber bullets on the police. It seems they're taking the brunt of everything that's been happening.

MS. PSAKI: I don't think I took sides. I think I said that it's important for all sides to maintain calm, that there's no place for violence in a country that aspires to a democratic future. So I don't -- I would disagree with the premise of your claims.

QUESTION: What does this building think of the prime minister's -- call for his security forces to show restraint and seemingly to be missing in action when on Sunday there was more violence heaped upon the demonstrators, particularly in Kyiv?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I think I just expressed what our view is of violence against demonstrators, so that's what our view is.

QUESTION: Can I -- has the Secretary spoken to somebody in Ukraine, his counterpart?

MS. PSAKI: He has not in the last several days. I can check if there's been any other calls I'm not aware of.

QUESTION: Because one of the big issues for Ukraine is tearing itself away from Russia and looking towards Western Europe for economic support. And one of the big things is that the president of Ukraine is heading to China to look for that. And if -- I was wondering if the U.S. had offered them kind of -- some kind of assurance or reassurance economically that they could be better off by signing these deals and with the support -- and the U.S. would support any kind of reform through the International Monetary Fund.

MS. PSAKI: Well, aside from public statements we've made, which, as Jo referenced, is -- that our belief is that European integration is the surest course to economic growth and strengthening Ukraine's democracy. That's still our belief. That's been consistently our belief. But beyond that, I'm not aware of any other discussions. Obviously, there's a lot of -- that's going on with the EU and with Russia, and beyond that we have made our position clear.

QUESTION: And what is the building's position on the detention of Yulia Tymoshenko?

MS. PSAKI: Well, we have consistently spoken about this in the past and expressed our concern about her detention. I know this was also a component that was potentially being worked through as an element of Ukraine getting into the EU. So we've consistently expressed concern, encouraged them to take steps forward. Obviously, there hasn't been progress on that on the ground.

QUESTION: I'm sorry, what did you say was the surest way to economic growth?

MS. PSAKI: I said European integration is the surest course to economic growth and strengthening --

QUESTION: Did you give the same advice to the Greeks?

(Laughter.)

MS. PSAKI: Matt. Behave.

Do we have any more on Ukraine or Afghanistan, since we touched on that too?

QUESTION: Still on Ukraine.

MS. PSAKI: Okay.

QUESTION: The Russians have proposed that the EU, Ukraine, and Russia get together to discuss some of these problems. Would the United States be in favor of that, some kind of a trilateral discussion to discuss the economic situation and political differences?

MS. PSAKI: It wouldn't involve the United States, so I don't have a particular position. I'm happy to talk to our team and see if we have a view on that.

Ukraine or Afghanistan? Okay, should we move on to Syria? Let's go to Margaret.

QUESTION: Thank you. Jen, the OPCW said over the past few days that the U.S. has stepped up, that they're going to give operational support, offering up financing. Can you give us some more detail on that?

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm. Well, I don't know if it will be satisfying, but let me try. (Laughter.) Well, as you know, the United States is committed to supporting the international community's efforts to destroy Syria's chemical weapons in the safest, most efficient and effective means possible. We have offered and are currently outfitting a U.S. vessel with field-deployable hydrolysis system technology to support the OPCW's efforts. We are in close contact with the OPCW and our international partners and remain confident that we can meet the milestones for destruction set out by the OPCW. Of course, the OPCW remains – and the UN – remain the lead coordinators on reaching out to countries and coordinating steps forward and any timeline, et cetera.

QUESTION: But on the financing, what is it exactly that we're offering? Is that a chunk of change? Is that financing and loans, or --

MS. PSAKI: Well, we've offered – we've offered in the – prior to this, we have offered – we have given 6 million to the OPCW and the UN Trust Fund, both in financial contributions and in kind, so I think we gave some materials as well. But this, of course, would be a DOD vessel. So I would point you to them on the specific costs. This, at this point, is an offer. So I think that's still being worked through.

QUESTION: So – but beyond the vessel, the OPCW says the cost is going to be between 35 to 40 million euros for the private contractors who would actually be --

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: -- be doing the disposal themselves. So is any of that money coming through the State Department, or is the State Department topped out at \$6 million?

MS. PSAKI: Well, we've said we'd be open to exploring additional ways to provide assistance. I don't have any announcements today of additional assistance we're planning to provide, but that certainly is something we're in discussions with the OPCW about.

QUESTION: So we can understand correctly, it is a commercial vessel, correct, that they are trying --

MS. PSAKI: It is a --

QUESTION: -- (inaudible) --

MS. PSAKI: -- U.S. Government vessel, not a commercial vessel.

QUESTION: Right.

MS. PSAKI: But there is a part of this – and this may be what you're asking about – which is the OPCW reaching out to commercial companies about the destruction capabilities.

QUESTION: Okay.

QUESTION: So what – so DOD is outfitting its own boat, which will be staffed with DOD personnel who will do this?

MS. PSAKI: I'd have to check on the specifics of that. I think some of it may still be work – be going through the process of being worked out, Matt, because they've offered – but obviously, how it would be staffed and the materials and the money – I mean, all of those are pieces that are still being discussed.

QUESTION: Do you actually have a timeline and the location for where this would happen?

MS. PSAKI: I don't have a location. That's still being discussed. The timeline, as you know, is – the next deadline is – not deadline, it's a target – is December 31st. And that is to get all of the chemical weapons out. But in terms of when the next step would be, I don't have a timeline of that.

Anne.

QUESTION: I realize part of this is kind of DOD-flavored, but you might know the answer.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: So is it proper to call this a warship, or is it a military-owned, but not non-warship ship?

(Laughter.)

MS. PSAKI: That is a very specific ship question. I would hesitate to answer incorrectly. I'd have to check on specifically how we categorize it. I don't believe it is a warship, but let me see if we can get more specification on how we – what we call it exactly.

QUESTION: Okay. And on the policy side, I mean; is there any disappointment here that after casting about to – for a friend here, it ends up being the U.S. having to essentially do this on its own?

MS. PSAKI: I wouldn't categorize it that way. I mean, certainly this is a priority for the U.S., as it is for the international community, to destroy and eliminate the chemical weapons. The OPCW is still talking to countries. There are countries that have made public comments about their willingness to help, so we'll see how that all shakes out. And certainly, we'd welcome the support or contribution of other countries.

QUESTION: Well, I'd imagine from your perspective, it should be a shared priority among many nations who would also share the same goal of the ultimate destruction, right? I mean, everybody was waving a flag when that – when the thing was signed.

MS. PSAKI: Certainly, and there are countries, as you know, throughout that have been open to contributing that couldn't for a variety of reasons, whether it's regulations or capacity or resources. But they're still talking to countries about contributing and being a part of this, and certainly we're hopeful of that as well.

QUESTION: So if the question is: "Are you surprised that you've been left holding the bag on this, once again," --

MS. PSAKI: We're not holding the bag yet, Matt.

QUESTION: -- the answer would be no, you're not surprised. You expected your friends in Europe to wimp out.

MS. PSAKI: Well, we made clear we were open to contributing from the beginning, Matt. There are other countries that have expressed an openness to contributing in some capacity. They're all going to make their decisions about what that will -- what will -- that will entail, and we'll let the OPCW decide how all of it will work together.

QUESTION: What about Russia, who you made this deal with and has been instrumental, as you say, in helping move this towards a resolution? Why can't Russia contribute in a significant way like you can?

MS. PSAKI: I'm not familiar with what they have contributed or what they've committed to contribute or what they have not. Obviously, there are financial ways -- there are a number of ways to contribute. We certainly welcome any country's contribution. There are different ways that each country can do that.

QUESTION: Are you in touch with the Russians specifically about making an -- a contribution?

MS. PSAKI: I'm not sure. I'd have to check on that and see if it's a discussion that's been a part of the regular discussions with Foreign Minister Lavrov.

QUESTION: Jen, still on Syria.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: Yesterday, Mike Rogers, the chair of the Intelligence Committee, warned that there are many jihadis that are Americans and Europeans and Westerners and so on, that they go back and forth and so on. Are you concerned about these jihadis being trained in Syria and now they come back to the United States and perhaps organize terrorist acts?

MS. PSAKI: I haven't seen his comments specifically. I know -- I believe he may have been on a Sunday show yesterday. I haven't read them fully. We've -- we're naturally concerned, as you know, about extremists whether they're going in and certainly and if they're coming out. I talked a little bit, I think it was a week or two ago, about ways that we coordinate with our international partners in the region to kind of track this and efforts we undertake to make sure we're watching, but of course we're concerned. I don't have any other specifics for you.

QUESTION: Are you pressing your partners in this case, like the Saudis and the Gulf Cooperation Council countries, that have been supplying arms and money in the past for these extremist groups -- are you pressing them not to do so?

MS. PSAKI: We have consistently, and all the countries, as you know, have agreed repeatedly to contribute assistance through the SMC.

QUESTION: Finally, yesterday there was a report in the *Telegraph*, *The London Telegraph*, that says basically the Free Syrian Army now is becoming a group of warlords and accumulating money and gangs and so on and

have no interest, really, in reaching a settlement. Is that your assessment, or are you still working very closely with General Idris?

MS. PSAKI: We are still working very closely with General Idris, we're still working towards a Geneva conference in January, and we still believe there's no military solution, as you know.

More on Syria?

QUESTION: Still on Syria.

MS. PSAKI: Or -- go ahead, Roz.

QUESTION: Still on Syria, the Iranian Foreign Minister Zarif did an interview with Al Jazeera this morning. And when it came to Geneva II, he said that while Iran is, quote: not begging to attend the talks in January, it would attend if invited. My first question: Would the U.S. be willing to invite Iran to take part in these talks? And if so, what does the U.S. believe that Iran could bring to this situation to try to end the civil war?

MS. PSAKI: Well, no decisions have been made about participation yet. There's another trilateral meeting on December 20th coming up that we'll be participating in with the UN and the Russians. Our position hasn't changed on Iran's participation or whether we believe they should be invited. They have not endorsed the Geneva communique. That's a condition we feel is necessary, but obviously this will continue to be discussed at the next trilateral meeting.

QUESTION: But given the -- that the UN is now estimating that upwards of 120-25,000 people may have been killed in the civil war to date --

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: -- is there some sort of leverage that Tehran could bring to the table to try to induce the Assad regime to, if nothing else, stop the killing and try to at least put in some sort of ceasefire?

MS. PSAKI: Well, this goes back to the premise that attendees should be endorsing the Geneva communique, because that is what the purpose and the goal of the conference is. So, I don't have any speculation on what leverage they may or may not have, but the conversations we have had with them in recent weeks have been about their nuclear program and moving towards a first-step agreement on that. They've not been focused on Syria. And our position on whether or not they should attend the Geneva conference in January hasn't changed.

QUESTION: But you do feel that if they do endorse Geneva I, there's a great deal of value for Iran's participation --

MS. PSAKI: Well, we'd have to --

QUESTION: -- considering that it is --

MS. PSAKI: We'd have to evaluate it, Said. I don't want to get ahead of --

QUESTION: But it's a very ally of the regime. It supports other elements that help the regime in its fight, like Hezbollah so on.

MS. PSAKI: If that is a step they take, we can have a robust discussion in here about it.

QUESTION: Jen, are there any contacts currently between the United States Government and the Syrian regime? I mean, I know Secretary Kerry spoke months and months ago --

MS. PSAKI: Sure.

QUESTION: -- to Foreign Minister Muallem. Is there anything going on at the moment?

MS. PSAKI: And we have for some time, as you know, have had different channels, but I don't have anything specific for you. I can check if there have been any recent contacts on any level.

QUESTION: So there were reports over the weekend that some European countries are quietly beginning to --

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: -- reopen diplomatic conversations or channels with the Syrian regime because, I think, the fear is that this is just so blocked at the moment that they're --

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: -- it's not going anywhere.

MS. PSAKI: Well, let me see if there have been any contacts at any level of the regime. We've -- they have happened in the past, as you mentioned, so I will see if there's more to report on that.

QUESTION: Can I go back to the Iranians and taking part in Geneva? I mean, I think over the last week or so, when there's been, like, various bouts of violence in Syria, that the Iranian Government has said that there needs to be a political solution to the situation in Syria. So don't you think that Iran is making more positive comments? I mean, I don't think the Russians have gone far beyond saying that there needs to be a political solution. They haven't said anything about President Assad leaving (inaudible).

MS. PSAKI: Well, the whole premise -- I mean the whole goal is to create a transitional governing body. That's the goal of a Geneva conference. So, certainly, they haven't embraced that as the focus of the Geneva communique, and --

QUESTION: Well, even though the Russians have agreed to a political transition, your definition of a transition is far different from the -- than the Russians' definition of a transition. So if the Iranians were to say, like, okay, we accept a political transition, I mean, does that really mean that they --

MS. PSAKI: It's not just about a political transition. It's about embracing the Geneva communique, which they have not done. If they do that, we will evaluate whether or not we'd support their -- an invitation to them to attend the conference.

QUESTION: Zarif also told us that his country is not interested in aggravating any sectarian tensions between Shiite and Sunni, between Alawite and other major Islamic communities; that they're trying to, in their efforts, promote more harmony, more peace. Does that add any -- does that change the complexion at all, particularly in Syria?

MS. PSAKI: I don't want to speak too specifically to an interview I haven't yet seen yet, and neither has anyone on our team. Broadly speaking, obviously we took a significant step forward with the first-step

agreement on their nuclear program, but there are remaining concerns that we have, as you all are familiar with, whether it's their involvement in support of the regime in Syria or humanitarian issues, and so that has not changed that. I can take a closer look once we see the transcript of the interview and see if we have more comments on Foreign Minister Zarif's comments.

QUESTION: You're saying your team does not watch Al Jazeera?

MS. PSAKI: Well, that is not true; we do. However, I believe there's only been a very short clip that has played of this interview that I'm sure will get lots of attention once it all plays.

QUESTION: Beyond the interview, he's freely reaching out. He visited Kuwait. He's reaching out to the other Gulf countries. He wants to visit Saudi Arabia. I mean, there is an effort underway to alleviate their fears and actually encourage them towards participating in Geneva II to make it a success. You must have some sort of a reading of this effort.

MS. PSAKI: I don't have any particular reading of it for you, Said. Our position, I think, has been pretty clear on whether or not they attend the Geneva conference.

QUESTION: I have another really quick logistics thing. On the December 20th meeting, that's Wendy Sherman and that -- it's the same iteration?

MS. PSAKI: It is that level. Exactly, yes. Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: Is that new or was that announced last week or something --

MS. PSAKI: I believe we talked about it last week as being the next meeting.

QUESTION: On China -- (inaudible).

QUESTION: Please, Jen, can we stay on Iran, please?

MS. PSAKI: Sure. Let's stay on Iran and then we can go to China.

QUESTION: On the 6th of February in this room, I had a very brief exchange with your predecessor, Victoria Nuland --

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: -- about Iran. And with your indulgence, I will read it in its entirety for the purpose of the record and so you can respond to it.

"Rosen: There have been reports that intermittently, and outside of the formal P5+1 mechanisms, the Obama Administration, or members of it, have conducted direct secret bilateral talks with Iran. Is that true or false?"

"Nuland: We have made clear, as the Vice President did at Munich, that in the context of the larger P5+1 framework, we would be prepared to talk to Iran bilaterally. But with regard to the kind of thing that you're talking about on a government-to-government level, no."

That's the entirety of the exchange.

As we now know, senior state department officials had, in fact, been conducting direct, secret bilateral talks with senior officials of the Iranian Government in Oman, perhaps dating back to 2011 by that point:

So the question today is a simple one: When the briefer was asked about those talks and flatly denied them from the podium, that was untrue, correct?

MS. PSAKI: I mean, James, I – that – you're talking about a February briefing, so 10 months ago. I don't think we've outlined or confirmed contacts or specifics beyond a March meeting. I'm not going to confirm others beyond that at this point. So I don't know that I have any more for you.

QUESTION: Do you stand by the accuracy of what Ms. Nuland told me, that there had been no government-to-government contacts, no secret direct bilateral talks with Iran as of the date of that briefing, February 6th? Do you stand by the accuracy of that?

MS. PSAKI: James, I have no new information for you today on the timing of when there were any discussions with any Iranian officials.

QUESTION: Let me try it one last way, Jen --

MS. PSAKI: Okay.

QUESTION: -- and I appreciate your indulgence.

MS. PSAKI: Sure.

QUESTION: Is it the policy of the State Department, where the preservation or the secrecy of secret negotiations is concerned, to lie in order to achieve that goal?

MS. PSAKI: James, I think there are times where diplomacy needs privacy in order to progress. This is a good example of that. Obviously, we have made clear and laid out a number of details in recent weeks about discussions and about a bilateral channel that fed into the P5+1 negotiations, and we've answered questions on it, we've confirmed details. We're happy to continue to do that, but clearly, this was an important component leading up to the agreement that was reached a week ago.

QUESTION: Since you, standing at that podium last week, did confirm that there were such talks, at least as far back as March of this year, I don't see what would prohibit you from addressing directly this question: Were there secret direct bilateral talks between the United States and Iranian officials in 2011?

MS. PSAKI: I don't have anything more for you today. We've long had ways to speak with the Iranians through a range of channels, some of which you talked – you mentioned, but I don't have any other specifics for you today.

QUESTION: One more on Iran?

QUESTION: *The Los Angeles Times* and *Politico* have reported that those talks were held as far back as 2011. Were those reports inaccurate?

MS. PSAKI: I'm not sure which reports you're talking about. Are you talking about visits that the Secretary and others made to Oman, or are you talking about other reports?

QUESTION: I'm talking about U.S. officials meeting directly and secretly with Iranian officials in Oman as far back as 2011. *The Los Angeles Times* and *Politico* have reported those meetings. Were those reports inaccurate?

MS. PSAKI: I have nothing more for you on it, James, today.

QUESTION: One more on Iran?

MS. PSAKI: On Iran? Let's just finish Iran and then we can go to China. Go ahead, Roz.

QUESTION: One of -- one more on Iran. Foreign Minister Zarif said, directly contradicting the Obama Administration's contention that sanctions worked, he told our interviewer that when the sanctions were first imposed, Iran had 200 working centrifuges. Today, they have more than 19,000. What is this building's reaction to his comment that sanctions did not work and did not bring Iran to the negotiating table?

MS. PSAKI: Well, again, I would like to look more closely at the context of the comments. But, just as reminder, President Rouhani and others have talked about how the impact -- how growing the economy and putting an end -- doing -- bringing an end to the sanctions is something that was a priority for them in order to help the economy and the Iranian people. There's no question, if you look just at the facts of the impact of oil revenues, the impact on their economic growth was large that there was a huge impact of -- that there -- the sanctions had an enormous impact, and that that was a driving factor in bringing the Iranians back to the negotiating table.

In terms of progress made on their efforts to develop a nuclear weapon, whether through centrifuges or at their various facilities, that to me sounds like a separate question. Obviously, there were concerns about steps they were taking and progress they were making, which was why it was so important to come to an acceptable agreement that would halt and roll back the progress of their program.

QUESTION: Just to follow up on that, though --

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: -- Secretary Kerry, when he did his round robin of interviews after the announcement of the deal in Geneva, more than once stated that when Iran had reached out to the Bush-Cheney Administration in 2003, Iran was only in possession of 164 centrifuges. Now, he would go on to say, they have 19,000, and this therefore represents the best possible deal that could be secured.

Isn't it a fact that since the Obama-Biden Administration took office, 70 percent of Iran's centrifuges have been installed?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I'd have to look at the statistics, James, but we have not questioned the fact that Iran has made progress on enrichment and on developing a nuclear weapon. We have not questioned that. That's one of the reasons why we stepped up sanctions over the past couple of years. The President and Secretary Kerry were big proponents of that. We worked with the international community to do just that to put that necessary pressure in place.

The point I was trying to make to Roz is that -- what she's asking sounds to me like two separate questions, so that was --

QUESTION: Right. I'm pursuing the separate one part that she carved out, and that is to say -- and if this is untrue, I'd be grateful to be disabused of the notion -- but the great bulk of Iran's progress in the development of its enrichment program has taken place under President Obama's watch, correct?

MS. PSAKI: I'd have to check on the specific numbers. The --

QUESTION: You're not prepared to dispute that statement, as --

MS. PSAKI: Well, James, I think what we're focused on at this point is the fact that we're now at a point where we are halting and rolling back the progress of their program and we're working towards a comprehensive agreement to bring an end to it. I can't speculate for you what would happen without -- what would have happened without sanctions. I would venture to guess --

QUESTION: (Inaudible) sanctions.

MS. PSAKI: But they were being paired together, so that's why I'm bringing it into the conversation.

QUESTION: But the context of the question was exactly: "The Obama Administration says we showed up because our economy is falling apart. I'm here to tell you that's not the case. We have our own reasons for coming."

MS. PSAKI: Well, we will take a close look at his comments and we'll have more to say about them once we do.

QUESTION: Can I just go back to the Geneva meeting and --

MS. PSAKI: Sure.

QUESTION: -- December 20th with Wendy Sherman?

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: This is --

MS. PSAKI: It's that level -- in terms of specific attendance, I'll have to just double-check that for you.

QUESTION: Oh, okay.

MS. PSAKI: Yeah.

QUESTION: This is going to be the first of the political meetings towards the next -- the comprehensive agreement --

MS. PSAKI: Well, they also --

QUESTION: -- or this is the technical discussions?

MS. PSAKI: No, no, no.

QUESTION: No, this is Syria.

MS. PSAKI: This is -- sorry, this is Syria.

QUESTION: Oh, I'm sorry.

MS. PSAKI: This is Syria.

QUESTION: Excuse me. I'm sorry.

MS. PSAKI: So this is the pre-Geneva. No, it's okay. It's confusing. Lots of Genevas.

QUESTION: Okay. But I did have an Iran question, actually.

QUESTION: But is there any new -- I mean --

QUESTION: Yeah.

QUESTION: -- when is it that you're going to start to negotiate the comprehensive deal with Iran?

MS. PSAKI: Well, right now, what we're focused on is the technical discussions leading up to the start of the six-month --

QUESTION: Right.

QUESTION: So do you have a date for those?

MS. PSAKI: I don't yet have a date on those.

QUESTION: Or a place?

MS. PSAKI: I don't yet have a place. It's being worked through. Hopefully we'll have an update for you all in the coming days.

QUESTION: And can I ask -- I don't know if you had seen the reports that the new British envoy to Iran is actually going to visit Tehran tomorrow. I wondered what the --

MS. PSAKI: I haven't seen that.

QUESTION: Well, I wanted a U.S. reaction to this following on to the question I asked last week about how far along the line you are prepared to go with your new diplomatic relations or not with Iran.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm. I still don't have any prediction of any step beyond what step we've already taken, which is being a part of the P5+1 agreement on the first step here with Iran. Obviously, different countries are going to make their own decisions, and as with most issues, we certainly support that.

QUESTION: Would it be helpful, though? Do you believe it's helpful that the British envoy could be going to Tehran?

MS. PSAKI: I don't know that I have that level of analysis on it. I don't have all the details on what the purpose of the trip is or what they hope to accomplish. And obviously, every country will make their own decisions about diplomatic relationships.

QUESTION: Jen, one more on the --

QUESTION: East China Sea?

QUESTION: -- secret negotiations with Iran.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: I apologize if you've already addressed this, but there have been reports that the secret negotiations that the U.S. was engaging in with Iran created a feeling of resentment among P5+1 allies such as France, and then that contributed to a rift among the P5+1 and made it difficult to reach consensus within that group. Do you have a reaction to that or a comment on that?

MS. PSAKI: I don't want to speak to anonymous reports about what may or may not be the feelings by other countries, but I will reiterate for you that this was -- these discussions were fed into the P5+1 process. That is the process that we ultimately all worked through to achieve a first-step agreement here. The P5+1 members, as well as our friends in Israel, were briefed early this fall.

As to the discussions, we have always been clear we've been open to bilateral discussions with Iran; that there are a range of channels to do that through; that if anything got serious, that we would certainly be briefing our important partners on that; and that's exactly what we did in this case.

QUESTION: Jen --

QUESTION: And when did the talks begin?

MS. PSAKI: James, you're so tricky over there. (Laughter.)

QUESTION: Can I ask about China?

MS. PSAKI: Let me just say one thing, though, for James. It's important here too -- and then I promise we'll go to China -- it's important here also to note, though, that these really picked up after President Rouhani's election, that in terms of the discussion of specific pieces about how to move forward, what kind of -- what an agreement could look like, that's when it picked up. So I understand that's not answering your question, but I felt it was important to --

QUESTION: But just on the basis of methodology and removing the specifics of Iran and who's president or who's Secretary of State, if you were able to stand there at the podium last week and say, "Yes, I'm confirming a certain set of talks that occurred in March," explain to me what is it that prohibits you from saying, yes or no, that a certain set of talks occurred two years ago?

MS. PSAKI: If I have more details for you, James, I will -- happy to share them.

QUESTION: I didn't ask you -- I'm asking for your thinking about why you're not addressing the question, not the specifics of the meetings. What is it that prohibits you from addressing a question about meetings that are two years old?

MS. PSAKI: I'm not going to do a psychiatrist chair today.

Go ahead. On China?

QUESTION: What about the couch? (Laughter.)

QUESTION: Thank you, Jen. So as we know, the U.S. Government has already told U.S. carriers to comply with China's requirements before any flights pass through the new air defense zone established by the Chinese Government. So does that mean the U.S. Government has recognized this new air defense zone established by the Chinese Government?

MS. PSAKI: So let me be absolutely as clear as I can be here because I know there's been a range of reporting. It has been -- some of it has been inaccurate, to no fault of -- perhaps it's our fault for not explaining it well enough. So we are not -- the State Department is not the point of contact with airlines. The FAA is the point of contact with airlines. There has not been any information that has been put out or confirmed that I am aware of that has conveyed what has or has not been communicated in that capacity to airlines.

There is -- for safety and security of passengers, U.S. carriers operate internationally -- operate consistently as a process with the notices to airmen issued by foreign countries, as is the case in this case. Their concerns are about the safety and security of passengers. That is different from what the U.S. Government policy is. It is not -- this in no way indicates U.S. Government acceptance of China's requirements in the newly declared ADIZ and has absolutely no bearing on the firm and consistent U.S. Government position that we do not accept the legitimacy of China's requirements.

This is a case where China announced this in an uncoordinated fashion. It's inconsistent with standard practice. And their requirements for operating exceed internationally accepted practice in this capacity. So I don't know how much more clear that it is, but it does contradict a bit your question, so I wanted --

QUESTION: It looks like we received the statement or the Q&A from the State Department, so it looks like it's from the U.S. Government. And also, you are saying --

MS. PSAKI: Well, in that statement, which I certainly was well aware of, what was conveyed in there is that for safety and -- for the safety and security of passengers, U.S. carriers operate consistently internationally with the notices to airmen issued by foreign governments. It did not convey that -- anything specific about what had been communicated to airlines. It did not convey that the U.S. Government supported this effort. So I'm very familiar with the statement you're referring to, and there were a lot of -- there were some assumptions made.

QUESTION: So (inaudible) --

QUESTION: Okay. It looks like --

QUESTION: -- that the FAA did not instruct airlines to comply with the Chinese regulations?

MS. PSAKI: I would point you to the FAA for what they did or did not communicate to commercial airlines.

QUESTION: Okay. Well, the FAA is part of the U.S. Government, is it not?

MS. PSAKI: They are. They --

QUESTION: Yes.

MS. PSAKI: Certainly, they are not housed in the State Department, however. (Laughter.)

QUESTION: So -- I understand that, but the State Department does have a representative -- you're familiar with the ICAO?

MS. PSAKI: I am not.

QUESTION: Okay. It's in Montreal.

MS. PSAKI: Okay.

QUESTION: It's a good excuse to get to Montreal --

MS. PSAKI: Good.

QUESTION: -- if you ever want to go up there.

MS. PSAKI: I will take that advice.

QUESTION: It's the International Civilian -- it's the civilian airline -- the UN agency for airlines. Do you know if the United States is going to use its membership in the ICAO to oppose this Chinese decision?

MS. PSAKI: I don't.

QUESTION: And if you don't know, could you ask?

MS. PSAKI: Yeah, I'm happy to check on that for you, Matt. Absolutely.

QUESTION: And when you say that the U.S. Government does not accept the legitimacy of the Chinese requirements --

MS. PSAKI: Well, it doesn't accept -- yeah, the Chinese requirements, right.

QUESTION: Right. That's what you said.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: Doesn't that -- if the FAA has been telling airlines that they have to comply with this, or that they should comply with it, how is that not accepting -- the government accepting the legitimacy?

MS. PSAKI: Well, there's a whole field of regulations and regulatory policy that I am certainly far from an aviation expert, as it evidenced by your Montreal question. So I would point you to them on that.

Evidence of the fact that the U.S. Government does not accept China's requirement is by the fact that the announcement will not change how the United States conducts military operations in the region, which is something DOD announced last week. And that is certainly a U.S. Government decision to make.

QUESTION: So does that mean that U.S. Government planes will not obey the -- or will not follow the Chinese requirements if they're flying through this airspace?

MS. PSAKI: Military planes?

QUESTION: Say the Secretary of State flying on an Air Force plane to Seoul or to Tokyo will not notify the --

MS. PSAKI: I am not aware of any upcoming Seoul trip coming up.

QUESTION: Well, the Vice President is there right now, or in Tokyo, at least. Are you saying that his plane, an Air Force plane, will not follow the requirements of the Chinese?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I am saying military planes would not, and that level of specificity I'd certainly have to check and see where that falls in.

QUESTION: What is this episode – what impact is this episode having on U.S.-Sino relations?

MS. PSAKI: There are times when we agree and there are times when we disagree, as you know. We've made clear our concerns about not only what was announced but how this was announced, the fact that there was no prior notice. As you also know, Vice President Biden is in the region now on a prior planned trip. He will, of course, be meeting with key leaders to discuss a range of issues. Certainly, this could be a topic of discussion, but there are a number of other issues that we discuss both with China and other partners in the region.

QUESTION: And has the pivot to Asia worked? Is this evidence of the pivot working?

MS. PSAKI: I wouldn't categorize this into – I wouldn't put this in the evaluation category of whether or not it worked. Our pivot to Asia, or rebalance to Asia, means focusing on Asia and the important partnership we have with Asia, with countries in the region, the economic and strategic partners. And nothing is further evidence of that than the Vice President's trip there, the fact that, as you know, the Secretary will be going back to Asia soon, that he was just there a couple of months ago with Secretary Hagel. So that is evidence of our commitment to the region. And we work with them on a – countries in the region on a broad range of issues.

QUESTION: But as we survey the last five years of this Administration, would you say that China is less aggressive in its serial commission of human rights abuses, currency manipulation, cyber warfare against U.S. businesses and government, territorial aggression, or is it better than it used to be?

MS. PSAKI: I'm not going to do an evaluation of that. Obviously, we work with them on economic issues, we work with them on strategic issues. There are still issues, including human rights, including this issue we're talking about now, that we express concerns about when warranted, and we'll continue to do that. But we know that the relationship is a vital one and one that we need to keep plugging away at even when we disagree.

QUESTION: Jen, could I (inaudible) for a second?

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: Is it fair to characterize the U.S. position as being that aside from the official policy, for the purposes of safety and avoiding some kind of unfortunate incident, that commercial carriers should abide by the Chinese ADIZ requirements?

MS. PSAKI: I don't have – I'd point you again to the FAA on more specifics than what I just conveyed. There are a range of regulations and policies that, of course, they oversee or are in place, but our general position as a U.S. Government is that we don't accept China's requirements. And obviously, the military – actions of military exercises is evidence of that.

QUESTION: Jen, this comes from --

QUESTION: Sorry, sorry. Just a quick follow-up on that.

MS. PSAKI: Go ahead.

QUESTION: It looks like the two main U.S. airlines are complying with -- are taking steps to comply. Delta and United are the two that have flight routes through the area, which seems to have kind of created a little bit of confusion/consternation in Japan over a perceived rift with Japanese policy, which is to not allow U.S. commercial airliners to file their flight plans with China. Do you have a -- do you have any kind of reassurance or any kind of response to that?

MS. PSAKI: We coordinate closely with Japan and with South Korea and all of the countries in the region about a range of issues. And certainly on this issue, we have been in touch with Japan and will continue to be. This is -- for specific actions of individual commercial airliners, I would point you to them or the FAA on any regulations.

QUESTION: But -- so you're not -- but you're not afraid for the safety or concerned about the safety of U.S. citizens on flights that are flying through the area?

MS. PSAKI: Well, certainly safety and security of citizens should be of concern to everyone. Obviously, there are policies in place and regulations in place because of that. But we don't oversee airline regulations. The FAA does, so I would point you to them.

QUESTION: (Inaudible.) Did the United States Government -- the position has changed toward this ADIZ, or not changed? What is the position to ADIZ now?

MS. PSAKI: It has not changed. We -- China announced the ADIZ without prior consultations even though the newly-announced ADIZ overlaps with parts of longstanding ADIZs of Japan, the Republic of Korea, and Taiwan, and includes territory administered by Japan. As I mentioned, we -- the fact that China's announcement has caused confusion and increased the risk of accidents only further underscores the validity of concerns and the need for China to rescind the procedures. It's consistently been our position and one we have communicated both publicly and privately. I know there was some confusion over the weekend about airlines and specifically.

QUESTION: Jen, you said that you are not still -- not accepting China's new air defense zone. But I wonder, like, Japan has its own air defense zone, and also part of it covers Taiwan. But it looks like the U.S. doesn't say anything about it. So do you think there is sort of a double standard? Why do you react so strongly to China's air defense zone?

MS. PSAKI: Well, one of the reasons is that they announced this without prior consultations. It was inconsistent with longstanding procedure and process. And obviously, it overlaps with a number of other longstanding air defense zones of some other neighboring countries.

QUESTION: Jen --

QUESTION: Jen, you do not contest the ability of China to declare such a identification zone; it's just the manner in which they did it, or the extent?

MS. PSAKI: No. I think I have -- I've just consistently said that we believe they should rescind the procedures. I've just -- I've also stated a couple of times that we don't accept China's requirements. So I think I've made that pretty clear.

QUESTION: (Inaudible.)

QUESTION: Is the first --

QUESTION: In response to the -- China's declaration of its own ADIZ, the South Korean Government is poised to expand its own ADIZ, so-called KADIZ, to the South China Sea. What is the position of the United States? Would you encourage it or discourage it?

MS. PSAKI: I haven't seen those reports, or I don't even know if they're reports or if there's been an announcement. I haven't seen any announcement, I guess I should say. So let me check into that, and --

QUESTION: They say they have already started consultations with the United States.

MS. PSAKI: I'd have to check into it and see if we have more to say on that.

QUESTION: Is this the first time the U.S. has called --

QUESTION: Jennifer, you talk about safety --

QUESTION: -- for the zone to be rescinded?

MS. PSAKI: I'd have to check on that for you, Roz.

QUESTION: Can we change topic?

QUESTION: No.

QUESTION: You talk about safety. Are you really concerned that the Chinese may down an airliner or something?

MS. PSAKI: I'm not predicting that, but certainly there is -- they created these Air Defense Identification Zones, they've asked for prior flight plans. So of course, the security and safety is part of the regulatory process, and -- but I don't have any predictions. It's just the question of abiding by it.

QUESTION: Is it a real concern, downing an airliner?

MS. PSAKI: I don't think I have any more for you on that question.

QUESTION: Jen, when you're taking that question that Roz had --

MS. PSAKI: Sure.

QUESTION: -- could you also check whether the United States actually is directly asking the Chinese to rescind it?

MS. PSAKI: Happy to. Sure.

QUESTION: Thank you.

QUESTION: Well, at least --

QUESTION: Apart from the specific concerns about how this was announced without any prior notice, its excessiveness, at least in terms of other regulations, and the safety risks that you say it cause, do you have any --

are there broader concerns about this area being identified as essentially the entire East China Sea? Is the U.S. concerned that the Chinese are looking at anything on a map that has the word "China" in it as all their own?

MS. PSAKI: Well, part of the concern is certainly that it overlaps with parts of other --

QUESTION: Right. But in terms of territorial claims --

MS. PSAKI: As well as territory administered by Japan, sure.

QUESTION: Right, right. But in terms of China's territorial claims, are you concerned that this is the first step or could be a first step towards actually moving in some kind of forceful way to take control of areas of territory and ocean maritime space that it says that it owns?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I don't want to make a prediction of that.

QUESTION: No, but I'm asking if you were concerned --

MS. PSAKI: But --

QUESTION: -- that this is a step in that direction, apart from the specific problems with the no prior notice and all that other -- the safety concerns.

MS. PSAKI: But one of the specific problems is also that this includes area -- territory administered by Japan, it includes overlapping area with other countries in the region. So certainly, that does touch on what your question is here. In terms of a prediction of what it will mean in the future, I certainly wouldn't venture to make that at this point.

QUESTION: Right. Well, the Chinese say that they would be well within their rights also to declare one of these zones over the entire -- over the South China Sea. Are you concerned about the possibility of that?

MS. PSAKI: Well, you're familiar with what our position is on that, and we've long --

QUESTION: Well, that's over the territorial disputes over the -- it's a question of sovereignty for these little atolls and bits of rock.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: Would you be as opposed as you are to this if the Chinese did it for the South China Sea, or is that a hypothetical question that you will wait to bash the Chinese over the head for once they -- if and when they do it?

MS. PSAKI: It is a hypothetical question at this stage in time.

QUESTION: All right.

QUESTION: One more thing. Just one more thing on that. China at the same time has announced they sent a fighter jet against United States and Japanese aircraft last week. Did you comment on that?

MS. PSAKI: I am not familiar with that specific report. In -- where, exactly?

QUESTION: If it's true, are you concerned about these Chinese announcement?

MS. PSAKI: I'd have to look at the specific report, and that may be a DOD question.

James.

QUESTION: Given that China makes this declaration --

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: -- and we regard it as thoroughly problematic, if not illegal, and therefore we have on our hands a dispute with the Chinese --

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: -- which is to be adjudicated somehow in a nonviolent way, wasn't it a kind of a provocative act for the United States to fly B-52s through that very zone in a short time thereafter?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I would point you to DOD on that, but I would reiterate the fact that we have made clear that this action, this announcement, is not going to change our military exercises. And that is an example of that.

QUESTION: So other than taking -- other than the Vice President, are you aware -- or has there been at this point any conversations that you're aware of in this -- from this building with the Chinese directly? It's kind of on Jill's question. And if not, do you expect them or is this going to be left up to the Vice President when he goes to --

MS. PSAKI: Let me check. I know we have expressed concerns. I mentioned this last week, Matt, so let me just make sure you have it.

QUESTION: Jen, the -- Secretary Kerry did meet on Wednesday with a senior Chinese official?

MS. PSAKI: I'd have to --

QUESTION: On Wednesday, the vice premier.

QUESTION: Lu.

QUESTION: Yeah.

MS. PSAKI: I'd have to look back at that. It seems like a long time ago.

QUESTION: I know it does. And it was happening on Wednesday.

MS. PSAKI: Deputy Secretary Burns met last week with a Chinese official where this was a topic of discussion. Also, Assistant Secretary Russel spoke with the ambassador about a week ago, and Ambassador Locke has also been in touch, of course, on the ground. In terms of specific contacts over the last couple of days, I'm happy to check and see what else we can read out for all of you.

QUESTION: Are you taking this to the UN in any forum there?

MS. PSAKI: I don't have any prediction of that, James, at this point in time.

QUESTION: New topic?

QUESTION: So it's strictly a bilateral or a multilateral thing, but outside the auspices of the UN is how you're going to seek to resolve it?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I don't have anything for you on it at this point. We're taking this day by day. I conveyed for you what we've done and what we've communicated. But obviously, we're taking steps day by day.

QUESTION: But is that a kind of – is that a consideration?

MS. PSAKI: Not that I'm aware of, Elise. But obviously, we're taking this day by day.

QUESTION: Can we change --

QUESTION: New subject?

MS. PSAKI: Sure, Jill. Go ahead.

QUESTION: I'm still on China. Can you actually clarify this? China's argument is that we institute the ADIZ that other countries have already instituted. If you're saying that China does not have a right to do that, they can say, well, what's good for the goose is good for the gander. And it doesn't seem like you have a legal foot to stand on. If you're opposed to the way in which they did it or the extent of it, these can be a subject of debate. And China has said we can get rid of our ADIZ if the Japanese get rid of theirs. I mean, something like that could happen. But somehow – are you really saying that you do not accept – you do not give China the right to declare a defense identification zone?

MS. PSAKI: I think I've thoroughly outlined what our concerns are, so I'm not sure I have much more to add to your question.

QUESTION: Just on another topic, Jen – sorry.

MS. PSAKI: Well, we were going to go to Jill next, and then I'm happy to go to you.

QUESTION: North Korea?

MS. PSAKI: Sure.

QUESTION: Merrill Newman.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: You've seen probably, or read at least, his so-called confession. Do you have any comments about that, any reaction? And what is the latest on his status?

MS. PSAKI: Well, the latest is – and let me do this first and then I'll do the second part. On November 30th, North Korea permitted the Embassy of Sweden, our protecting power, to consular access to Merrill Newman. It – and given his advanced age and health conditions, we continue to urge North Korea to release him so he may return home and reunite with his family.

We, of course, have seen the Korean Central News Agency report regarding Mr. Newman's detention. According to the report, he apologized for the misunderstanding that led him -- led to his detention. We don't have any other further information regarding the reason for his detention. But again, given his age and health, we continue to call for North Korea to release him as quickly as possible.

QUESTION: Do you believe that the North Korean -- that that apology was -- that he wrote and that was released by the North Koreans -- do you believe that he wrote that of his own volition and that he -- and do you have reason to believe that all of those things in that apology are true?

MS. PSAKI: We just don't have any other further analysis. We've seen the same reports all of you have seen, of course, about his interview and the publication of that, but I don't have any other further analysis on it.

QUESTION: Are you aware if that -- the subject of his quote, unquote "confession" came up in the meeting with the Swedes?

MS. PSAKI: I don't have anything more on it, but I'm happy to check and see if there's more detail we can outline for all of you.

QUESTION: Did the Swedes as for and did Mr. Newman sign a PAW?

MS. PSAKI: A Privacy Act waiver?

QUESTION: Correct.

MS. PSAKI: Yes, he did. That is why I am able to talk about him now.

QUESTION: Okay. So then if -- since he has signed the waiver, would you take it back to your -- whoever it is that liaises with the Swedes on this --

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: I assume it's EAP, but I guess it could also be EUR -- and find out if Mr. Newman, in his discussions with the Swedes, talked at all about or said that he had freely made this alleged confession and when it was that he recorded this or when it --

MS. PSAKI: I am happy to take that and see if there's more we can share.

Go ahead, Lesley.

QUESTION: Also, did the Swedes report back in what condition he is in? Has he been tortured? Anything today? And how long did they meet with him, and was it in a jail? Was it in a --

QUESTION: Guest house.

QUESTION: -- government -- a guest house?

QUESTION: A jailhouse guest house.

MS. PSAKI: A guest house. I don't have many specifics on that. I'm happy to also check with Matt's questions and to see if there's more we can share on that as well.

QUESTION: But didn't it include a --

QUESTION: But they did say -- the Swedes did say that he --

QUESTION: -- physical examination of him?

QUESTION: The Swedes did, I think, say that he was --

MS. PSAKI: I believe they've spoken publicly about it.

QUESTION: -- that he was treated -- that's he's being treated (inaudible), right?

MS. PSAKI: Right. I've seen those comments as well. So I don't have any other specifics on it, but if there's more we share beyond what they've said publicly, I'm happy --

QUESTION: Including whether or not there was a physical examination of him during this consular access?

QUESTION: I just want to get back to his confession. I mean, it is kind of written in language that kind of fits the narrative that North Korea has been saying, and I'm just wondering if you think that he wrote this. Are you -- I mean, there's often times that you would say, like, oh this person seemed under duress --

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: -- or something like that. So I mean, I'm just -- about this particular confession, do you have any reason to believe that he did not confess to all of those things?

MS. PSAKI: I don't -- I certainly understand why you're asking. I don't have any particular analysis on it at this stage. I will see if this is something that our team is looking into, and if there's more we can say about it specifically.

QUESTION: And what is this building doing to secure his release beyond calling for his release from imprisonment? I mean, Ambassador King had tried months ago to go --

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: -- for the other American under detention, Kenneth Bae. What's actually being done to get them out?

MS. PSAKI: Well, our Swedish protecting power just visited with him two days ago, and obviously that's an important component of reaching out to citizens who are detained in North Korea. We certainly do continue to call for his release. I don't have any other predictions or announcements on travel or visits of other officials at this point to tell you about.

QUESTION: But beyond those consular visits, I mean, is there any outreach to the Chinese specially on behalf of Mr. Newman?

MS. PSAKI: I don't have more I can outline for all of you, but I can check and see if there is any more to tell.

QUESTION: Have they been helpful the past with Kenneth Bae or with others? The Chinese (inaudible)?

MS. PSAKI: They have been helpful, but there's not more specifics I can outline.

QUESTION: Through the Swedes are elsewhere, has North Korea communicated any demands or requests of the United States that have to do with Newman or – as a prelude to his possible release?

MS. PSAKI: I don't have any more specifics on the contact with the Swedes and kind of what the discussion entailed beyond confirming --

QUESTION: Well, any – in any forum, have they asked for anything from the United States?

MS. PSAKI: I don't have any details on it. I am happy to check if there's any more to share with all of you.

QUESTION: But you guys are in touch with the North Koreans directly, just to confirm?

MS. PSAKI: Well, we – as you know, we've long had a channel, but we've been working in this case through our Swedish protective – protecting power.

QUESTION: But you have been in touch with the North Koreans specifically on his matter?

MS. PSAKI: On this specific case, not that I'm aware of, but I'm happy to check if there's anything more on that.

QUESTION: Are you in touch with Mr. Newman's family?

MS. PSAKI: We are. We have been. Let me see if I have the detail of when we last spoke with him – with his family. I don't have that detail for you. I'm happy to put that in the pocket of things I'm going to check on.

QUESTION: And have they asked for you to help facilitate any kind of visit by them to North Korea, given that this gentleman's actually – I mean, he's quite elderly --

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: -- so you would imagine that if – there would be concern enough to try and travel to visit him.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm. I'm not aware of a request that they've made about that specifically, but we can see.

QUESTION: So all the attention, really, is on this Mr. Newman. But as we've said, Kenneth Bae has been held for quite a long time.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm. You're right.

QUESTION: So in your efforts working with the Swedes or working to try and get the release, I mean, are you emphasizing because of Mr. Newman's age and health that you need to get him out right away, or are they part of a package that you think that they --

MS. PSAKI: I mean, we'd certainly like to see them both released as quickly as possible. In terms of that level of detail, I just don't have that.

QUESTION: These American citizens being held against their will in a rogue state, they're hostages, right?

MS. PSAKI: I mean, they're being held by the governments. The governments have confirmed that, so I don't know that I need to categorize it further, James.

QUESTION: You don't regard them as hostages?

MS. PSAKI: Do we have another topic?

QUESTION: Yes. Could I move onto the --

QUESTION: (Off-mike.) (Laughter.)

QUESTION: -- the Secretary's trip.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: Okay. The portion to the West Bank and to Israel.

MS. PSAKI: Yeah.

QUESTION: Yes. If you have more to share with us -- today or yesterday, President Abbas, the president of the Palestinian Authority, was so impressed with the Geneva success, now he's suggesting a format, perhaps another Geneva, where the Palestinian-Israeli issue could be resolved. Would you look kindly at this suggestion?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I haven't seen those comments from him specifically. I know this has been an idea floated out there. Our focus remains on the direct negotiations between the Israelis and the Palestinians. We're a facilitator in that effort. There are certainly a number of countries who have a great investment and great interest in the success -- in a successful outcome here, including the Arab League, including many other countries that want to contribute to growing the Palestinian economy. But that's our focus, not on planning yet another conference.

QUESTION: And a Palestinian member of the Israeli Knesset, Mr. Ahmed Tibi, claims that the 20,000 housing that the Israelis announced and they put on hold were actually not put on hold, that there is -- construction is ongoing. Do you have any information on that?

MS. PSAKI: I don't have anything new on that. I'd have to look into that for you.

Scott?

QUESTION: (Inaudible.)

MS. PSAKI: Oh.

QUESTION: Can we stay on stay on that?

MS. PSAKI: Yeah.

QUESTION: Just on this idea of not necessarily a Geneva-type conference for the peace process, but just the idea of internationalizing the process, would the United States -- would the Administration object to an internationalization of the peace process?

MS. PSAKI: Well, it's hard to know exactly what that means. Obviously, as you all are well aware, there's direct negotiations between the Israelis and the Palestinians now. That's what our focus is on, so certainly that's not a path we're pursuing.

QUESTION: Well, I think that the point that -- right, it's not a path that you're pursuing --

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: -- but the point that people who are suggesting that this might be a way to go, the point that they make is that the United States has been the sole and unique arbiter, mediator, facilitator, whatever you want to call it, of Israeli-Palestinian peace talks going back decades.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: And you haven't gotten anything out of it. There's been no success. It's been one failure after another. Is it perhaps not time to try something new, is the argument that these people would make.

MS. PSAKI: Well, Matt, obviously, many people are going to make different arguments about how it should proceed. We're less than halfway through the nine-month timeline here. There are a number of countries that are engaged and invested, including, of course, the Arab League, who, as you know, are in very close contact with the Palestinians and engaged in this effort. There are many who are engaged with the Israelis in this effort. So our focus remains on the direct negotiations, and I don't think we're at this point speculating on a different alternative forum.

QUESTION: Well, let me -- okay. Well, let me put it this way: Is it still the position of the Administration that the United States has unique leverage and influence with both sides that makes it the only logical or capable, competent, credible mediator for peace between Israel and the Palestinians?

MS. PSAKI: I don't know that we've ever stated it exactly like that. We're playing a facilitator role which both sides are comfortable with. There are other countries engaged with this effort and certainly in touch with the Israelis and the Palestinians. I expect that will continue. But in the meantime, we'll continue to play the facilitator role as long as it's productive.

QUESTION: Do you believe, does the Administration believe that the United States still has leverage and influence with Israel or the Palestinians? I mean, you say, in reference to other questions about, say, Mr. Newman or Mr. Bae in North Korea --

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: -- that the Chinese have influence with the North Koreans and you would like to go through them, maybe after you're done yelling at them about their air defense zone. But do you still think that the United States -- does the Administration believe that it has influence and leverage with either Israel or the Palestinians?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I think we have a close relationship with both. And obviously, we're at this point because both sides decided to come to the table. I don't think it's about leverage. There's -- it's in the interest of both sides to come to an agreement on the final status issues, and that's what they're working to do at this point.

QUESTION: Jen, could I just ask -- there was an agreement --

MS. PSAKI: Sure.

QUESTION: -- reached last week between the EU and Israel which will allow Israel to actually touch some funding for scientific research. There have been some problems because the EU wanted to bar all research in areas of -- in the West Bank --

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: -- settlement areas in the West Bank. Is there an -- I mean, does the American -- do America -- does America believe that this is a good agreement for the EU and Israel, given that Secretary Kerry has always mentioned that he fears an increasing isolation of Israel on the international stage?

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm. I haven't talked to our team about it, so I'd have to talk to them and see if we have any particular view on the agreement last week.

QUESTION: And is -- what is the message that Secretary Kerry's going to be bringing with him when he visits Israel later on this week?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I think he'll be talking to both sides about the importance of staying firm with the timeline and working through the tough and difficult issues that they're doing at the negotiating table, and reiterating the importance of coming to a peaceful end to the final negotiations. And of course, when he's meeting with Prime Minister Netanyahu, they'll certainly be discussing the recent P5+1 agreement with Iran and having an ongoing dialogue about that as well.

QUESTION: And have there been any meetings, direct talks between the Israelis and Palestinians, since the resignation of the Palestinian team?

MS. PSAKI: I don't have any updates on meetings at this point. I'll see if there's any more we want to provide to all of you in terms of specific meetings and timing of that.

QUESTION: But I mean, since the last time the Secretary's been there, there's been another announcement of new settlement construction.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: There's been the resignation of the Palestinian -- it just seems that without him actually physically there holding their hand for hours at a time, that they're not able to sustain it on their own.

MS. PSAKI: Well, they've had many meetings when he has not been there. So obviously, we didn't expect this to be easy. We certainly are aware of some bumps in the road of late, but both sides have also reaffirmed their commitment to seeing this through.

QUESTION: Would you really call those bumps in the road, though? I mean, particularly on the -- actually, on either side, whether it's the Israelis continuing to announce settlement construction or the Palestinians' full negotiating team just giving up, it just doesn't seem as if --

MS. PSAKI: Well, when the negotiating -- and that's a good example. The negotiating team -- President Abbas reaffirmed his own commitment to seeing this through --

QUESTION: But it just --

MS. PSAKI: -- whether it was them or whether it was other officials in their place. So they're continuing to move forward.

QUESTION: It just doesn't seem like they have the -- while they may have the desire and the dream that there'll be a peace deal. The motivation to actually do the hard work day in and day out doesn't seem to be there. And so it does seem as if Secretary Kerry is the one holding this together personally, and isn't there, like, a limit to how much he can do?

MS. PSAKI: Sure. That's why he has a team to help work through it every day.

QUESTION: Well, I meant more the parties themselves.

MS. PSAKI: You're right, but there also is a long timeframe we still have left. One of the reasons committing to the nine-month timeframe was so important is because we knew there would be challenging periods throughout the process. But both sides remain committed to that, and so we'll continue to work through it.

QUESTION: But it doesn't sound like -- unless you could disabuse us of the notion, it doesn't sound like since Secretary Kerry's last trip in early November that there have actually been any direct talks.

MS. PSAKI: I wouldn't jump to that conclusion. We just have always said we wouldn't confirm every meeting.

QUESTION: Sure.

MS. PSAKI: So let me see if I can confirm any meetings since that point for all of you.

QUESTION: Jen, could you tell us if Ambassador Indyk is there now? Is he there? Is he in the region? Is he -- Ambassador Indyk, where --

MS. PSAKI: He's here. I saw him this morning.

QUESTION: He's here. Okay.

MS. PSAKI: Okay. Let's just do one or two more here.

Scott.

QUESTION: What is the U.S. view of what's going on in Thailand right now?

MS. PSAKI: Well, we certainly deeply regret the loss of life in Bangkok due to politically motivated violence. We condemn violence as a means to achieve political objectives and urge all sides to exercise restraint and respect the rule of law. We are concerned about the continuing political tension in Thailand, and we are following the situation closely.

Peaceful protest and freedom of expression are important aspects of democracy, of course. Violence and seizure of public or private property, however, are not acceptable means of resolving political differences. We firmly believe all parties should work together to resolve differences through peaceful dialogue in ways that strengthen democracy and rule of law.

Ambassador Kenney spoke with the prime minister and -- has spoken with the prime minister and opposition leaders to also encourage restraint and peaceful dialogue. You may have also seen that the U.S. Embassy in

Bangkok issued a security message for U.S. citizens in Thailand explaining that large political demonstrations may continue in coming day – in the coming days, including at government facilities, in and outside of central Bangkok, and is advising them to avoid areas of demonstration and to exercise caution.

QUESTION: Following his talk with the prime minister, one of the main opposition leaders said that he would accept nothing short of her resignation. Is that a responsible position in the eyes of the United States?

MS. PSAKI: We just continue to encourage all parties to work together to resolve their differences. We, of course, have seen his comments, but I don't think we're going to weigh in further at this point, aside from encouraging restraint on the ground.

QUESTION: Would you weigh in on the general amnesty bill that the ruling party failed to get through parliament, which was one of the instigations for this?

MS. PSAKI: I know – I don't know if I've spoken to that in the past, Scott. I'd have to – I don't have anything for you on it at this particular moment, but I'm happy to follow up post-briefing.

Okay, let's do two more here: In the back, you've been very patient.

QUESTION: Thank you. Michael Vincent from the Australian Broadcasting Corporation. What's the U.S. response to the Australian Government's rejection of the U.S. company Archer Daniels Midland's bid for GrainCorp?

MS. PSAKI: Well, we are disappointed by the Government of Australia's decision to reject Archer Daniels Midland's proposed acquisition of GrainCorp. We do not – we do note that the Australian Treasurer Joe Hockey has expressed openness to approving an increase in ADM's current share in GrainCorp. The United States is the largest foreign investor – foreign direct investor in Australia, with 132 billion in investment projects to date, and we look forward to working closely with Australia's government to build stronger ties and investment – stronger trade and investment ties.

QUESTION: Just a quick follow-up.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: Did – unrelated matter, but has the U.S. Government accepted private medical, legal, or religious information on Australian citizens as offered by Australian intelligence agencies?

MS. PSAKI: I don't have anything further or anything for you on a range of reports. I'm certainly not going to comment on any of them. As you know, we're undergoing our own review of these processes, which we expect to conclude by the end of the year.

QUESTION: Jen, back to ADM for a second.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: Did – was this issue, this proposed sale, bid by ADM raised at the AUSMIN ministerial meetings?

MS. PSAKI: It's a good question, Matt. I'd have to check. It wasn't one raised while I was there, but let me check and see if it was.

QUESTION: And if it was, did – was – were you given any indication that this is the way your closest antipodal ally was going to go?

MS. PSAKI: I will check and see if it was even raised.

Okay, let's do one more. Go ahead, Samir.

QUESTION: Do you have a reaction to the draft constitution in Egypt today?

MS. PSAKI: Sure.

QUESTION: Can I throw a Bahrain question at the end of that?

MS. PSAKI: Sure. Why not?

Well, we continue to track the constitutional process with interest, and we'll examine the document carefully once it is finalized and sent to President Mansour, which we understand will occur tomorrow. The Egyptian people, of course, will decide the fate of the draft constitution in a referendum. We will continue to support a transition process that leads to an inclusive civilian government selected through free, fair, and transparent elections, and civilian government based on the rule of law, fundamental freedoms, accountability, and an open and competitive economy. So we will see when it is transferred, and we will take a close look at it.

Bahrain.

QUESTION: Yeah. Do you have any view on the government --

QUESTION: A quick one on Egypt. Hold on. I'm sorry, Matt. You don't have any comment on the prohibition of religious parties in Egypt?

MS. PSAKI: Again, we'll wait to comment on it until it's been officially transferred. Obviously, there are steps in there we may be complimentary of and others we may not be.

QUESTION: Yes, please.

QUESTION: Does the decision of the – not to release this human rights campaigner when he was eligible to be released? It was yesterday or today.

MS. PSAKI: Let me see. I think I have something on this. One moment, Matt.

QUESTION: Mm-hmm. You can get it – if you just want to make it a TQ, that's fine.

MS. PSAKI: Yeah, that's fine. I believe I have something on it for you. Let's see. We continue to encourage Bahrain to take the necessary steps to promote reconciliation among Bahrainis, including permitting all sectors of society to voice their political views in a peaceful manner. We have seen reports that the head of the Bahrain Center for Human Rights Nabeel Rajab – is that who you're talking about – okay --

QUESTION: (Inaudible.)

MS. PSAKI: -- was denied early release today in Bahrain. We understand that he has served 18 months of his two-year prison sentence and is scheduled to be released in May of next year. We remain deeply concerned about the three-year prison sentence for leading illegal gatherings. We urge the Government of Bahrain to

protect the universal rights of freedom of expression and assembly, just as we urge all elements of Bahraini society to engage in peaceful expressions of political opinion.

QUESTION: Do you think that he should've been released as was – as he could've been today?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I believe we are concerned about his – we were concerned about his three-year prison sentence, I believe. Let me check and see, but I believe that's what we're implying here.

QUESTION: I mean, this is not the first. I mean, there have been several other opposition activists and so forth that have been detained. I mean, does this cast doubt on your encouraging words earlier in the year about Bahrain's commitment to political reforms?

MS. PSAKI: Well, we certainly are encouraging them to take some step – to take necessary steps to promote reconciliation. And obviously, each time that there is a case like this, we have expressed concern. So I don't have any analysis as to what that will mean longer-term or about the overall relationship, but each time there has been an incident, we have certainly expressed our concern.

QUESTION: Well, but each time – you say each time that there's been an incident. I mean, there's a pattern of incidents. I mean, does that say something about their actual commitment to reforms?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I don't have any more analysis on it for you.

Thanks, everyone.

QUESTION: Thank you.

(The briefing was concluded at 3:18 p.m.)

###

Forgerson, Luke A

From: Curran, Andrea M (PACE)
Sent: Monday, December 02, 2013 7:10 PM
To: Thaivalappil, Maureen E (PACE)
Cc: PA DCC Notify
Subject: RE: VideoDogg - DOS Daily Press Briefing - December 2, 2013

RELEASE IN FULL

Hi Maureen,

Correct, Brightcove is still processing additional renditions of that video asset at multiple bitrates.

Refresh your browser and when you preview the player has a pull-down menu to select one of a few bitrates that have now completed.

Hope that helps,

Andrea

From: Thaivalappil, Maureen E (PACE)
Sent: Monday, December 02, 2013 6:57 PM
To: Curran, Andrea M (PACE); Curran, Andrea M (PACE)
Cc: PA DCC Notify
Subject: RE: VideoDogg - DOS Daily Press Briefing - December 2, 2013

Hi Andrea,

When I preview the video in Brightcove, I can hear the audio but I see a blank screen. Is it possibly still processing?

Best,
Maureen

From: Curran, Andrea (<mailto:CurranAM@state.gov>)
Sent: Monday, December 02, 2013 6:26 PM
To: Curran, Andrea M (PACE)
Cc: PA DCC Notify
Subject: VideoDogg - DOS Daily Press Briefing - December 2, 2013



The following video has been added to the Bureau's EI/WM Notification Queue:

Action Step : Step 4 - Ready for Publication: State.gov
Event Date : 12/02/13
Event Time :

Video Title : DOS Daily Press Briefing - December 2, 2013

Video Description :

On-Camera, On-the-Record Briefing with Spokesperson Jen Psaki.

OBS Producer : Maxine 7-8220

OBS Editor : Fabian 7-1305

Action Required :

View Record

Memo

TO: Elizabeth Trudeau
FROM: Jeff Jackson
CC: Molra Whelan
DATE: Wednesday, May 11, 2016

RELEASE IN FULL**December 2, 2013 Daily Press Briefing Video Product**

U.S. Department of State
Office of Video Services
2201 G Street N.W. Suite 2317
Washington, DC 20006

Jeff Jackson

T 202.647.5127
F 202.647.5000

jjackson@state.gov

The December 2, 2013 Daily Press Briefing product hosted by the State Department's video portal (www.video.state.gov) and the State Department's YouTube channel (<https://www.youtube.com/user/statevideo>) was edited, with approximately seven minutes of content removed.

The transcript that accompanied the Briefing and that was available on both of these video platforms was complete and contained the press briefing in its entirety.

In December of 2013, there were two separate workflows, or series of sequential processes used to create the Daily Press Briefing video product.

The on-demand web products, (the portal and the youtube products) were created using traditional post-production methods: typically, the daily press briefing was recorded to a digital video server, the recorded file was then accessed using a network-attached editing system and editors cleaned up the beginning and ending portions of the Briefing video.

The edited Briefing file was then transferred to another, networked, server farm and compressed, encoded and made ready for the web. The same server farm systems transferred the Briefing file to the correct video platform (the video portal and youtube). All the editing hardware, and IP network, and infrastructure are self-contained at HST. The video platforms are hosted off site.

On the State Department's DVIDS channel (<https://www.dvidshub.net/unit/USDOS#VzM-wGNuz8s>) the December 2, 2013 Briefing was always available in its entirety and unedited.

The DVIDS version, was created in a similar manner — with DVIDS receiving the Briefing from the State Department live, in real time via a fiber transmission and recording the Briefing to their video server. At the conclusion of the transmission, DVIDS created 'their' version of the Briefing in a similar manner to the State Department using editing systems and editors.

Memo

U.S. Department of State
Office of Video Services
2201 C Street N.W. Suite 2317
Washington, DC 20006

Jeff Jackson

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Using a process tracking database, we know who was listed as the producer and editor for the Daily Press Briefing that day. Luke Forgeson spoke with the producer and I spoke with the editor. Neither person has any recollection of that briefing, nor of anyone, ever, asking them to remove material based on the content.

However, it was not altogether uncommon to edit briefings that contained serious technical problems, like freezes or audio and video dropouts. In December of 2012, if I recall correctly, OVS had only one broadcast engineer, so while technical problems were not frequent, they were not altogether uncommon either.

In 2013, error and correction tracking was pretty rudimentary. The 12-3 Briefing was not published until 7:10 PM on December 2nd — later than what would have been typical at the time. The YouTube version wasn't published until the 4th of December. Circumstantially this leads me to believe that there might have been problems with the file, that took time to be corrected.

There are many different ways to cover up an error or to hide an edit. Prefacing an edit, the way the Briefing was done, with a white flash frame draws attention to the edit. When I spoke to the editor listed in the process database, he noted that he never used 'white flashes' when doing a corrective edit, instead preferring to use a 'cutaway' or simply 'jump cut' the edit.

It would have been uncommon for someone other than a manager to stay late and correct an error but it would not have been uncommon for the final author or the edits themselves to go undocumented. While everyone, myself included, have looked through their emails to gather clues or answers, chances are good that remedies might have been arrived at via a phone conversation, rather than email.

Depending on how far down the rabbit hole you wish to go, I would consider talking with then OBS director, Martin Opus and his deputy director George McNamara.

Based on my experience, and knowledge of the various workflows, I believe that the edit made to the Briefing, was an effort to remove some sort of error or errors which probably occurred during the recording of the Briefing.

Unfortunately, because of the passage of time, I don't think that we can empirically prove, one way or the other exactly what happened.

From: PA Press Clips
Sent: Thursday, May 12, 2016 9:25 PM
To: PA Monitoring Group
Subject: WP - State Department keeps saying that erased video of tough question from Fox News reporter was a 'glitch'

RELEASE IN PART B6

State Department keeps saying that erased video of tough question from Fox News reporter was a 'glitch'
Washington Post
By Erik Wemple (Blog)
Thursday, May 12 at 7:26 PM EDT

High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Federica Mogherini and Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif at a news conference in Vienna last year. (Herbert Neubauer/European Pressphoto Agency)

Undercovered media story of the week: Fox News correspondent James Rosen revealed that video of him asking a tough question of a State Department spokesperson disappeared from the agency's video archive. Poof! Where the exchange once existed, a flash of white light replaced it.

At issue was Iran. Let's turn back the clock. In February 2013, Rosen pressed then-State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland on whether the United States was carrying on "secret, bilateral" discussions with Iranian leaders. No, Nuland said. Time passed.

In December 2013, after information surfaced indicating that the Iran-United States talks had stretched back for some time, Rosen pressed then-State Department spokeswoman Jen Psaki about the matter:

QUESTION: Is it the policy of the State Department, where the preservation or the secrecy of secret negotiations is concerned, to lie in order to achieve that goal?

MS. PSAKI: James, I think there are times where diplomacy needs privacy in order to progress. This is a good example of that. Obviously, we have made clear and laid out a number of details in recent weeks about discussions and about a bilateral channel that fed into the P5+1 negotiations, and we've answered questions on it, we've confirmed details. We're happy to continue to do that, but clearly, this was an important component leading up to the agreement that was reached a week ago.

Reasonable people can interpret that exchange in a number of ways, one of them being that Psaki, from the State Department podium, endorsed lying.

History took over from there. Through significant diplomatic and political exertion, the Obama administration secured approval of the Iranian nuclear deal, also known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action. It entered into force in January. Completion of the deal, however, didn't end criticism of the deal. Last weekend's New York Times Magazine featured a profile by David Samuels of Ben Rhodes, deputy national security adviser for strategic communication — a story that accused the administration of misleading the public about the deal's timeline. Samuels rapped President Obama for the following offense:

The president set out the timeline himself in his speech announcing the nuclear deal on July 14, 2015: "Today, after two years of negotiations, the United States, together with our international partners, has achieved something that decades of animosity has not." While the president's statement was technically accurate — there had in fact been two years of formal negotiations leading up to the signing of the J.C.P.O.A. — it was also actively misleading, because the most meaningful part of the negotiations with Iran had begun in mid-2012, many months before [President Hassan] Rouhani

and the "moderate" camp were chosen in an election among candidates handpicked by Iran's supreme leader, the Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

The actual timeline for the negotiation of the deal, Samuels said, betrays the administration's argument that the whole thing started in 2013, when moderates in Iran led by Rouhani surged to prominence.

The hubbub stirred by Samuels's story prompted Rosen & Co. to revisit that exchange in the State Department briefing room about candor and secret diplomacy. "I said to my producer, 'I want you to get these two briefings — one where they lied to me, and one later on when I confronted them about it,'" Rosen said yesterday on Fox News's afternoon program "The Five." The producer went back to Rosen and told him that the State Department had "edited out" the clash with Psaki. "We couldn't believe it," Rosen said.

Not only had the exchange disappeared from the video on the State Department's site, but a parallel disappearing act was also apparent on the video on the State Department's YouTube channel, Rosen reported.

The State Department's defense? Check this out:

The — this is a daily press briefing from 2013. The transcript of that daily press briefing and video was always available — transcript was on state.gov; the video was available on other sites. There was a glitch in the State Department video. When Fox flagged it for us, we actually replaced it with a video from DVIDS, which is the military repository where a lot of news media gets its video. The whole video was there, and we also annotated it on our YouTube channel.

That explanation comes from State Department press office director Elizabeth Trudeau, speaking at Tuesday's briefing under questioning from legendary AP diplomatic reporter Matt Lee. She confirmed that the State Department was looking into the matter, but really threw shade on the notion that this disappearance was something other than an innocent mishap: "Genuinely we think it was a glitch," Trudeau said.

Good thing Lee knows a story when it disappears on him and the rest of the world. He pressed Trudeau again about the matter yesterday, with this question:

QUESTION: Yesterday you intimated that there would be some kind of looking at or review — you didn't want to use the word "investigation," but — into what happened with this video — the video of the briefing in question. Has that — have you determined — have you been able to figure out what exactly —

Trudeau responded:

Sign up

MS TRUDEAU: Yeah, we're still looking into it. We continue to take a look at our process at that time and also making sure that something like that obviously never happens again. I would reiterate video is — was always available. It's back up now on state.gov. We annotated it on our YouTube channel, so it's been resolved, but we do take it seriously and we're looking.

Another day, another cross-examination: In Thursday's briefing, Lee was back at it with Trudeau:

QUESTION: I need to ask you one more time: Have you all gotten to the bottom of the glitch in the video of the — of the briefing?

MS TRUDEAU: So we continue to take a look at it. We take this seriously. What we're doing is not only reviewing what happened in the past but also ensuring that we can guarantee that transparency going forward, so we're in discussions now. I don't have a final readout to give you guys.

QUESTION: And has – in the course of the review or whatever you want to call it, however you want to describe it, has – have there been any other similar instances?

MS TRUDEAU: We have not located any similar incidents.

QUESTION: But have people looked?

MS TRUDEAU: So people are continuing to review it. It's a big archive, yeah.

QUESTION: Right, no kidding. I know.

Bolding inserted to highlight the highly selective nature of this "glitch."

The Erik Wemple Blog pledges to keep reporting on this incident, because there's no downside here. Either this is the most fantastic, once-in-a-lifetime, surgical, white-flashing, history-expunging glitch, or it's the most Mickey Mouse, ineffective government conspiracy of all time.

Harry Edwards • Press Officer • U.S. Department of State

2201 C St, NW Rm 2109, Washington, DC 20520 | ☎:BB:

<mailto:edwardshq2@state.gov> (OPENNET)

B6

RELEASE IN PART B6

From: PA Press Clips
Sent: Tuesday, May 10, 2016 8:31 PM
To: PA Monitoring Group
Subject: Post Briefing Clip - Daily Mail - State Department says 'glitch' responsible for missing moment from press briefing video when it essentially admitted to lying about Iran nuclear talks

State Department says 'glitch' responsible for missing moment from press briefing video when it essentially admitted to lying about Iran nuclear talks

Daily Mail

By Francesca Chambers, White House Correspondent For Dailymail.com

Published: 17:04 EST, 10 May 2016 | Updated: 18:59 EST, 10 May 2016

- Yesterday Fox News reporter James Rosen discovered that a portion of his 2013 exchange with State's Jen Psaki was missing from the video archive
- As the video approached the section in question, a white flash appeared, as if the tape had been edited, and it skipped ahead
- Psaki had essentially admitted to Rosen that the administration had engaged in 'secret negotiations' with Iran, contradicting a previous claim
- State is blaming the curious disappearance on a 'glitch' and replaced the old video with a new one that restores the section
- The kerfuffle comes from a profile that suggested the administration duped the press and its allies into backing the Iran nuclear deal

The State Department is blaming the curious disappearance of unhelpful footage from an old press briefing on a 'glitch' today as the fallout continues from a profile that suggested the administration duped the press and its allies into backing the Iran nuclear deal.

Yesterday Fox News reporter James Rosen discovered that a portion of his 2013 exchange with then-State Department spokeswoman, now White House Communications Director, Jen Psaki was missing from the video archive.

As the briefing video approached the section where Psaki essentially admitted to Rosen that the administration had engaged in 'secret negotiations' with Iran, contradicting a previous claim that it had not, a white flash appeared, as if the tape had been edited, and it skipped ahead.

Rosen noted the oddity yesterday evening as he reported on the new drama surrounding the nuclear accord and said State could not explain the cut.

Today a spokeswoman for the diplomatic arm of the government brushed off the notion that it was a conspiracy, arguing that the video clip was available elsewhere and the discussion was included in the transcript posted to State's website.

'There was a glitch in the State Department video. When Fox flagged it for us, we actually replaced it,' State's Elizabeth Trudeau said.

Indeed, as of this afternoon, State's website included a new copy of the Dec. 2, 2013 briefing that contains the section in question.

In it, Rosen confronts Psaki with a charge made by her predecessor, Victoria Nuland, that the United States was not meeting with Iran one-on-one, outside of the international P5+1 group, to discuss its nuclear program.

Nuland told him earlier that year, 'We would be prepared to talk to Iran bilaterally. But with regard to the kind of thing that you're talking about on a government-to-government level, no.'

By the time of the December briefing, rumors were swirling that senior officials from both governments had been meeting in secret. Psaki wouldn't confirm those reports. But she also suggested they were accurate.

'Is it the policy of the State Department, where the preservation or the secrecy of secret negotiations is concerned, to lie in order to achieve that goal?' Rosen asked her.

Psaki told him, 'James, I think there are times where diplomacy needs privacy in order to progress. This is a good example of that.'

Trudeau swatted down a reporter today who said her excuse - the disappearing video footage was the result of a 'glitch - seems awfully strange and coincidental.'

'The transcript was always up,' she retorted, 'and the video existed on other channels.'

She told him, 'We're looking into it. Genuinely, we think it was a glitch.'

Other videos in the archive have not been affected 'to our knowledge,' Trudeau said.

'We were unaware of it, and as soon as we found out about it, we made sure it was whole.'

The kerfuffle arose from a report Rosen was filing for Fox on the The New York Times Magazine profile of Deputy National Security Adviser Ben Rhodes.

The article asserts that Rhodes and the administration misconstrued the timeline for talks with Iran to make the resulting deal more palatable to Congress and the public.

'The way in which most Americans have heard the story of the Iran deal presented - that the Obama administration began seriously engaging with Iranian officials in 2013 in order to take advantage of a new political reality in Iran, which came about because of elections that brought moderates to power in that country - was largely manufactured for the purpose for selling the deal,' the Times piece claims

In fact, it says, 'the most meaningful part of the negotiations with Iran had begun in mid-2012.'

That was months before Iranian President Hassan Rouhani and other so-called moderates came into power with the blessing of Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

'The idea that there was a new reality in Iran was politically useful to the Obama administration,' said writer David Samuels.

The Obama administration has had its hands full over the past week whacking down various statements by Rhodes in the article and resulting accusations.

Yesterday, another Fox News reporter, Kevin Corke, asked White House Press Secretary Josh Earnest, 'Can you state categorically that no senior official in this administration has ever lied publicly about any aspect of the Iran nuclear deal?'

Earnest could be heard telling him in the briefing room, 'No, Kevin.'

The utterance is depicted in the White House's video version of the briefing but was not included in the transcript it makes available after each discussion with reporters.

It ignores Earnest's initial response and jumps straight to his follow-up statement.

'Kevin, I think the facts of this agreement and the benefits of this agreement make clear that the national security of the United States of America has been enhanced, and Iran's effort to acquire a nuclear weapon has been set back,' he said.

Earnest went on to tout the merits of the deal, as perceived by the administration, also telling Corke, 'I recognize that there is an attempt by those who either lied or got it wrong to try to relitigate this fight.

'But the fact of the matter is, when you take a look at the concrete results of this agreement, Iran is not able to obtain a nuclear weapon; we can verify that their nuclear program is only focused on peaceful purposes; and we have succeeded in making the United States safer, in make Israel safer, and making our partners in the region safer because Iran is not able to obtain a nuclear weapon.'

Afterward Corke asked him if he maybe 'misspoke' at the beginning.

'I said, can you state categorically that no senior official in this administration ever lied publicly about any aspect of the deal.'

To that, the president's spokesman said, 'There is no evidence that that ever occurred. And what I would encourage you and other critics of the deal to do is to look at the facts and to look at the results. We can verify them now, and the facts are clear.'

Asked today about the omission and whether its absence from the transcript was perhaps a reflection of a change in his position, Earnest told a reporter from another news outlet, 'No, if I had changed my answer you'd know about it.'

Harry Edwards • Press Officer • U.S. Department of State

2201 C St, NW Rm 2109, Washington, DC 20520 | ☎:BB:

<mailto:edwardshq2@state.gov> (OPENNET)

B6

From: Naawu, Maxine <NaawuML2@state.gov>
Sent: Monday, December 02, 2013 3:36 PM
To: Naawu, Maxine L (PACE)
Cc: PA DCC Notify
Subject: VideoDogg - DOS Daily Press Briefing - December 2, 2013

RELEASE IN FULL



The following video has been added to the Bureau's DCC/ODE Notification Queue:

Action Step : Step 3 - Ready for Processing
Event Date : 12/02/13
Event Time :
Video Title : DOS Daily Press Briefing - December 2, 2013
Video Description :
On-Camera, On-the-Record Briefing with Spokesperson Jen Psaki.
OBS Producer : Maxine 7-8220
OBS Editor : Fabian 7-1305
Action Required :
View Record

From: Olaya, Fabian <OlayaF@state.gov>
Sent: Tuesday, May 10, 2016 4:13 PM
To: Keller, Lawrence J
Subject: RE: 4pm call

RELEASE IN
PART B5, B6

That's weird!! On state.gov shows the brief TRT 1;22;00 But I sent something that was 1;13;02 The one posted cant be the correct one.

<http://video.state.gov/en/video/2886914568001>

From: Olaya, Fabian
Sent: Tuesday, May 10, 2016 4:06 PM
To: Keller, Lawrence J
Subject: RE: 4pm call

I have nothing telling me to cut anything. I saw Maxine was producer. I wonder if it was recut and videodogg changed after. We could tell by checking the TRT on state.gov or where ever it is posted.

[REDACTED]

From: Olaya, Fabian (PACE)
Sent: Monday, December 02, 2013 3:35 PM
To: Naawu, Maxine L (PACE)
Subject: RE: VideoDogg - DOS Daily Press Briefing - December 2, 2013

TRT 1;13;02

SENT 336

From: Keller, Lawrence J
Sent: Tuesday, May 10, 2016 4:00 PM
To: Olaya, Fabian
Subject: RE: 4pm call

[REDACTED]

From: Olaya, Fabian
Sent: Tuesday, May 10, 2016 3:58 PM
To: Keller, Lawrence J
Subject: RE: 4pm call

Yeah [REDACTED]

From: Keller, Lawrence J
Sent: Tuesday, May 10, 2016 3:57 PM
To: Olaya, Fabian
Subject: RE: 4pm call

Looks like 8 minutes were cut out with a white flash. [REDACTED]

B5

From: Olaya, Fabian
Sent: Tuesday, May 10, 2016 3:56 PM
To: Keller, Lawrence J
Subject: RE: 4pm call

Hmm I don't remember that or any of the briefs I use to edit. Let me see if I have any emails saying to cut something out. But I don't remember ever cutting any brief up and putting a white flash, especially in the middle of Psaki answer. I would have cut out the whole question or made the cut at a different camera shot.

From: Keller, Lawrence J
Sent: Tuesday, May 10, 2016 3:49 PM
To: Olaya, Fabian
Subject: RE: 4pm call

You were the editor for the DPB that day. Fox News is going crazy, saying that DoS edits stuff on state.gov.

<http://www.foxnews.com/politics/2016/05/10/state-dept-faces-questions-over-missing-tape-amid-scramble-over-wh-aides-iran-boast.html>

From: Olaya, Fabian
Sent: Tuesday, May 10, 2016 3:48 PM
To: Keller, Lawrence J
Subject: RE: 4pm call

Huh? Whats that?

From: Keller, Lawrence J
Sent: Tuesday, May 10, 2016 3:47 PM
To: Olaya, Fabian
Subject: RE: 4pm call

He wants to ask about Dec 2, 2013.

From: Olaya, Fabian
Sent: Tuesday, May 10, 2016 3:42 PM
To: Keller, Lawrence J
Subject: RE: 4pm call

Oh ok. Any idea what he wants to talk to me about? [REDACTED]

B6

From: Keller, Lawrence J
Sent: Tuesday, May 10, 2016 3:40 PM
To: Olaya, Fabian
Subject: RE: 4pm call

Nope. He's still here.

From: Olaya, Fabian
Sent: Tuesday, May 10, 2016 3:40 PM
To: Keller, Lawrence J
Subject: RE: 4pm call

I thought he leaves already. He just sent me an email that he wants to see me in the morning. [REDACTED]

B6

From: Keller, Lawrence J
Sent: Tuesday, May 10, 2016 3:39 PM
To: Olaya, Fabian
Subject: RE: 4pm call

Tell Jeff.

From: Olaya, Fabian
Sent: Tuesday, May 10, 2016 3:26 PM
To: Keller, Lawrence J
Subject: 4pm call

I am making command decision!!!

From: Olaya, Fabian <OlayaF@state.gov>
Sent: Wednesday, May 11, 2016 9:20 AM
To: Jackson, Jeff
Subject: DPB 12/02/13

RELEASE IN FULL

On state.gov shows the brief TRT 1;22;00 But I sent something that was 1;13;02

<http://video.state.gov/en/video/2886914568001>

This is what I sent Maxine, Other than that I don't have anything else regarding the briefing.

From: Olaya, Fabian (PACE)
Sent: Monday, December 02, 2013 3:35 PM
To: Naawu, Maxine L (PACE)
Subject: RE: VideoDogg - DOS Daily Press Briefing - December 2, 2013

TRT 1;13;02

SENT 336

From: Forgerson, Luke A <ForgersonLA@state.gov>
Sent: Tuesday, May 10, 2016 3:53 PM
To: Jackson, Jeff
Subject: RE: VideoDogg - DOS Daily Press Briefing - December 2, 2013

RELEASE IN FULL

Well, that does provide some context. Thanks for flagging.

From: Jackson, Jeff
Sent: Tuesday, May 10, 2016 3:51 PM
To: Forgerson, Luke A
Subject: FW: VideoDogg - DOS Daily Press Briefing - December 2, 2013

Hey Luke – Larry found this thread and it looks like it's possible that there were technical problems with the briefing that day. Unfortunately, there is no final chapter resolution in this thread. You might want to check with Andrea and see if she has anything pertaining to the error.

Have a good one dude!

Jeff

From: Curran, Andrea M
Sent: Monday, December 02, 2013 7:10 PM
To: Thaivalappil, Maureen E
Cc: PA DCC Notify
Subject: RE: VideoDogg - DOS Daily Press Briefing - December 2, 2013

Hi Maureen,

Correct, Brightcove is still processing additional renditions of that video asset at multiple bitrates.

Refresh your browser and when you preview the player has a pull-down menu to select one of a few bitrates that have now completed.

Hope that helps,

Andrea

From: Thaivalappil, Maureen E (PACE)
Sent: Monday, December 02, 2013 6:57 PM
To: Curran, Andrea M (PACE); Curran, Andrea M (PACE)
Cc: PA DCC Notify
Subject: RE: VideoDogg - DOS Daily Press Briefing - December 2, 2013

Hi Andrea,

When I preview the video in Brightcove, I can hear the audio but I see a blank screen. Is it possibly still processing?

Best,
Maureen

From: Curran, Andrea [<mailto:CurranAM@state.gov>]
Sent: Monday, December 02, 2013 6:26 PM
To: Curran, Andrea M.(PACE)
Cc: PA DCC Notify
Subject: VideoDogg - DOS Daily Press Briefing - December 2, 2013



The following video has been added to the Bureau's EI/WM Notification Queue:

Action Step : Step 4 - Ready for Publication: State.gov
Event Date : 12/02/13
Event Time :
Video Title : DOS Daily Press Briefing - December 2, 2013
Video Description :
On-Camera, On-the-Record Briefing with Spokesperson Jen Psaki.
OBS Producer : Maxine 7-8220
OBS Editor : Fabian 7-1305
Action Required :
[View Record](#)

From: Keller, Lawrence J <KellerLJ@state.gov>
Sent: Tuesday, May 10, 2016 3:45 PM **RELEASE IN FULL**
To: Jackson, Jeff
Subject: DPB
Attachments: RE: VideoDogg - DOS Daily Press Briefing - December 2, 2013; RE: VideoDogg - DOS Daily Press Briefing - December 2, 2013; VideoDogg - DOS Daily Press Briefing - December 2, 2013; VideoDogg - DOS Daily Press Briefing - December 2, 2013; VideoDogg - DOS Daily Press Briefing - December 2, 2013; VideoDogg - DOS Daily Press Briefing - December 2, 2013; VideoDogg - DOS Daily Press Briefing - December 2, 2013

RELEASE IN FULL

From: Thaivalappil, Maureen E <ThaivalappilME2@state.gov>
Sent: Monday, December 02, 2013 6:57 PM
To: Curran, Andrea M; Curran, Andrea M
Cc: PA DCC Notify
Subject: RE: VideoDogg - DOS Daily Press Briefing - December 2, 2013

Hi Andrea,

When I preview the video in Brightcove, I can hear the audio but I see a blank screen. Is it possibly still processing?

Best,
Maureen

From: Curran, Andrea [<mailto:CurranAM@state.gov>]
Sent: Monday, December 02, 2013 6:26 PM
To: Curran, Andrea M (PACE)
Cc: PA DCC-Notify
Subject: VideoDogg - DOS Daily Press Briefing - December 2, 2013

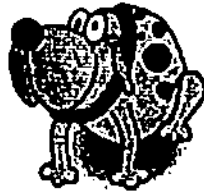


The following video has been added to the Bureau's EI/WM Notification Queue:

Action Step : Step 4 - Ready for Publication: State.gov
Event Date : 12/02/13
Event Time :
Video Title : DOS Daily Press Briefing - December 2, 2013
Video Description :
On-Camera, On-the-Record Briefing with Spokesperson Jen Psaki.
OBS Producer : Maxine 7-8220
OBS Editor : Fabian 7-1305
Action Required :
[View Record](#)

From: Johnson, Tamika Y <JohnsonTY@state.gov>
Sent: Monday, December 02, 2013 9:00 AM
To: Johnson, Tamika Y
Cc: PA DCC Notify
Subject: VideoDogg - DOS Daily Press Briefing - December 2, 2013

RELEASE IN FULL



The following video has been added to the Bureau's OBS Notification Queue:

Action Step : Step 2 - Request Video Submission

Event Date : 12/02/13

Event Time :

Video Title : DOS Daily Press Briefing - December 2, 2013

Video Description :

On-Camera, On-the-Record Briefing with Spokesperson Jen Psaki.

OBS Producer : Maxine 7-8220

OBS Editor : Fabian 7-1305

Action Required :

[View Record](#)

From: Naawu, Maxine <NaawuML2@state.gov>
Sent: Monday, December 02, 2013 8:59 AM
To: Naawu, Maxine L (PACE)
Cc: PA DCC Notify
Subject: VideoDogg - DOS Daily Press Briefing - December 2, 2013



The following video has been added to the Bureau's DCC Notification Queue:

Action Step : Step 1 - Request Video Filename
Event Date : 12/02/13
Event Time :
Video Title : DOS Daily Press Briefing - December 2, 2013
Video Description :
On-Camera, On-the-Record Briefing with Spokesperson Jen Psaki.
OBS Producer : Maxine 7-8220
OBS Editor : Fabian 7-1305
Action Required :
View Record

From: Jackson, Jeff <JacksonJ2@state.gov>
Sent: Monday, May 09, 2016 7:01 PM
To: Forgerson, Luke A; Curran, Andrea M; Jones, Eric M
Cc: Brown, Cynthia A; McAdams, Lisa A
Subject: Re: URGENT: Brightcove Video -- Daily Press Briefing - December 2, 2013

RELEASE IN FULL

Understood. See you tomorrow.

Jeff Jackson
Director, Office of Video Services
Bureau of Public Affairs, U.S. Department of State

From: Forgerson, Luke A
Sent: Monday, May 9, 2016 6:40 PM
To: Curran, Andrea M; Jones, Eric M
Cc: Brown, Cynthia A; McAdams, Lisa A; Jackson, Jeff
Subject: RE: URGENT: Brightcove Video -- Daily Press Briefing - December 2, 2013

Just wanted to close the loop on this. Eric has resolved this.

Jeff, will connect with you early tomorrow.

Thanks, all!

From: Forgerson, Luke A
Sent: Monday, May 09, 2016 5:29 PM
To: Curran, Andrea M; Jones, Eric M (PACE) (JonesEM@state.gov)
Cc: Brown, Cynthia A (brownca@state.gov); McAdams, Lisa A (mcadamsla@state.gov)
Subject: URGENT: Brightcove Video -- Daily Press Briefing - December 2, 2013
Importance: High

Eric/Andrea -

Need assistance on this ASAP.

Can one of you call me or come to my desk please?

Thanks!

From: Forgerson, Luke A
Sent: Monday, May 09, 2016 5:21 PM
To: Curran, Andrea M; Jones, Eric M (PACE) (JonesEM@state.gov)
Cc: Brown, Cynthia A (brownca@state.gov); McAdams, Lisa A (mcadamsla@state.gov)
Subject: Brightcove Video -- Daily Press Briefing - December 2, 2013
Importance: High

Andrea,

Can you please check minute 26:58 of this video? Come see me if you have questions. Can you also find it on YouTube. (If you need assistance, please let me know.)

<http://video.state.gov/en/video/2886914568001>

RELEASE IN PART B6

From: Psaki, Jennifer R
Sent: Monday, December 02, 2013 6:17 PM
To: Nuland, Victoria J
Subject: Re: Post Briefing Clip - Politico - Fox reporter confronts State Department on Iran denial

:) he was off the chain today. I am glad u think it was handled ok.

From: Nuland, Victoria J
Sent: Monday, December 02, 2013 06:13 PM Eastern Standard Time
To: Psaki, Jennifer R
Subject: Fw: Post Briefing Clip - Politico - Fox reporter confronts State Department on Iran denial

Love this.

From: PA Clips [<mailto:paclips@state.gov>]
Sent: Monday, December 02, 2013 06:03 PM Eastern Standard Time
To: PA-Monitoring-Group-DL
Subject: Post Briefing Clip - Politico - Fox reporter confronts State Department on Iran denial

Fox reporter confronts State Department on Iran denial
 Politico
 By JOSH GERSTEIN | 12/2/13 5:44 PM EST

Fox News Chief Washington Correspondent James Rosen visited the State Department briefing room Monday to challenge what he suggested were false denials the department issued about high-level talks between Iran and the United States.

With current State Department spokesperson Jen Psaki at the podium, Rosen read from a question he asked then-spokesperson Victoria Nuland in February about reports of "direct, secret bilateral talks with Iran."

"With regard to the kind of thing you're talking about on a government-to-government level: no," Nuland replied.

Rosen pointed Monday to reports that senior U.S. officials, including Deputy Secretary of State Bill Burns and then-Director of Policy Planning Jake Sullivan, held a series of meetings in Oman in recent years with top Iranian officials.

"The question today is a simply one: when the briefer was asked about those talks and flatly denied them, that was untrue, correct?" Rosen asked.

In response, Psaki noted that the State Department confirmed a meeting in March of this year—after the denial in question. However, she did not deny reports that the meetings stretched back to 2011.

"You're talking about a February briefing, so ten months ago. I don't think we've outlined or confirmed contacts or specifics beyond a March meeting. I'm not going to confirm or outline others beyond that at this point," Psaki said.

Rosen then asked Psaki if she would "stand by the accuracy" of Nuland's denial.

"James, I have no new information for you today," Psaki replied.

Rosen followed up further by asking if it is "the policy of the State Department to lie in order" to maintain the secrecy of negotiations.

"There are times when diplomacy needs privacy in order to progress. This is a good example of that," Psaki said.

Psaki also said the U.S.-Iran talks "really picked up after [Iranian] President Rouhani's election" in June of this year, but she acknowledged she was not answering the question about when those talks began. U.S. officials have said the high-level back-channel was important to the interim nuclear deal reached in Geneva last month. However, the discussions have been controversial, in part because Israel was reportedly kept in the dark about the talks until September of this year.

Rosen pressed Psaki on the thinking of State Department briefers on whether it would be appropriate to mislead reporters about matters such as sensitive diplomatic negotiations.

"I'm not going to do a psychiatrists' chair today," Psaki declared.

"What about a couch?" Rosen shot back.

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B6

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Daily Press Briefing, June 7, 2016

****Note:** *Pulled from unedited transcript. Check quotes against final transcript posted online.*

QUESTION: One, is there anything new on the look into or the response to Congressman Chaffetz on the briefing video edit?

MR TONER: No, all – I mean, all I would just say in – by way of update is that we're discussing the letter with the committee and his request, the request in the letter to – for Secretary Kerry to testify. And we're discussing it with the committee, as we would any request, but I don't have any additional details to – or updates to provide.

QUESTION: Okay. Actually, that's not the letter I'm talking --

MR TONER: Oh, sorry.

QUESTION: I'm referring to the one where he asked for the documents.

MR TONER: Ah, okay.

QUESTION: But thank you for the answer on the other.

MR TONER: That's right. But we are also planning to respond to that letter, the initial letter, tomorrow. They did request a pretty extensive amount of information, so we're going to provide what we can tomorrow, and we'll continue to try to provide additional information.

QUESTION: Do you know what that will include?

MR TONER: I don't, and I'll try to get a better grasp of what precisely we're going to be able to answer tomorrow. I think we're trying to simply manage this as one of -- I think it's one of 10 outstanding requests that we have from the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee on a broad range of topics, so we're just trying to, obviously, be responsive but with the understanding that we've got a lot of requests from that committee.

QUESTION: Okay. Well, I mean, has this bounced to the front of the line in terms of what you're responding to?

MR TONER: Well, that's a fair question. I think we're trying to be responsive to the deadline for tomorrow, so we're trying to answer what we can by tomorrow.

QUESTION: Okay. And then on the request for the Secretary to appear and testify --

MR TONER: Yeah.

QUESTION: -- I mean, is it the department's position that this is a legitimate, valid request or legitimate, valid use of the Secretary's time to go up and testify? Or do you --

MR TONER: Well, I think we're still having that conversation with -- through our H office, Congressional Liaison Office, with the committee directly, looking at a number of factors, including his availability as well as other issues.

QUESTION: So there's -- and do those --

MR TONER: No decision has been made yet.

QUESTION: Do those other -- right. Well, could you just give us an idea of what the other issues are?

MR TONER: Just, again, whether he's the appropriate --

QUESTION: I mean, does the department believe that he is the --

MR TONER: Right. Whether he's the -- sorry, go ahead. I'm sorry.

QUESTION: No, no. You were about to answer.

MR TONER: Yes, that's okay.

QUESTION: Is he the appropriate person to --

MR TONER: Well, that's one thing we're looking at, whether he'd be the best person to answer the questions that they have and to speak to the issue. And then again, as many of you know, he's going to be on the road again next week.

QUESTION: Right. Okay.

MR TONER: So he's not often in Washington.

QUESTION: So he's --

QUESTION: Yes, you can say that again.

QUESTION: Where is he going next week?

MR TONER: We'll announce when we're ready to announce. (Laughter.)

Daily Press Briefing, June 6, 2016 [\[LINK\]](#)

QUESTION: Right. We'll get back to Syria, but I just want to start with a couple housecleaning -- or one housecleaning item --

MS TRUDEAU: Sure.

QUESTION: -- which is about the edited briefing video.

MS TRUDEAU: Yeah.

QUESTION: So last week we were told that you guys intended to respond to Congressman Chaffetz, and have you? Have you turned over the documentation that he has asked for? Does such documentation exist?

MS TRUDEAU: So we have received the letter. We're working on a response. We are hoping to provide at least a partial response by June 8th. So yes, we will be responsive.

QUESTION: "At least a partial response?"

MS TRUDEAU: Correct.

QUESTION: What is -- can you explain what that means?

MS TRUDEAU: At this stage we're still looking at what the letter requested.

QUESTION: He's asked for -- right, he has asked for documents, though. I'm wondering, are you aware that there are documents out there that are related?

MS TRUDEAU: So yeah, we are looking at creating a -- at least a partial -- we're going to be as responsive as we certainly possibly can be.

QUESTION: So there are documents?

MS TRUDEAU: We believe that we can be partially responsive.

QUESTION: But not fully?

MS TRUDEAU: At this stage we will continue to try and meet that goal by June 8th, which is the deadline they've set.

QUESTION: Right. Okay. And is there a --

QUESTION: Can I have a follow-up on --

QUESTION: Well, I just want to know if there's a -- are there any updates on the -- what happened, why?

MS TRUDEAU: No. I think we -- we obviously had a couple exhaustive conversations about this last week in this briefing room. Assistant Secretary Kirby's focus is really on moving this forward. You guys saw the message he sent out to the Public Affairs Bureau. We are very focused on ensuring this does not happen again, and the procedures are in place.

QUESTION: But there is no new information that has been uncovered since last week?

MS TRUDEAU: At this stage I am not aware of new information.

QUESTION: All right. .

MS TRUDEAU: Lesley.

QUESTION: A follow-up on that is that they've asked for the Secretary to appear before the Oversight Committee. Have you received that request?

MS TRUDEAU: Yes, we have received this request. We will discuss it with the committee, as we do with any request to testify.

QUESTION: So is there a chance that the Secretary can -- will agree to this?

MS TRUDEAU: We just received it. I just don't have any other details for you.

QUESTION: Did you receive it today?

MS TRUDEAU: We did.

QUESTION: Okay.

MS TRUDEAU: Thank you.

[...]

QUESTION: I just want to go back to the first question here. You said you were going to provide a partial response by June 8.

MS TRUDEAU: Yeah.

QUESTION: And to what request is that?

MS TRUDEAU: I believe that is to Representative Chaffetz's letter.

QUESTION: About – but about what? He was asking for information. He's also asking for Secretary Kerry to testify. So you're going to give him a response by the 8th about whether he's going to testify or not?

MS TRUDEAU: The information.

QUESTION: The --

MS TRUDEAU: The information. We continue to work with the committee on the Secretary's availability, as we do with the committee on all requests.

QUESTION: Have you agreed to testify and you're just looking for a date, or --

MS TRUDEAU: At this stage we've just received the letter. We'll work --

QUESTION: Okay.

MS TRUDEAU: -- with the committee on that.

QUESTION: Okay. And then also, Secretary Kerry said that he was going to – he wanted to get to the bottom of who was responsible and why they did that. Has he asked the Inspector General to do an audit, or what --

MS TRUDEAU: So I've seen that Secretary Kerry obviously was very seized with this issue, spoke out very strongly about it. In terms of the path forward I don't have any other information to share with you on that.

QUESTION: And then --

QUESTION: You don't have any --

MS TRUDEAU: No.

QUESTION: There's no plan in place, or --

MS TRUDEAU: Well, the plan in place, obviously, is, as Kirby has said, is to make sure it never happens again. In terms of what they would do if more information becomes available, more information comes to light – as Kirby has said, we'll continue to take a look.

QUESTION: Well, no, no, no. But that's – there's a difference between if more information just happens to fall in your lap and what the Secretary says, which was: I want more information about who was available. So I --

MS TRUDEAU: Yeah. I just don't have details on that. The Secretary did make himself very clear on that, though.

QUESTION: And the – from the partial response, is that new information that is coming to light?

MS TRUDEAU: I believe that in the letter to the department, they detailed some materials that they were interested in. It's -- we will work to provide those materials. And it's our understanding that at the very least we'll have a partial response on those.

Remarks by Secretary Kerry, June 3, 2016. [\[LINK\]](#)

QUESTION: On some other investigations, the House Foreign Affairs Committee today and the House Oversight Committee have called for investigations into the missing portion of the tape on the State Department's website. Do you think there should be a further investigation or that people should be held accountable for this? And do you think that as you travel around the world --

SECRETARY KERRY: Well, I'll just begin by saying whatever -- I mean, the first I ever heard of it was yesterday or the day before yesterday. It's completely inappropriate by any standards. Inappropriate. And I'm trying to find out more about exactly what happened and -- but it's completely also contrary to everything that my tenure at the department has personified. I mean, this guy stands up every day, five days a week usually or at least one of our people are there accountable to you for hours. We stay till the last question is asked.

And what's interesting about that I have learned is the entire transcript continually remained available and posted. It never was changed. The Defense -- what's it called?

MR KIRBY: Video Information website.

SECRETARY KERRY: The Defense Video Information was always available, never was changed. So whatever happened was both clumsy and stupid and inappropriate, and I'm trying to find out more details, period.

[...]

QUESTION: Sir, if I can ask a follow-up on the video questions. Do you want people working for you who tamper with the historical record?

SECRETARY KERRY: Of course not. I just said it's inappropriate.

QUESTION: If you find out who requested or ordered this, would you want them to continue to work in the Public Affairs --

SECRETARY KERRY: I would like to find out exactly what happened and why. And I'm not going to make any comments about -- but I said it's a stupid and inappropriate thing to do, and I think that comment summarizes my point of view about it. And I am trying to find out the details of what this was.

QUESTION: Do you think the investigation has hit a dead end or a --

SECRETARY KERRY: I have no idea yet. I just -- as I say, I just learned about this the other day. And I've been asking a lot of questions, and we'll find out where we are.

QUESTION: Do you know that you were given the deadline by Wednesday by the chairman of House Government Reform Committee, Jason Chaffetz, to find out who is the person?

SECRETARY KERRY: Well, I hope I can find out before Wednesday. (Laughter.) We'll find out – we'll find out as soon as we can, I assure you. But I can't be more emphatic than saying a combination of stupidity and inappropriateness, and it just seems baffling to me given that records are there for everybody to peruse. I don't understand what was in somebody's mind, but until I find out, I'm not going to speculate.

QUESTION: Would there be a consequence then?

SECRETARY KERRY: I said I'm not going to speculate. I want to find out what happened.

[...]

SECRETARY KERRY: Hey, by the way, you mentioned the tape again. Let me just make one comment quickly to all of you on the record.

MR KIRBY: You guys can put this on the record.

QUESTION: On the record or off the record?

QUESTION: Off the record or on the record?

SECRETARY KERRY: No, on the record. On the record.

MR KIRBY: You can put this on the record.

SECRETARY KERRY: I want to put this on the record. I know, because I heard back home, that somebody asked a question about Jen Psaki and her role in this or possible. Jen Psaki was an absolutely superb, beyond any question, straight dealer as spokesperson. And I am convinced and satisfied that Jen Psaki didn't know anything about it, and there's no evidence whatsoever to the effect that somehow she was involved in this. And I'm absolutely – I have total confidence in Jen Psaki and in Jen Psaki's abilities and in her ethics. So there's no question in my mind she didn't even know about this and was as surprised and taken aback as I am. And we think it is as inappropriate as I have said to you. So that I am certain of.

QUESTION: Could you say with that level of confidence – could you say that about other officials, like Marie Harf or --

SECRETARY KERRY: I have not had a chance to – as I said, I'm not going to go down a list. I'm not going to start playing. But I know about Jen Psaki, particularly because that would be the first person one would ask and check out and run the hoops on. But I can tell you that I have – she was a superb spokesperson, is beyond reproach in terms of her approach to these things, her ethics. She's always been up front with people, and I have absolute confidence in Jen Psaki.

But I am trying to find out what happened here, because as I say, it's unacceptable. Not in my – not in the Department that I run am I going to have somebody clipping – it's just – you'd think people learn from history, you'd think they learn from just basic common sense. It doesn't make sense particularly since it's remained posted in its full transcript and posted. So I don't know what happened, but I'm going to try and do my due diligence. Okay? Thanks all, appreciate it.

QUESTION: Thank you.

CNN Wolf Blitzer (Psaki), June 3, 2016 [\[LINK\]](#)

Interview with Jen Psaki, State Department Spokesperson

Subject: Iran, Fox News, Nuclear Weapons

Participants: Jen Psaki, State Department Spokesperson; Wolf Blitzer, CNN

Time: 13:26:00

Date: 2016-06-03

WOLF BLITZER, CNN: Joining us now, the White House communications director, Jen Psaki. She was the State Department spokeswoman during some of this controversy. This is her first TV interview since the State Department admitted it was not a technical glitch but someone had deliberately told that videotape editor to go ahead and delete, what, about seven or eight minutes of the official video.

Have you gone back, Jen, and looked who - who was responsible for asking that videotape editor to remove that video, that sensitive video?

JEN PSAKI, WHITE HOUSE COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR: Wolf, I don't have any more information than you do. This is a stunning case of poor judgment, whether that is - was incompetence or lack of experience or both. I don't know the answer to that. The fact is, as was stated in the previous piece, I had no involvement with the editing, I had no knowledge of this, nor would I have ever approved of it. As actually the Republican you referenced before, I agree with the sentiment that the whole purpose of the State Department briefing is to provide a forum to have a debate and a discussion with reporters from the United States, but all over the world about a range of issues. I spent two years doing that. Many of my predecessors spent even more time. And this really flies in the face of that effort and something many of us spent time really believing in and hopefully delivering on from that podium.

BLITZER: Do you want the inspector general of the U.S. State Department to launch an official investigation? You heard Chairman Ed Royce, the chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, has just asked that the inspector general find out precisely what happened, who asked that videotape editor to delete that video? Is that a good idea for an I.G. report to begin right now?

PSAKI: Well, Wolf, I'll let the State Department and their lawyers speak to that. I will say, you know, I think I - I understand why people at home who are watching this inside the beltway debate in many ways can't understand why nobody would be held accountable and why there - they haven't been able to get to the bottom of it. So I'll let others and I'll let the State Department speak to the process.

BLITZER: Because there are also demands from The Hill, from members of Congress, from House committees, to have their own investigations. Will you fully cooperate?

PSAKI: Of course.

BLITZER: Let's talk a little -

PSAKI: I have absolutely nothing to hide here, Wolf.

BLITZER: All right, so -

PSAKI: But I will say again, I had no involvement and no knowledge here. And I think this has raised an interesting debate that you've probably had on your show before, and we've all discussed many times over the years, which is whether diplomacy should be given the room to develop and to grow with the - with the - with the secrecy that is sometimes needed. One - many could argue, I would certainly argue, that we would not be at the place we are with Cuba, we certainly would not be at the place where we have a deal with Iran, where they've agreed to not move forward on creating a nuclear weapon had we briefed out these discussions publicly. And that's something that - going back to Schultz and Kissinger and Madeline Albright used to talk about how mushrooms grow better in the dark. I mean this is something many, many people have spoken about over time.

BLITZER: But there's - there's one thing - but, Jen, as you know, you worked in the State Department, you're not at the White House, as you know, it's one thing to be discreet and not release all the information to the public for sensitive reasons, whether it's classified or diplomacy or whatever, but it's another thing to flat out lie to the news media and to the American public, which is what your predecessor, Victoria Nuland, did when she was asked back in 2013 whether or not there were secret, bilateral, government to government negotiations going on with Iran and she said "no." That was - that was a lie, right?

PSAKI: Well, Wolf, I think you'd have to speak to my predecessor about that. What I can tell you is that what I was doing, not just that day when this question was asked, the fact is, a week before this, I proactively talked through every aspect of the back channel at the State Department briefing. I was also supportive of and involved with the briefing of press and the stories that came out before that. So my role was providing information. I was an advocate of that about the back channel. It was at the time where we could do that because of where the diplomatic negotiations were. There's a long history for decades, again, of not being able to provide information when it's at a sensitive time that could have an impact. And that certainly may have - was the case earlier that year.

BLITZER: But - but then there was this subsequent - when you were the State Department spokeswoman, subsequent exchange you had with James Rosen of Fox when he asked why Victoria Nuland had lied about those direct, bilateral negotiations. I'll play the clip once again. Listen to this.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

JAMES ROSEN; CORRESPONDENT, FOX NEWS: Is it a policy of the State Department where the preservation of secrecy of secret negotiations is concerned to lie in order to achieve that goal?

PSAKI: James, I think there are times where diplomacy needs privacy in order to progress.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

BLITZER: The accusation against you, Jen -- and I want to give you a chance to respond -- that you were defending that earlier lie from Victoria Nuland.

PSAKI: I think you could speak to Tori or anyone else about she knew or didn't know about the negotiations. I don't have that information. But what I was doing that day and the weeks prior was providing information about the back channel, about the negotiations from the years past. I do believe, as I said during that exchange, there are certainly times where negotiations and important diplomatic discussions require not briefing the public on what's happening. Not because we don't want to have that conversation with you, Wolf, but because that means all parties are weighing in and it becomes a public debate instead of a private negotiation, that, as you know from covering these type of negotiations for years, is often need in order to make progress.

BLITZER: The point being though that it's one thing not to release all of the information you need for national security reasons or diplomacy or whatever. It's another thing to actually lie to the media and the American public as a result of that. Is it ever justified? This is my final question because I know you got to run. Is it ever justified for a U.S. government spokesperson to lie to the American people?

PSAKI: I think that's a fundamental value that I have always followed is not to and providing as much information as you possibly can, including being an advocate for when you can provide more, which is exactly what I did in the case briefing on the Iran back channel.

BLITZER: Jen Psaki is the White House communications director.

Jen, thank you very much for joining us.

PSAKI: Thank you, Wolf. Great to be here.

Daily Press Briefing, June 3, 2016 [\[LINK\]](#)

QUESTION: -- let's start with the -- trying to tie up any loose --

MR TONER: Sure.

QUESTION: -- the loose ends from the editing of the briefing video.

MR TONER: Great.

QUESTION: You will have seen today that Congressman Chaffetz and Congressman Royce have each written -- Congressman Royce to the Inspector General, asking him to open an investigation into this; and Congressman Chaffetz directly to the Secretary, asking for the department to turn over all of the documents related to the investigation into what happened. Well, first, have you gotten those letters? Have you responded? What will your response be? And you had been resisting -- well, let's start with that.

MR TONER: Okay. So we've -- we have seen the letters. Obviously, we've received -- on the receiving end of the letter from Senator Chaffetz.

QUESTION: From who?

MR TONER: Senator -- what did I --

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

MR TONER: Representative Chaffetz; I apologize.

QUESTION: I'm sure he wouldn't mind being a senator.

MR TONER: Representative Chaffetz; sorry.

QUESTION: You gave him a promotion.

MR TONER: I apologize. Representative Chaffetz. We are in the process of studying the letter, and of course, we will make every effort to be responsive to his questions.

QUESTION: Does that mean you responded?

QUESTION: It's a pretty short letter.

QUESTION: When you say "responsive to his requests," I mean, when you say you're going to make every effort to be responsive to his request, does that mean you're actually going to produce all the documents and the communications by June 8th, like he requested?

MR TONER: I would just say we're looking at the letter; we're in the process of seeing how we can be responsive and under what time constraints.

QUESTION: Well, do you know, is there an issue that might prevent you from being responsive and prevent -- that could prevent you from turning over the fruits of the legal advisor's investigation?

MR TONER: No, I mean, look, I mean, we are always responsive to Congress and always strive to be --

QUESTION: Well, you can be responsive by saying no.

MR TONER: -- and always strive to be responsive to Congress, certainly. I just don't -- I can't stand up in front of you today and say we'll meet their demands by X date. We're looking at the letter and we'll get back in touch with them.

QUESTION: All right. Yeah, earlier both you and Kirby have been somewhat resistant or the building, through you, has been resistant to the idea of an IG probe because you say that it -- this

is a very specific incident and the IG generally focuses on broader thematic issues. Has that position changed or do you think that Chairman Royce has a point when he says that --

MR TONER: Certainly, we don't -- as we've made pains to -- or take pains to make this point frequently, the OIG operates as a separate entity; and so it will decide for itself whether it wants to look into this incident. I think our -- my point yesterday was that -- the point about looking at doing audits, investigations, what have you -- but also that there was no, as we talked about at length yesterday, there was no rules broken here. We did conduct an internal investigation, but the letter's been sent to the IG and it's up to the IG to make that call.

QUESTION: Right. Yeah, but -- so but you're not going to get --

MR TONER: I'm certainly not going to -- I'm not going to pronounce one way or another or make that decision for them. It's not my --

QUESTION: Well, but you had said before -- both you and Kirby had said before that you didn't think it was necessary. Is that still the position of the building?

MR TONER: We didn't. We didn't, but we're certainly not going to --

QUESTION: Sorry, you didn't what?

MR TONER: We conducted an internal review within the State Department.

QUESTION: No, I understand that.

MR TONER: We did not think it fell into the purview of the IG.

QUESTION: And do you -- right. And do you still -- is that still your position?

MR TONER: It's still our viewpoint, but it's up to the IG to decide whether they look at --

QUESTION: I understand that. But you still don't think it's necessary?

MR TONER: No.

QUESTION: So given that you still don't think it's necessary, are you now planning to continue your own investigation or your own review of this? Because the other day you said no, you still don't know who did it. Has that changed?

MR TONER: We don't. Look, I mean, we've looked into it, as we talked about yesterday. We still don't know who made the request.

QUESTION: Right.

MR TONER: But we also said if there is more information that comes to light, we're going to look at it and we're going to consider it. But --

QUESTION: But there's a difference between, like, standing and hoping that information drops out of the sky into your hands and actively going out and looking for it. And I just want to know -- there's been a lot of criticism from up on the Hill about this and then called -- saying what has been done so far is fine but it's incomplete and that there needs to be --

MR TONER: We feel --

QUESTION: There needs to be more information about this:

MR TONER: Sure.

QUESTION: Why it was done, who did it, and some kind of accountability even if no rules were broken.

MR TONER: Well, and that's precisely the point is whether we like it or not, whether we agree with it or not, there were no rules or regulations broken.

QUESTION: I mean that's a separate -- completely separate category of thing here.

MR TONER: We believe that we have investigated the incident to the point where -- to which we can. And what we have sought to address is the fact that there was an absence of a clear policy --

QUESTION: Right.

MR TONER: -- about this and we have addressed that, as you saw.

QUESTION: Last one.

MR TONER: Yeah, please.

QUESTION: So the criticism that you have been on the receiving end of over the course of the last couple of days has not at all swayed or changed your viewpoint as to reopening or continuing to press ahead to try and get the answers that people -- the lawmakers and others -- are demanding; is that correct?

MR TONER: It's correct to say that we believe we have conducted an inquiry into this incident. We have, to the extent that we can, that -- given that no rules or regulations or policy was broken, that we have sought to correct that going forward but that we believe we have exhausted our efforts to look into the incident and responsibility.

QUESTION: Right, but -- and I know I said the last one. Right, okay.

MR TONER: That's okay, go ahead.

QUESTION: Then this definitely will --

MR TONER: Yeah.

QUESTION: It's not a -- I don't think -- the point is not that the -- whether a specific rule or regulation was broken, but it's kind of a -- it's a public trust issue that was broken, credibility that was broken issue here. It didn't have to be about this. It could have been about anything. It could have been about aid to Borneo. It's not the -- I know that a lot of people are saying that it's more important, perhaps, because it was about the Iran negotiations, but in fact any deletion or editing of any part of a briefing on any subject should be wrong and not acceptable. Isn't that correct?

MR TONER: So a couple of points on that -- a couple of points on that. First of all -- and we've said this from day one, when this allegations or this incident first came to light -- one product, a video, was edited. We have acknowledged that and we have made steps to correct the policy going forward so that that never happens again. But there was always a transcript available of that briefing and there was always a video available of the full briefing on DVIDS. So I understand -- and I understand and I appreciate the tough questions that you all are asking us in this room, and we are doing our best to answer, but there's a lot of overblown rhetoric beyond this room about what happened and what transpired. We believe we have conducted an inquiry into what happened. We don't have the answers, ultimately, why this was done or why this was requested. And so like many of you, we're asking ourselves the same questions, but we don't have any further leads to investigate. So we're at a -- as I said yesterday -- a bit of a dead end. But we're going to continue to, as we get information, more information, we'll pursue that. But what's important here is that we take steps so it doesn't happen in the future.

Matt -- or Arshad, sorry.

QUESTION: Did you get an answer to my question regarding whether or not the State Department has internal telephone records that would allow you to figure out who did this, or whom -- who -- what phone made the phone call?

MR TONER: Right. So we did actually check with IRM, and the system is such that internal phone call records are only available for a 24-hour period. So those records -- internal calls -- would no longer be available.

Yeah.

QUESTION: When you say they're only available, does -- do they go somewhere else where they're inaccessible after 24 hours?

MR TONER: No, I believe they're just simply gone.

QUESTION: Gone. Okay. Did the --

MR TONER: That's my understanding. Yeah.

QUESTION: Yeah. Did the Office of the Legal Adviser seek to find out if there were telephone records?

MR TONER: They did not.

QUESTION: Okay. Why not?

MR TONER: Well, again, because, Arshad, it returns to the point I was trying to make with Matt, which is, as regrettable as this incident was – and we've acknowledged that – they – there wasn't a legal premise on which to base a further investigation into the incident. We did interview the person, who, by the way, came forward and offered their recollection of what happened. But beyond that we didn't feel like we – or they – the legal office didn't feel like they needed to pursue this further – did not have the grounds to pursue this further.

QUESTION: So – well, but either you want to find out or you don't. And if you want to find out, I don't understand why you wouldn't ask a question that even somebody like me, who's not a lawyer and doesn't – would think of, which is, gee, maybe there's a record here since this involves a phone call. And I don't understand why they wouldn't – I understand that you don't have a broken rule or a broken law. What I don't understand – I mean, this all goes to credibility, and if the idea is to do a credible review, even if it's not an investigation, why wouldn't you turn over every stone?

MR TONER: Well, again, I think we also have to be mindful of the privacy of individuals involved and we also have to be mindful of the authority by which we can carry out any kind of, again, examination of what happened. And there was no legal basis on which to continue to look into this incident.

Now, like I said, if we get more information, new information, and we would certainly pursue that.

QUESTION: So I'm --

MR TONER: Yeah, please.

QUESTION: Another thing. I'm told that – you'll recall that on Wednesday, Kirby said that all that the person could recollect was that someone had asked that this be done. I don't – I can look up his exact quote.

MR TONER: Yeah.

QUESTION: But basically, all the person could remember was that they were called and asked to do this, and that they believed it came from elsewhere in PA. I'm told that the person also, however, said that they had no – that they didn't think it was former spokesperson Jen Psaki. Is that correct?

MR TONER: That's correct.

QUESTION: Why weren't we told that on Wednesday? I mean, you said all they can remember is X, but now it turns out it – they remembered more than just X. And I don't understand why you would say they only remember X and then it turns out they remember more than that, and then we – we learn about it later.

MR TONER: It's a legitimate point, Arshad, and one we have now obviously corrected by putting that out there. Look, I think we were concerned by some of the coverage that Jen Psaki

was being sullied by allegations that she somehow – this came from her. And so we recognized that we needed to very clearly refute that point, and so we did.

QUESTION: Did the person recollect anything else about the communication that they received that we have not been told? Did they say, for example – and I – that they recollected that anybody else – that it wasn't anybody else specifically? Did they remember that it wasn't the deputy spokesperson at the time or that it wasn't the assistant secretary at the time?

MR TONER: To my knowledge, no, that there was no other – that --

QUESTION: Pertinent information?

MR TONER: -- pertinent information conveyed, but we have since seen that – and you have also seen this – that the deputy spokesperson at the time, Marie Harf, and others – the assistant secretary at the time – have all come out and said that they had no parts in this.

QUESTION: Yeah. No, I'm asking because I want to know if there was anything --

MR TONER: Yeah, I understand --

QUESTION: -- as they remember it.

MR TONER: I understand why you're asking.

QUESTION: Okay.

MR TONER: I will triple-check that, but that is my understanding, is that – that's --

QUESTION: Well, is there anyone else you can rule out?

MR TONER: You mean – I'm sorry.

QUESTION: Well, I mean, the only person that you guys feel comfortable – seem to be comfortable ruling out as the source of this is Jen. Is that correct, or are you able to extend that to other people? And if so, how many other people have been ruled out?

MR TONER: Well, again, part of – this is the reason why we don't want to go down this rabbit hole.

QUESTION: Well, but you went down this slippery slope --

MR TONER: I understand that. I understand that.

QUESTION: -- by saying this is who didn't do it.

MR TONER: I understand that, but that was part of the reason why we didn't get into this information in the first place. I mean, to the extent that what this individual shared in terms of who she spoke with and who she was able to rule out or to confirm that was not on the other end

of the line or was not part of this, it's only been Jen. But other people have, as you know, stepped forward and said --

QUESTION: Right. And you have no reason to doubt any of those?

MR TONER: And we have no reason to doubt any of them.

QUESTION: One more. I had asked whether, as a general matter, there is any State Department rule against lying to someone conducting an internal review. Is there?

MR TONER: Lying against anyone conducting an internal review?

QUESTION: Lying to anyone -- if somebody is conducting an internal review, is there a rule against lying to them?

MR TONER: I would presume so, yes. I don't have -- I apologize.

QUESTION: Can -- no, it's okay.

MR TONER: I will check on that.

QUESTION: Okay. Thank you. I mean, it's in the same category of if you don't have a rule --

MR TONER: No, I understood.

QUESTION: -- then -- yeah, okay. So I would like to know if there is. If there isn't, maybe you would want to institute such a rule, but -- yeah.

MR TONER: No, I -- and just to take that one step further, I mean, this is an organization in which the majority of people have security clearances, and all of those require significant background checks, but also require people to be interviewed on occasional bases and tell -- be truthful about -- in those interviews, so I would presume it to be the case.

Please.

QUESTION: I want to move on, but I think Olivia probably has some questions on that.

QUESTION: Hi. How are you? I have a quick question: Was there no -- was there a look into the email back-and-forth of the editor to see whether they said -- whether it was confirmed that they had edited a piece? Was there -- I know we talked about phone calls, but was there any look into the emails? Because I know that that's widely --

MR TONER: The email records -- the -- right, whether there was an email exchange that --

QUESTION: With one's superior --

MR TONER: So my understanding is -- and if this is wrong, I will correct myself -- but my understanding is that this was all done over the phone.

QUESTION: Okay.

MR TONER: Yeah. So there's no email record.

QUESTION: Was it just one phone call, or could it have been more than one?

MR TONER: I believe it was just one phone call, is my understanding.

QUESTION: Okay.

Daily Press Briefing, June 2, 2016 [\[LINK\]](#)

QUESTION: I was not at yesterday's briefing and I don't want to go belabor or go tread the same ground that was trod yesterday as it relates to the video, the editing of the video of the December 2013 briefing. But I did the -- in reading the transcript of yesterday's briefing, it raised -- raises more questions, kind of, I think, than the explanation that your colleague offered.

MR TONER: Okay.

QUESTION: And so I just want -- I want to get to a couple points, and I'll try to be very quick about it.

MR TONER: Sure.

QUESTION: Is it correct or am I understanding correctly that until yesterday or until whenever it was that Kirby made -- came down with these new rules, that it was not specifically a violation of any rule or State Department regulation to manipulate a video of the briefing? Is that correct?

MR TONER: That's correct. It was not --

QUESTION: Was it -- why?

MR TONER: As far as we have checked in terms of our Foreign Affairs Manual, but also in other rules and regulations, there was not a clear policy or regulation prohibiting editing of transcripts before they were publicly posted.

QUESTION: Well, I mean, yet you -- obviously you edit transcript -- we're talking about the video here, not --

MR TONER: I'm sorry, video, yeah.

QUESTION: But, I mean, obviously if someone -- there can be cleanup editing of things, but I -- this is -- this would seem to be -- this stuff was deleted for content reason, not because -- not for a technical hitch in audio or the video.

MR TONER: No, understood. I mean, I understand your --

QUESTION: That was not a violation of the rules until yesterday?

MR TONER: Again, there was no rule in place, and we only discovered this when we actually had the occasion to investigate it.

QUESTION: I know, but why not? I mean, now – I guess I understand now why people have to put warning labels on mattresses and stuff like that. I mean, this would seem to be just pure common-sense that you don't mess around with what has been said on – from the podium.

MR TONER: And that may be partially the reason there was no rule in place, is that we all --

QUESTION: All right.

MR TONER: -- understand, working in this business, whether on your side or on our side, that there are --

QUESTION: Well, but apparently not. You say "we all," but someone out there didn't, right?

MR TONER: Well, understood, and that's why we've -- we're correcting it going forward.

QUESTION: All right. The -- am I correct in understanding that you guys -- you, Kirby, your office didn't do -- and had no part of this? It was all done by the Legal Adviser's Office, the -- in terms of --

MR TONER: The actual investigation into the incident was conducted by the legal office, yeah.

QUESTION: And they found that there were no rules violated?

MR TONER: No.

QUESTION: No, they did not find that?

MR TONER: They found that there were no rules -- yeah. There was no existing policy or regulations in place that would have been violated by editing this video.

QUESTION: That's just mindboggling. I mean -- so --

MR TONER: We were equally surprised.

QUESTION: Yeah. So did they -- to the best of your knowledge, did they ask the technician who they spoke to, who said that she was asked to do this -- did they ask her what the reason was for the request to edit the video?

MR TONER: And I want to be careful here not to get too much into the substance of their investigation. They did talk to the person who did edit the video, who told them that -- this person told them that they were acting in direct response to a call that they received --

QUESTION: Yeah, I know that. I read the transcript from yesterday.

MR TONER: -- asking them to edit the video. What's -- I'm sorry, what's your --

QUESTION: Did they say -- did they ask the technician why that request was made of --

MR TONER: No, I mean --

QUESTION: No?

MR TONER: Well, I'm sorry. When you say "why the request was made -- "

QUESTION: Did the Legal Adviser's Office, in speaking with the technician who did the edit, ask the technician what the reason was that the person, whoever got in touch with, he or she, gave for saying, "Let's remove the seven, eight minutes"?

MR TONER: So my understanding of this is that that question was posed. The person was simply acting under order to change it and did so but was not given a reason why.

QUESTION: So there was -- was not given a reason why. Okay. I mean, it just seems like there would be -- there's a bit of a -- there seems to be a lack of curiosity here on the -- I mean, if someone was to ask me, a superior asked me to do something like that, I think I would want to know why before I would even consider doing it. But in this case, the person just got the request and did it of their own volition?

MR TONER: Correct.

QUESTION: Was everything contained -- the request and that -- the initial request, which I understand was like secondhand --

MR TONER: Right.

QUESTION: -- to this building?

MR TONER: Yes.

QUESTION: Was there any -- so it -- and it was all contained --

MR TONER: Yes.

QUESTION: So not --

MR TONER: So my understanding is that --

QUESTION: It didn't come from outside, not the White House?

MR TONER: My understanding is that, yes, it was -- so the request was -- and we still don't know, obviously, who made that request -- but that that was passing on a request from somewhere else within the Public Affairs Bureau.

QUESTION: Okay. And you're -- that -- but you're certain of that? If this -- I don't --

MR TONER: I mean, that's what this individual said and that's what we're --

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

QUESTION: But yeah, there's no way that you can -- I just --

MR TONER: No, we can't -- I mean, we obviously can't -- I mean, we have one person's word to go by. Yes.

QUESTION: Well, okay. And is -- do you consider now that this whole case is closed?

MR TONER: No, and I think Kirby said as much yesterday that if we get new information --

QUESTION: You mean if someone volunteers it?

MR TONER: Well, I mean, we've -- we've pulled on this particular thread as far as we can go. The individual in question here does not remember who told him or her to carry out this order. It was a phone call that took place three years ago. We're not going to question their memory. But at this point, we believe that we've done the forensics, we've identified that there's a problem here, which you identified, which is that there's no policy regarding editing of video, and we're correcting that going forward. But if we get new information as to where this request came from, we will investigate further.

QUESTION: But you're not looking at -- you're not going through the roster of staff that there was at the time --

MR TONER: We've looked at all that. I mean --

QUESTION: And you --

MR TONER: I think you can rest assured that we have actually taken common-sense steps to look at --

QUESTION: Well, apparently -- (laughter) -- I don't know if we can rest assured that you've taken common-sense --

MR TONER: Well, we have.

QUESTION: It would be common sense not to edit the video in the first place. If common sense were the -- what we were operating on here, or an assumption of common sense, this -- we wouldn't be having this conversation at all.

Anyway, but is there is a -- is the Office of the Legal Adviser or anyone else still actively trying to find out who and why, or is it just done now?

MR TONER: There's -- we believe we've carried out the necessary investigation. We have hit a dead end in terms of finding out more information. If more information does become available, if we are made aware of more information about who might have been behind this request, we'll, of course, investigate.

QUESTION: Well, but to what end, though? If it was not a violation --

MR TONER: You're right. I mean, that's a fair point, is there's -- is that there's no --

QUESTION: No --

MR TONER: -- there isn't any -- sorry, I'll get to you in a second -- I mean, that's a fair point to make. This was not in any violation of existing policy or regulations.

QUESTION: But should have been, correct?

MR TONER: We're correcting that going forward.

QUESTION: So here's my question.

MR TONER: Arshad. Go ahead.

QUESTION: I mean, yesterday Kirby made very clear that he believed that this was wrong, this shouldn't have happened, correct?

MR TONER: Yeah.

QUESTION: Do you believe that the State Department should have working for it people who would deliberately alter the historical record of the public statements of the State Department spokesperson?

MR TONER: I'm sorry. So your question is directed at?

QUESTION: Should people who would deliberately tamper with the historical record be working here?

MR TONER: Well, Arshad, I mean, I guess that's a fair question to ask. Our posture on that is that without having an existing policy in place clearly laying out that this sort of action was prohibited. We need to give this individual the benefit of the doubt that they were acting under orders of their supervisor or supervisors or other people who directed them to carry out this task.

QUESTION: The question's not about the supervisor.

QUESTION: Sorry, but I'm just -- wait, wait, wait --

MR TONER: Oh, okay. I --

QUESTION: The question is not about the person who actually --

QUESTION: I've got a -- sorry, I've got a -- forgive me, I've got a whole bunch more questions that are raised by your answer, then. So I'm not talking about the editor, okay, because you know who they are.

MR TONER: Okay.

QUESTION: I'm talking about -- and I'm not even really talking about the person who placed the phone call at the behest of someone else, because they could have been just ordered, "Please do X." I'm talking about the person who made -- who originated the request.

MR TONER: So -- okay. So let me answer that question.

QUESTION: So should they be here in Public Affairs?

MR TONER: So as Kirby said yesterday and I'll reiterate today, we believe that this was an inappropriate request, an inappropriate action, but it did not violate any rules that were in place at the time that governed that sort of action.

QUESTION: So it's fine if -- for them to still be here? Tampering with historical record is okay as long as there's no rule against it?

MR TONER: Well, Arshad, first of all, we don't have that individual or that individual's name.

QUESTION: I know.

MR TONER: So --

QUESTION: But the signal you're sending is anything that isn't explicitly prohibited is fine, even if you regard it as wrong or inappropriate. And I don't see how that's a position --

MR TONER: That's not at all the signal we're sending, and in fact --

QUESTION: It is. It is.

MR TONER: -- Assistant Secretary Kirby just today sent an email out to the entire bureau explaining the change in policy and explaining the actions we've taken thus far to get to the bottom of this. We have carried out an investigation -- actually, we had the legal office carry out that investigation; we didn't do it internally, for obvious reasons -- and until we find reason to pursue that investigation further, we're at a dead end.

But that in no way excuses the action that was taken. And I think Assistant Secretary Kirby has shown his commitment to the integrity of the bureau and to the integrity of the State Department by taking the actions he's taken and being as transparent as possible in explaining why he's taken them.

QUESTION: You said that you had done the forensics. Yesterday I asked if you had, for example -- or the Office of the Legal Adviser -- had sought to obtain the telephone records, and

the answer was not to his knowledge. Why not? I mean, "forensics" is a strong word. If you're doing the forensics to figure out how something happened, you don't just necessarily ask people, you also look for digital trails.

MR TONER: Sure.

QUESTION: So why didn't you look? Or can -- if you don't know, can you take the question of -- well, did they look for digital trails? I think a lot of phone calls around here are tracked, right? And I think PA phone calls in particular sometimes are tracked. So if you didn't look for the phone records, I don't understand how you can argue that you did a thorough -- you did thorough forensics on this.

MR TONER: I can't confirm that we did all of the tracking of phone calls or whether we're even able to do so. I know we did check our records as much as we could to see what might have happened that day. And you're right, there are records that exist. But if I have more to share on that, I certainly will. But --

QUESTION: Can you check whether you looked for phone records, please --

MR TONER: Sure. Sure.

QUESTION: -- and answer that? And then -- and I don't like dwelling on this, but I feel like the integrity of the public record is an important thing.

MR TONER: It is.

QUESTION: It was clearly and deliberately violated by someone, right? And even if there wasn't a rule against it, presumably the State Department has basic codes of behavior, right? I mean, isn't there something that says you should be honest in your dealings with the public?

QUESTION: Apparently not.

MR TONER: Well, look, of course. And we've talked about --

QUESTION: But then it is a violation. If of course there's a rule that says you should be -- or a basic precept that you should be honest in your dealings with the public, then somebody violated that.

MR TONER: And again, I'm not -- it's impossible to -- for me, without knowing who directed this individual to carry out this task, what the rationale was, what the justification was, what the reasoning behind it was. So that's point number one.

Point number two is there was no existing regulation or policy in place. We've addressed that. Moving forward, we're putting in a clear policy in place that this kind of action is not going to be tolerated in the future. I think we can certainly -- and you're right to point out the fact that this was an inexcusable incident, but we also have to look forward and how do we correct this for the future. And we're setting in place a clear procedure and clear guidelines in how to avoid any action like this, because we do obviously take our role seriously.

QUESTION: You – we were told by a State Department official yesterday that the person who received the phone call discussed the matter with her superior and that they concluded that the request had come from a place of sufficient credibility and authority within the department – within the bureau, excuse me – that they then acted on the request. Have you or did the Office of the Legal Adviser go to people of credibility and authority in the bureau and ask them, “Did you do this?”

MR TONER: We have asked those questions.

QUESTION: And nobody said they did it?

MR TONER: That’s correct.

QUESTION: So --

MR TONER: We’ve asked so far.

QUESTION: Yeah. So what I don’t – I continue to not understand how there could have been a conversation between someone and their manager that concludes that a request has come from a place of sufficient credibility and authority from the bureau they work in that they should do this, but that they have no other recollection of anything about the call – the gender of the person who called. Do you know the gender of the person who called? Because that would cut your list of suspects in half.

MR TONER: I understand that.

QUESTION: Do you know the gender? Do they remember the gender?

MR TONER: Again, it was a secondhand call. Somebody was conveying this. And we do know that, and I’m not --

QUESTION: Right. So they – do they know the gender of the person who called?

MR TONER: And we do know that, and I’m not going to share that.

QUESTION: Okay. So – no, that’s – okay. I mean, it’s not very transparent of you, right? But then you have eliminated half the potential people --

MR TONER: I understand that.

QUESTION: -- who made the call, and that makes it easier for you to find out, well, gee, who actually made the call and then who told them to make the call.

MR TONER: And let’s be very clear, when we’re talking about transparency, I’m not going to get up here and reveal to you from this podium every detail of what is an internal, albeit by our legal office, an internal investigation into what happened. I’m under no obligation to do that, and that’s out of respect for the privacy of the individuals involved. What I am obligated to do is to

explain to you, and I think John did as well yesterday, that we realize that this was an intentional action, we've taken steps to address it, we've investigated the incident as far as we can take it at this point in time, and we're taking steps to correct that this incident -- that a similar incident doesn't happen in the future.

QUESTION: And do you know the identity of the person who placed the call, relaying the message from the place where it originated?

MR TONER: No, we've not been able to clarify that either.

QUESTION: Sorry, Mark, you may not have an obligation, but apparently there was no obligation before yesterday not to mess around with the video transcript, so -- or the video. So I just -- in the interest of transparency, in the interest of trying to set this aside, why not reveal the details of what the legal adviser found beyond what you have already done, or is that it? Is that all that they know?

MR TONER: That's more or less it -- right.

QUESTION: Because it doesn't seem like that's very -- it doesn't seem like a very thorough investigation. Well, someone got a phone call passing on a request from someone else and that's the end of it -- that doesn't sound like -- anyway. Can you at least tell us what the new policy is specifically?

MR TONER: I can --

QUESTION: Like what does this email that Kirby sent around today say --

MR TONER: Sure.

QUESTION: -- in terms of what the regulation is? Thou shalt not edit --

MR TONER: (Laughter.) I mean, thou shalt not -- fair point. I don't have it in front of me, but --

QUESTION: Okay, can we get it?

MR TONER: Yeah, of course, I can get you -- I can get you the text. I mean, we're going to make clear that all video and transcripts from daily press briefings need to be immediately and permanently archived in their entirety and that --

QUESTION: Including anything with glitches like audio or video glitches?

MR TONER: Yes.

QUESTION: So it will be naked, unedited?

MR TONER: Unedited and naked, if you will.

QUESTION: Can I -- can I make a point about the edit --

QUESTION: Well, wait. Wait, can you finish that --

MR TONER: No, no, I'm just saying in the unlikely event that narrow, I don't know, compelling circumstances that require edits be made, like the inadvertent release of privacy-protected information -- just as an example -- that that would only be made with the express permission of the assistant secretary and with an --

QUESTION: So any edit at all has to go through the assistant secretary?

MR TONER: That's correct.

QUESTION: Yeah, that's what Kirby said yesterday.

MR TONER: That's correct.

QUESTION: But he also said yesterday, if I'm not mistaken, that it would be annotated so that the omission was noted?

MR TONER: That's correct, yeah. I was just going to get to that.

QUESTION: Yeah. Does that policy also apply to the transcripts, State Department transcripts? And I do not want anybody to think that I have anything but the highest regard for the transcribers, but --

MR TONER: No, no, I -- and I -- that should already be the case.

QUESTION: Well, but it should have been the case that --

MR TONER: We always asterisk if we do a -- if we do an annotated -- an annotation to the transcript, of the written transcript.

QUESTION: It pains me to ask the question --

MR TONER: Yeah.

QUESTION: -- but it should have already been the case that tampering with the video violated a rule, but it didn't until yesterday. So are there going to be similar rules regarding the transcripts?

MR TONER: Yes.

QUESTION: For all State Department officials who speak on the record, including in the briefing?

MR TONER: Yes. And there should be.

QUESTION: And you will annotate any changes to the actual spoken word, as transcribed?

MR TONER: Yes.

QUESTION: Thank you.

QUESTION: So one point I have to make and a question I had about the edits--

QUESTION: I'm sorry, is that in the latest email? Is that in his latest thing?

MR TONER: I'll double-check on that.

QUESTION: Okay.

MR TONER: This may just pertain to video, but that's a fair question. I'll check.

Please.

QUESTION: Okay. So one question is the edit itself was -- anybody who's looked at video could see that it was a flash edit. It wasn't -- it in no way resembled a technical malfunction. In fact, it resembled experienced editing. So why then -- the question is: Why then was it initially called a technical glitch, when, in fact, it just didn't appear to be that at all? What -- where did that come from?

MR TONER: Look, so what I'll say to that is I'm not sure that as a layman I would have been able to say that it was a professionally done editing job or a glitch.

QUESTION: Well, that's not -- frankly, that's not plausible.

MR TONER: I'm just saying -- I'm just saying, so understand that we're all not broadcast experienced press officers here at the State Department. That said, we did recognize, Justin, very shortly after that initial response, that it clearly was. And we were told that internally. And so we corrected ourselves once we found that out.

QUESTION: Not only do I not find that plausible, but I also don't find it plausible that the technician, as Arshad mentioned, does not remember who gave this order. Did anybody ask the technician if this was the only time she had been asked to edit a video, or was this a standalone, one-time deal?

MR TONER: My understanding is it was a standalone request.

QUESTION: Okay. Which they would remember doing, but not remembering who gave the order. Do you have any reason to believe that it was the then-spokesperson, Jen Psaki, who ordered the edit or have you ruled her out?

MR TONER: So Jen has -- Jen Psaki has gone out publicly --

QUESTION: I've heard, yeah. I've seen that.

MR TONER: -- and said that she had nothing to do -- no knowledge of this and nothing to do with this incident. Jen Psaki is a highly regarded professional and colleague, and I take her at her word.

QUESTION: And last one for me. Do you find it necessary maybe to do -- for the Press Office to do its own investigation, or are you totally satisfied with the legal office's own investigation of this? I mean, if anybody would know --

MR TONER: So --

QUESTION: -- it would -- I would think it would be you all.

MR TONER: Sure. I mean, what we did was we specifically picked the legal office to do this because we didn't want -- we wanted an objective and unaffiliated body to look at the incident. And that's what they were able to do. As to your questions about what this person knew or what they didn't know, ultimately we have to take them at their word, that they don't remember who gave them the order. And as I said, if we come across more information that sheds light on that, we'll certainly pursue it.

QUESTION: Did you ever consider punishing the technician?

MR TONER: We have not, no.

QUESTION: And why not?

MR TONER: Well, again, because they were simply carrying out an order and they were not violating any existing regulations at the time.

QUESTION: So you're told. I mean, you're taking their word for it that they were carrying out an order.

MR TONER: We are.

QUESTION: And you have no proof of that.

MR TONER: We are.

QUESTION: Mark, I just --

QUESTION: Look, (inaudible).

QUESTION: You probably answered this before.

MR TONER: Independently. Please.

QUESTION: But did you say that that's the only time this happened? Was that -- like it's (inaudible) --

MR TONER: Well, I mean, Kirby spoke to this yesterday. We have no -- well, I don't want to say we have no capability, but unless you wanted us all to simply spend all of our time going through every --

QUESTION: Right. I mean, to the best of your knowledge, that's the only time?

MR TONER: No, right.

QUESTION: And also a clarification. You probably talked about it before when you explained it. Was that immediately after -- I mean, the day after, the day following? When did this happen?

MR TONER: I'm sorry, what --

QUESTION: When was it excised? When the -- when was it edited?

MR TONER: We believe it was the day of.

QUESTION: The day of.

MR TONER: And in terms of our knowledge -- to our knowledge, it has not happened before or since. But we have no way of answering that definitively, because we just don't have the manpower or the technology to go back and look at every videotape:

QUESTION: You don't have the what?

QUESTION: Mark --

QUESTION: I mean, you might not have the manpower, but you certainly have the technology, right?

MR TONER: I mean, we -- well, I mean, yes.

QUESTION: I mean --

MR TONER: We have YouTube.

QUESTION: If you want to spend like five weekends looking through --

MR TONER: Yes.

QUESTION: I mean, that's not -- was there any thought given --

MR TONER: I'll get to you.

QUESTION: Sorry. Was there any thought -- you just said you wanted an independent and objective, impartial look at this, and you went to the legal adviser. Why not the IG?

MR TONER: IG doesn't really do this. We talked about that, actually.

QUESTION: Oh, okay.

MR TONER: And they don't really do this.

QUESTION: Yesterday?

MR TONER: I mean, they do broader investigations.

QUESTION: You say that the person who originally ordered this cut didn't break any existing regulations at the time.

MR TONER: Yeah.

QUESTION: You've now -- you've since asked a lot of people whether they did it. They've all said no. If they were lying, would that be a breach of regulations?

MR TONER: That's --

QUESTION: To lie to this inquiry.

MR TONER: I mean, that's highly --

QUESTION: I mean, they're weren't under oath, but they --

MR TONER: I mean, it's a hypothetical.

QUESTION: They have a duty of honor.

QUESTION: Well, that's a reasonable question.

MR TONER: Sure.

QUESTION: Does the State Department have a rule against people lying to its own internal inquiries? Because if it doesn't, apparently it's a-okay to lie and maybe somebody will write a policy the first time you catch somebody doing it. So I mean, I think that's a very reasonable question. Do you have a policy against lying?

MR TONER: I don't know. I mean, I can't answer that definitively, that we --

QUESTION: But --

MR TONER: I assume we do, but I don't --

QUESTION: In the opinion of your office, is it -- is the person honor-bound to come forward? Enough time has been wasted, the person who ordered it knows they did it; do they have a duty to stop wasting everyone's time?

MR TONER: If somebody wants to come forward with that, then we would welcome that, obviously.

QUESTION: But do they have a -- are they honor-bound to do so? Is it the honest thing to do?

MR TONER: I mean, certainly, it's the ethical thing to do. But -- but --

QUESTION: Is the legal office an unaffiliated body? You said it was an unaffiliated --

MR TONER: Yes, it is. I mean, it's not connected to the Public Affairs -- I mean, it's obviously a State Department office, but they were able in this particular instance to play an objective role.

QUESTION: Why not do a truly independent investigation though, like bring in an outside counsel? Often companies, when they have issues, and sometimes they ask for a general counsel to investigate things. Other times they decide -- and I realize it costs money --

MR TONER: Right.

QUESTION: -- that you should have an independent law firm come in and figure out what happened, because there are no relationships, no conflicts of interest, no -- people are not all reporting --

MR TONER: Understood.

QUESTION: -- up to the Secretary of State.

MR TONER: Understood. We believe in this instance that the legal office was able to carry out an objective investigation.

QUESTION: Mark, how many people work for the Bureau of Public Affairs here?

MR TONER: I knew you were going to ask me a hard question like that. (Laughter.) I'll get the --

QUESTION: That seems to be pretty easy.

MR TONER: I know. I should know that off the top of my head. I'm going to casually look over here and ask Elizabeth.

MS TRUDEAU: About 300.

MR TONER: 300.

QUESTION: Have you interviewed all 300 of those individuals?

MR TONER: No, we have not.

QUESTION: And why not?

MR TONER: Again, I mean, they're all aware of the incident. And if they, as David offered --

QUESTION: They read the paper the next --

MR TONER: -- if they wanted to put -- step forward -- no, we only actually focused the investigation on those who would have been involved, and that is the people in the Office of Video Services.

QUESTION: And you're confident that it was someone from the Bureau of Public Affairs that made this request?

MR TONER: That's our -- again, recognizing that we only have the testimony of one person to go by, that is our understanding that that request came from elsewhere in the Bureau of Public Affairs. Correct.

QUESTION: And you only looked at the Office of Video Services? You didn't ask people outside like in the PA --

MR TONER: No, no, we did. As we --

QUESTION: Did you ask people in the PA front office --

MR TONER: Yes.

QUESTION: -- which is where authority is vested for PA's running, right?

MR TONER: Well, it's a different front office now, but yes.

QUESTION: No, no, I got that.

MR TONER: All these conversations were had, yes.

QUESTION: Following up on an earlier question that Arshad asked --

MR TONER: Yes.

QUESTION: -- couldn't you call the telephone company to figure out the records?

MR TONER: I'm not sure.

QUESTION: You said you would take --

QUESTION: How are you not sure?

MR TONER: I can look into it, but I'm not -- okay.

QUESTION: You said you would take the question about whether --

MR TONER: I will. I will take the question.

QUESTION: Whether the telephone company was called? Is that the question?

MR TONER: Whether we have records of phone -- phone records. I'm not --

QUESTION: And whether you tried to find them for this -- it's one day. You know the date.

MR TONER: I'm aware.

QUESTION: Given the inconclusive nature of the investigation by you and the Office of the Legal Adviser, why wasn't this matter referred to the State Department's Office of Inspector General?

MR TONER: Well, I just tried to answer this to Matt. The Inspector General's Office has a little bit of a different writ, if you will, and looks at broader issues or institutional processes. I mean, it does audits of embassies, it does audits of programs, it does audits -- this is a specific incident.

QUESTION: Email?

MR TONER: Now --

QUESTION: It doesn't do email as well?

MR TONER: Yeah. But I mean -- no, I mean, but in all honesty, we felt like this was a little too specific for their purview.

QUESTION: Couldn't his office choose to take it up, though? It's not just things you refer to him.

MR TONER: I'm -- I suppose they could, yeah.

QUESTION: Harf, Marie Harf. Did you ask her, as long as we're checking off names here?

MR TONER: Marie, and -- yes, and she said she also had no knowledge of this and certainly wouldn't have condoned it.

QUESTION: And finally, yesterday you stated that -- or excuse me, Admiral Kirby stated that both Ms. Nuland and Ms. Psaki did their jobs, quote, "credibly, honestly, and with integrity" on the relevant days in question. Given that it is the universal conclusion that one of those briefers spoke falsely from the podium on one of those days, it seems appropriate to ask you for the purposes of the record the same question Ms. Psaki was asked, quote: Is it the policy of the State Department where the preservation of the secrecy of secret negotiations is concerned to lie to achieve that goal? Because only if you could answer "yes" could you come to the conclusions you have about the job done by Ms. Nuland on that day.

MR TONER: No, I mean, I think if you ask Ms. Nuland, Toria – and certainly we have, and I've spoken with her personally about it – she had no knowledge at that date that we were conducting bilateral talks with Iran. And if you extrapolate or go forward in time to Jen Psaki's comments on that date, she was simply stating that sometimes negotiations – or, rather, diplomacy needs a level of secrecy. She wasn't condoning --

QUESTION: But that wasn't the false statement.

MR TONER: It wasn't a false statement.

QUESTION: Right, it was Ms. Nuland's statement that was false --

MR TONER: And I said she had no knowledge at the time that she made that comment that there were, in fact, negotiations going on with Iran.

QUESTION: But if she had no knowledge, why would she say they're not going on? Isn't proving a negative a little difficult?

MR TONER: Because she was speaking on what she knew. I mean – if – I mean, pick a issue. If you'd asked me what – I would certainly – I wouldn't offer that it was possibly happening if I – to the best of my knowledge I believed it wasn't, and that was her starting point.

QUESTION: Couldn't she say, "I'll find out?"

MR TONER: Look --

QUESTION: Can I ask to --

MR TONER: -- I'll let my statement stand.

QUESTION: Can I ask to clarify one important point here? You basically said your rule – you ruled out that the White House was involved, yet you have no idea who made the order. How do you rule out the White House?

MR TONER: I mean, look, Justin – I mean, we've taken it to the level that we've pursued this.

QUESTION: But you can't rule out the – look, the --

MR TONER: I can't rule out the --

QUESTION: You can't rule out the White House. Is that correct?

MR TONER: I mean, I can't rule out categorically that --

QUESTION: Santa Claus?

MR TONER: -- Santa Claus didn't call and order it.

QUESTION: Or the White House.

MR TONER: I mean --

QUESTION: You would agree with that statement?

MR TONER: I just can't definitively say that anyone -- what -- I mean, all we know and all I have shared --

QUESTION: Right. Well, that's why I'm asking, because you kind of -- yeah. I was just asking for clarification.

MR TONER: And I -- no, but I'm not --

QUESTION: Can't you say you'll find out?

MR TONER: That's right.

QUESTION: Yeah. I mean, are you interested in finding out, or is it just -- this is -- it is a done deal? I mean, is it just now you're going to treat it as water under the bridge? I don't understand why you're satisfied with the legal adviser's investigation that stopped with the person who actually just did it and on instruction from someone else, and you don't -- doesn't go any higher.

MR TONER: I mean, we've hit a dead end. Arshad's point notwithstanding that we could maybe unearth phone records and pursue that -- I don't know if that's even viable. But we've hit a dead end, and we're not an autocratic government that can force someone to say what we've -- what they've already offered. We -- this is -- this was a civil conversation with --

QUESTION: Right. Waterboarding is out of the question, I assume. (Laughter.)

QUESTION: And Mark, one of the reasons I ask about the White House is because it's important to note that Ben Rhodes has been sort of accused of trying to manipulate the press on the whole scope of the Iran negotiation. So I'd ask you this: Did you ask Ben Rhodes if he was -- if he made the call to edit the tape?

MR TONER: We, as we often do, have talked to our colleagues in the White House and the NSC about this and about a lot of issues. And look, I mean, that's a huge conclusion to jump to. We are at this point satisfied that this came with -- from within the bureau. We don't have any indication to believe that it came from outside the Public Affairs Bureau. If we get an indication that that was the case, then we'll pursue that. But at this point we don't have that, so all we're doing based on that knowledge is taking steps, moving forward to put in place procedures and regulations that will keep this from happening in the future.

QUESTION: Mark, are all --

QUESTION: And can I just -- can I just repeat my appeal -- my plea for the --

MR TONER: Yeah.

QUESTION: -- to get the new guidance, the new regulation?

MR TONER: Of course, yeah. I think we can share that.

QUESTION: Mark, are all of your talking points here at the State Department scrubbed by the White House when it comes to the subject of Iran?

MR TONER: No. No, but we often share with them, I mean, and they share theirs with ours. We often talk about -- whether it's Iran or any issue, as much as possible we try to share information.

QUESTION: Is it just a coincidence that this particular exchange between my colleague James Rosen and Jen Psaki was on the subject of Iran?

MR TONER: Oh, I have no idea whether it's coincidental or not. I just don't know.

QUESTION: One more thing on this.

MR TONER: Yeah, sure.

QUESTION: According to the Foreign Affairs Manual, it is the Telecommunications and Wireless and Data Services Division of the IRM Bureau that is responsible for -- or maybe IRM is a subset of another bureau -- but that is responsible for -- but I thought they were their own -- is responsible for telecoms for the department. Do you know if the Legal Adviser's Office went to IRM to say, "Hey, do we have these records?"

MR TONER: I don't. I'll have to check.

QUESTION: Okay. Can you take that one?

MR TONER: Sure.

QUESTION: And then also if you can see if there are records -- I mean, it may be they don't keep them for three years. I have no idea. Maybe they keep them for five, maybe they keep them for six months. I don't know. But if you can check how long they keep records if they keep them.

QUESTION: Can we move on?

QUESTION: Wait, I've just got -- I just want to make sure I got this from yesterday and also from today, and that is the conclusion that you have reached based on the limited investigation that has been completed so far is that this stuff was deliberately removed or edited out because of what the content was; is that correct?

QUESTION: (Inaudible) was too long.

MR TONER: Given --

QUESTION: Based on what you know --

MR TONER: Based on what we know, yes, that is accurate.

QUESTION: And --

MR TONER: Because it was a particular piece of the -- of the video that was removed, a particular exchange.

QUESTION: And because of that you have reached the -- there is no other reason that you have reached that conclusion? The only reason that you've reached that conclusion is that it's just that one part?

MR TONER: That's right.

QUESTION: And do you think, or is there a sense in the building, that what was said in that edited portion was somehow embarrassing or incorrect or --

MR TONER: No. And in fact, I mean, so two points on that. One is even though that portion was excised or edited, it was always available on DVIDS, the digital --

QUESTION: Right. Which makes it -- which would --

MR TONER: The Defense Video and Imagery Distribution System. So --

QUESTION: Which would make it -- if it was an attempt to hide something -- a particularly inept attempt.

MR TONER: Precisely.

QUESTION: Sloppy.

MR TONER: Which --

QUESTION: And really kind of stupid. So --

MR TONER: And secondly -- and secondly, we didn't view the exchange to be all that sensitive.

QUESTION: Precisely. I was sitting here in this same seat when it happened, and I didn't think much of it at the time. So I don't understand --

MR TONER: So what that begs the question is the rationale behind this, and I just don't have a good answer for you, Matt. I just don't.

QUESTION: All right.

Washington Examiner (Harf), June 2, 2016 [LINK]

Second ex-State Dept. spokeswoman denies pushing for Iran video edits

BYLINE: Susan Crabtree, Susan Crabtree, Political Correspondent

Marie Harf, a top adviser to Secretary of State John Kerry, said Wednesday that she is not responsible for pushing to selectively edit a State Department briefing video in 2013 to delete a discussion about the Iran nuclear agreement, and has no knowledge about who made that decision.

Harf is Kerry's senior adviser for strategic communications, and previously served as State's acting spokeswoman and deputy spokesman when the video edit was made. Harf joins her former colleague, White House Communications Director Jen Psaki, in denying involvement in the purposeful decision to edit the video, an act that the State Department confirmed on Wednesday.

"As Jen tweeted yesterday, I also had no knowledge of nor would I have approved of this editing," Harf told the Washington Examiner in an email. "I have no idea who asked for the editing of the tape."

Psaki was a spokeswoman for the State Department in 2013 and Harf was her deputy, when a video was quietly edited to remove a portion of a press briefing dealing with the timing of when negotiations began with the Iran deal. Harf is now in charge of ongoing communications at State about the Iran deal.

Three weeks ago, State said the video appeared to be missing because of a "glitch." But on Wednesday, current State Department spokesman John Kirby admitted that an official in the Bureau of Public Affairs directed the video to be edited. But he said it isn't clear who did it or why.

The clip that went missing includes Psaki's response to Fox news reporter James Rosen's questions about when negotiations began with Iranian officials and whether that diplomacy began in 2012 or 2013, as the State Department had previously stated. Rosen asked Psaki if officials ever lied about those sorts of things to protect national security.

"James, I think there are times where diplomacy needs privacy in order to progress. This is a good example of that," Psaki replied in the now-restored video.

Psaki has strongly denied ordering the video to be edited, arguing that she has been a strong advocate for providing greater information to the press, both in the White House and at State.

"I had no knowledge of nor would I have approved any form of editing or cutting my briefing transcript on any subject while [at] @StateDept," she tweeted Wednesday.

In a separate response to the Examiner, Psaki added, "I believe deeply in providing the press as much information on important issues as possible."

A government official close to the issue said "poor judgment" within the department likely made it possible for the request to be made and then approved, and said Psaki was unaware of the video was edited at all until it was raised recently.

The official said while at State, Psaki was an advocate for getting the press more access to top officials, and supported briefing the press about U.S. talks with Iran.

Fox News – Fox & Friends (Kirby), June 2, 2016 [LINK]

***Note: Rough transcript. Verify any quotes with video footage at link.*

KILMEADE: I know it was a tough day for you and it doesn't reflect on you what happened in the past but I'm surprised there isn't going to be a further investigation about who made the call to the editor to edit out that section of the public record.

A/S KIRBY: Well, we took this seriously for one. And actually, before I answer your question, I want to thank James Rosen, your correspondent, for bringing this to my attention. Because if he hadn't a couple of weeks ago, I would have never known that this occurred. So first of all, kudos to him. He's a journalist I have great respect for, so I thank him for that. Number two, we take it seriously and we did talk to the technician on duty that day and who was asked to make this cut. The call that came into her was a call from somebody else passing on a request from another official. That's why -- it was too removed.

Now another thing, I didn't say yesterday that everything was over. I said that we looked at this. Now, if additional information comes into light that's going to compel me to go into more detail or to look at it further I'll do that. I'm not afraid to do that at all. What I said to my staff yesterday was this was inappropriate. And this isn't the way we're going to behave. What I'm focused on now as the spokesman is we're going to put in a policy -- did it yesterday -- a policy that will prevent this from happening again. Another thing I want to say, this video that was edited was a video we put on our YouTube channel. There was still a full video of it existing on another official website, the defense video information website, as well as the transcript -- written transcript was never edited. So the only one that was -- and I'm not mitigating or making excuses -- but the only one that was edited was the one that went on the YouTube channel.

TUCKER CARLSON: Admiral, it was still an attempt of course to eliminate history --

A/S KIRBY: Of course.

CARLSON: -- and James Rosen found this out by accident. He asked a producer to pull it off of the website and he found it out by accident. I mean, how many other videos have been edited under Jen Psaki's tenure. Have you looked into that?

A/S KIRBY: No there is not, Tucker. The short answer to your question, I don't know. I don't know that's any way I can know. I don't have the time or the resources or the man power to go back and look at every single press briefing over the last three or four years. I don't know that would be a useful use of taxpayer dollars. What I can tell you is I'm focused on going forward. And going forward we'll make sure that this kind of thing can never happen again.

CARLSON: But asked the editor who -- I mean, you know the person who erased this clip. Have you asked that person, did you erase anything else?

A/S KIRBY: I can't talk about the details of the discussion that was had with her. Because it was done through our Office of the Legal Adviser. Our focus was really on this particular instance. And making sure that we tried to go as far as we could knowing what happened in this particular case.

EARHARDT: In this particular case, did the editor remember who called her and directed her to do this?

A/S KIRBY: she did not. She did not know who called –

EARHARDT: Does that mean because she gets the calls all the time? They're too many for her to remember this one in particular?

A/S KIRBY: I don't think that's the case, no.

EARHARDT: Why couldn't she remember? If she remembered deleting it, why couldn't she remember who gave her the direction?

KILMEADE: Because there are only a few people who have the power to edit out the record.

A/S KIRBY: Look, I was as curious about this as you were and as James was. That's why I wanted the Office of the Legal Adviser to look at this. I took this seriously. I can't speak for the memory of this individual. This happened three years ago and I just can't speak for what she remembered or didn't remember. All she remembered was that it was a request passed on -- the caller was passing on the request from somebody else in my bureau, in the Public Affairs bureau. And again, we don't find that acceptable.

CARLSON: Since you're the spokesperson, what do you think of Jen Psaki's admission in the tape, yes, sometimes you have to lie from the podium. Do you agree with that? Do you lie from the podium?

A/S KIRBY: First of all, no, we don't lie. That's a key tenet of being a spokesman, you can't lie. The moment you do that, your credibility, your authenticity goes down the toilet. That's not what Jen said in that clip. She didn't say it was okay to lie, but she said that diplomacy needs privacy sometimes to be effective. And that's actually true. A lot of what our diplomats do around the world, believe me as a spokesman coming over from the Pentagon, one of the frustrating things is that I would love to talk about the great work our ambassadors are doing around the world, but sometimes that has to remain private so that result can happen. She didn't say she lied or anybody lied.

KILMEADE: Rick Grenell told us – he was a spokesperson at the State Department before. He told us this a half hour ago.

CLIP – RICHARD GRENELL: There's a cover-up going on right now. You don't get to just say that a violation of a Federal Records Act is a done deal, oh we're already done, forget it, we're not moving on. This not what happens. This is about credibility of government.

KILMEADE: Is there a cover-up?

A/S KIRBY: No, there's no cover-up. Not at all. I think you guys know me well enough to know that I would never abide by any such thing. As I said, we interviewed this individual. We tried to find out what happened. Where I am now is where I was yesterday. We just don't know who made the request and why. But if additional information were to come to light that would change our understanding of the events, I would look at it deeper.

KILMEADE: How firm were you when you said, I need a name, I imagine if someone said I forgot, I don't know that would suffice for you.

A/S KIRBY: Well, listen, I did not get involved in the particular line of questioning. I wanted somebody outside my bureau to look at this. I wanted an independent view of what happened. So it wouldn't be done by the chain of command, that's something I brought with me from the military days. You want somebody unbiased and outside your chain of command to look at it and that's why I asked our legal shop to do it for you.

KILMEADE: So good of you to get up and try to shed some more light on this story. Thanks so much.

A/S KIRBY: I'm happy to do it. Thanks, guys.

Daily Press Briefing, June 1, 2016 [\[LINK\]](#)

QUESTION: There were a couple questions yesterday that I wanted to close off. First, has there been any conclusion on missing tape from – I think it was a December 2013 briefing. When it was posted online, it had a few minutes that were cut out of it. Has there been any resolution on how that happened?

MR KIRBY: Yes, and thank you for that question, Brad. As many of you know – and I want to be specific on this, so I'm going to refer to my notes a little bit – as many of you know, and as some of you have brought to our attention, a portion of the State Department's December 2nd, 2013 press briefing was missing from the video that we posted on our YouTube account and on our website. That missing portion covered a series of questions about U.S. negotiations with Iran. When alerted to this, I immediately directed the video to be restored in its entirety with the full and complete copy that exists and had existed since the day of the briefing on the Defense Video and Imagery Distribution System website, otherwise known as DVIDS.

I also verified that the full transcript of the briefing, which we also post on our website, was intact and had been so since the date of the briefing. I asked the Office of the Legal Adviser to look at this, including a look at any rules that we had in place. In so doing, they learned that a specific request was made to excise that portion of the briefing. We do not know who made the request to edit the video or why it was made.

To my surprise, the Bureau of Public Affairs did not have in place any rules governing this type of action. Therefore, we are taking immediate steps to craft appropriate protocols on this issue as we believe that deliberately removing a portion of the video was not and is not in keeping with the State Department's commitment to transparency and public accountability.

QUESTION: Do you --

MR KIRBY: I'm not -- let me just finish.

QUESTION: Sorry, I didn't know.

MR KIRBY: I got a little bit more. No, sorry.

QUESTION: It was a dramatic pause. Excuse me.

MR KIRBY: No, I was just turning the page. (Laughter.) Specifically, we are going to make clear that all video and transcripts from daily press briefings will be immediately and permanently archived in their entirety, and that in the unlikely event that narrow, compelling circumstances require edits to be made, such as the inadvertent release of privacy-protected information, they will only be made with the express permission of the assistant secretary of state for public affairs and with an appropriate level of annotation and disclosure. I have communicated this new policy to my staff and it takes effect immediately.

QUESTION: Do you know when the edit -- or the cut, I should say -- occurred? Was it some point afterwards? Was it the same day?

MR KIRBY: To the best of our knowledge the edit was done the same day.

QUESTION: And how do you know that it was deliberately removed, as you said?

MR KIRBY: As I understand it, the request was made -- again, back in 2013 -- over the phone.

QUESTION: Ah.

MR KIRBY: The recipient of the call, who is one of the editors, does not remember anything other than that the caller was passing on a request from somewhere else in the bureau.

QUESTION: And are you doing any -- I mean, there would -- as you said, there was no rules about this, but are you nevertheless investigating further to figure out who did this and why?

MR KIRBY: The short answer, Brad, is no. As I said, there were no rules in place at the time to govern this sort of action. So while I believe it was an inappropriate step to take, I see little foundation for pressing forward with a formal investigation. My focus as the assistant secretary going forward is going to be making sure that we have in place clear policies and procedures that prevent this sort of thing from happening again.

QUESTION: Is there any way -- can I follow up on this? Is there any way for you to track all the phone calls that were made to the individual who received that request on that date? And if so, did you try to -- did the Office of the Legal Adviser try to do that so as to establish who may have made the request?

MR KIRBY: I know of no such technology here that exists that would allow you to do that. And no, that effort was not pursued. Again, it's important to remember there were no rules governing this sort of action in the past. So again, I find no reason to press forward with a more formal or deeper investigation. What matters to me – and I take it seriously – is our commitment to transparency and disclosure, and so we're going to make sure – again, I communicated this this morning to the staff – we're going to make sure that this kind of thing can't happen again.

QUESTION: No, I get that. I guess clearly somebody, however, is not as committed to transparency and disclosure as you are, and because it affected a very sensitive matter – not merely the Iran nuclear negotiations but, more importantly, whether a previous person at that podium spoke truthfully – I wonder why you are not making a greater effort to find out who sought to bowdlerize the record.

MR KIRBY: Well --

QUESTION: Even if there weren't rules, it's – it stands to common sense and your own inclinations that you be transparent. So I don't understand why you wouldn't try to find out who tried to subvert what has historically been the transparency of the department in these matters.

MR KIRBY: But we did. We tried. And, I mean, that's why I asked the Office of the Legal Adviser to look at this. I wanted somebody outside the bureau to take an independent look at it, and they did, and they – they tried to pursue it. But, I mean, it was three years ago, and the individual who took the call just simply doesn't have a better memory of it. And there were no rules, no regulations in place that prohibited this. So I feel like we did due diligence, we did take a look at this, we did try to find out what happened.

And, frankly, we did learn quite a bit, right? We learned that there was a deliberate request – that this wasn't a technical glitch; this was a deliberate request to excise video. And as I said, I – and I said it this morning to the staff: I don't find that to be an appropriate step to take. So again, my focus is going to be on the future and making sure that we have the right rules in place to make sure it doesn't happen again.

QUESTION: John --

QUESTION: One other one from me to just --

QUESTION: -- has there been any conclusion with regard to --

QUESTION: One other one from me, please. Do you believe, going back to the issue of transparency and your commitment to it – as you're aware, the excised portion was with regard to a previous State Department briefing in which the spokesperson was asked whether there were secret negotiations underway between the United States and Iran, and replied no. Were they telling the truth? Were they being transparent and accurate when they made that statement?

MR KIRBY: I'm not going to re-litigate past briefings. The excised portion, though, was not – you're talking about the – you're talking about an exchange with who was then the spokesman at the time, Ms. Nuland, who was asked that specific question --

QUESTION: Correct.

MR KIRBY: -- and whose answer was no.

QUESTION: And the excised portion --

MR KIRBY: The excised portion was --

QUESTION: -- dealt with --

MR KIRBY: -- was a year or so -- almost a year later.

QUESTION: Right, but it was about the previous -- it was about the prior briefing.

MR KIRBY: It was about that previous exchange.

QUESTION: Correct.

MR KIRBY: Yeah. I'm sorry, I lost the question again.

QUESTION: Well, the question is: Was the prior spokesperson -- not the one whose --

MR KIRBY: Portion was excised.

QUESTION: -- words were excised, but the other one -- telling the truth about when they said no, there were no -- I think the exact quote was, "No." They were asked are there secret negotiations between the United States and Iran on the nuclear issue and the answer was no.

MR KIRBY: I have -- again -- I've only been at the State Department a year, so I can't speak to events as they developed well before I got here. But I have been preceded in this job by two extraordinary spokespeople who are people of character and integrity and extremely professional in the conduct of their duties, and I have no doubt that on both of the previous occasions that we're talking about that they were doing their jobs credibly, honestly, and with integrity.

QUESTION: Can I just ask if there were any other -- this example was only discovered by, I think, the reporter who asked the question --

MR KIRBY: Yeah.

QUESTION: -- back in 2013. So have you asked and found out if there were other examples? Was this a regular thing, going back and changing videos?

MR KIRBY: We -- I'm not aware of any other instance where this happened before.

QUESTION: Okay.

MR KIRBY: But I can't tell you with great certainty, Brad, that it never happened before. I'm not aware of any.

QUESTION: Okay.

MR KIRBY: And I don't have -- we don't have the time or the resources to go back and look at every single briefing from the past. But I'm not aware of any.

QUESTION: Can we just -- last thing on this -- clarify with regard to -- has there been any conclusion with regard to what the motivation was for excising?

MR KIRBY: No. As I said at the top, we don't know who made the request and we don't know why.

QUESTION: But I know we don't know who, but I mean, we know what was taken out.

MR KIRBY: I don't know.

QUESTION: Do we know why it would've been taken out?

MR KIRBY: I do not know.

QUESTION: And do you --

QUESTION: And just to clarify, it's back? It's back?

MR KIRBY: I'm sorry?

QUESTION: Just to clarify, the video is back on the website?

MR KIRBY: It is. It is.

QUESTION: Can I change the subject.

MR KIRBY: I think Arshad had one more.

QUESTION: Do you know why the request was exceeded -- was acceded to? I mean, why wasn't there pushback like, "No, the State Department has for many, many years now put out honest, faithful transcriptions and video of what transpires in the briefing." Do you -- did you ask the person who took the call, "Hey, why didn't say, 'No, we don't do that?'"

MR KIRBY: I -- because there were no rules in place, I'm going to -- I'm -- there were no rules in place prohibiting it, so I'm really not able to get into any more detail in terms of the decision process that went on when the request was made. All I can go back and tell you is that looking at it from my vantage point, this was not an appropriate step to take and we're going to make sure that it doesn't happen again.

QUESTION: But John, how can you know about the decision -- I mean, I understand that you don't want to talk about it, but how can you know about the decision-making process on how it was decided and not know who asked for the request to be made?

MR KIRBY: Because the individual who was in receipt of the request does not remember. I mean, it was three years ago. Does not remember --

QUESTION: There's no record of an email exchange?

MR KIRBY: As far as I know and as far as I understand it, after talking to the Office of the Legal Advisor who looked into this for me, this was -- this request was made over the phone.

QUESTION: But this -- there's no proof? I mean, it's a little strange. Somebody -- so the person you spoke to admitted cutting it from the tape and said somebody they can't remember told them to do that. They didn't know their position, how senior they were, have any indication of their authority to ask them that --

MR KIRBY: Well, as I said --

QUESTION: -- and then they just said, "Well, I did it, but somebody I can't remember told me to do it."

MR KIRBY: As I said --

QUESTION: That seems a little fishy, right?

MR KIRBY: The recipient doesn't remember anything other than that the caller was passing on a request from somewhere else in the bureau. And that's -- that's --

QUESTION: In what bureau?

MR KIRBY: That is the most information that we were able to glean.

QUESTION: Wait, wait, wait. You said -- I'm sorry, I don't remember if you said this before, but you said a request was made from someone in the bureau. So it was made from someone in PA?

MR KIRBY: Was as -- the recipient of the call doesn't remember anything other than that the caller -- the individual who called this technician -- was passing on a request from someone else in the Public Affairs Bureau.

QUESTION: From what you're aware of it was a one-of-a-kind request, and would the editor forget a one-of-a-kind request? I mean, as I understand, you're saying you're not aware of any other occasions --

MR KIRBY: Look, all I can do is tell you what the individual, when asked, could remember. I mean, I can't do more than that. And again, this happened three years ago.

QUESTION: Well, did the legal -- did the legal advisor ask other then-top officials in PA whether they made that request?

MR KIRBY: I'm not going to get into the specific details about --

QUESTION: Well, but it does go to what's— how — how thorough the investigation on this was.

MR KIRBY: This wasn't an investigation. Remember, Elise, there were no rules governing this.

QUESTION: Just — c'mon, John. Just because there were no rules governing taking out a public briefing and editing it doesn't mean that it was the right thing to do.

MR KIRBY: There were no rules --

QUESTION: So I'm sorry that there were no rules, but I don't really think that just because there's no rule on certain things doesn't — and you've said from this podium there was no rule on Secretary Clinton not using emails, but it was the wrong thing to do. So I don't think that --

MR KIRBY: And as I've said, I don't find this to be the appropriate step to have taken either. But I asked the Office of the Legal Advisor to look into this; they did. They pursued it for me, and we got about as far as we can go. The individual who took the call doesn't remember anything more than that it was being passed on from somebody else in the Public Affairs Bureau. I don't — I cannot be any more specific than that right now.

And what my focus is — as I said, I acknowledge that that step — and I don't know what the motivation was, but it wasn't an appropriate step to take. It's not, as I said, in keeping with our obligations to be transparent and to be publicly accountable for the information that comes from this podium as well as all the other means of information that we distribute here at the State Department.

So what I'm going to do is put in place — I mean, I already have starting this morning, but I'm going to further look at the potential for crafting specific language that we can put in the Foreign Affairs Manual so that we can institutionalize an approach to this that prevents it from happening again. My focus has got to be on making sure that going forward we can prevent this from happening again.

Daily Press Briefing, May 31, 2016 [\[LINK\]](#)

QUESTION: Two — two, again, very brief follow-ups. And again, I don't know if these have been asked while I was away. One, did anyone ever get to the bottom of that gap in the briefing video?

MR KIRBY: Not yet, but we are working on it. And --

QUESTION: Yeah. So how long does it take to clear this up?

MR KIRBY: I suspect that very soon we'll be able to let you know what was learned.

QUESTION: Okay. Very soon, like this week?

MR KIRBY: Very — very soon.

QUESTION: Like, this week?

MR KIRBY: Potentially this week.

QUESTION: Okay.

QUESTION: Is it still your belief what you previously said, that this was a glitch? Is that still your belief?

MR KIRBY: Again, we're -- I think we'll have more to say on this a little bit later. So I don't want to get ahead of that. Why don't we just -- let me get to the end of the process here, and then we'll come back and let you know what we've learned.

Daily Press Briefing, May 13, 2016 [\[LINK\]](#)

QUESTION: And then the last one is completely unrelated but it goes back to the subject we've been talking about for several days this week, which is the glitch, the quote/unquote "glitch" in the briefing video, that we were told there's a look into what happened, how this happened, if it was done intentionally, if it was content-related, if it was audio gap-related, whatever.

MR KIRBY: Right.

QUESTION: Has -- have you guys come to a determination of how exactly this happened?

MR KIRBY: No, we haven't, Matt. But I can tell you -- and I say this as not just the spokesman for the department, but the assistant secretary of state for public affairs, that I'm very concerned by this, and I have every intention of making sure that we look into it thoroughly and try to get answers as best we can about what happened here. We have an obligation to be transparent and to be fully so, and I take that very, very seriously. So we are still looking at it. I don't have an answer for you as to what exactly happened.

QUESTION: But from what you know so far, is there -- do you have any reason to believe that this was done intentionally because of the content of what the -- what the (inaudible)?

MR KIRBY: I do not -- I don't have enough information right now to say one way or the other.

QUESTION: All right. Any idea --

MR KIRBY: And I'm not -- and I don't want to get ahead of a process.

QUESTION: Any idea when this -- when you might be -- when whoever is looking at it might be finished with it?

MR KIRBY: I do not. I don't.

Daily Press Briefing, May 12, 2016 [\[LINK\]](#)

QUESTION: I need to ask you one more time: Have you all gotten to the bottom of the glitch in the video of the -- of the briefing?

MS TRUDEAU: So we continue to take a look at it. We take this seriously. What we're doing is not only reviewing what happened in the past but also ensuring that we can guarantee that transparency going forward, so we're in discussions now. I don't have a final readout to give you guys.

QUESTION: And has -- in the course of the review or whatever you want to call it, however you want to describe it, has -- have there been any other similar instances?

MS TRUDEAU: We have not located any similar incidents.

QUESTION: But have people looked?

MS TRUDEAU: So people are continuing to review it. It's a big archive, yeah.

QUESTION: Right, no kidding. I know.

MS TRUDEAU: But no, we are.

QUESTION: It's --

QUESTION: And have you -- have you -- is it still your view, as it was yesterday, that it was a glitch?

MS TRUDEAU: At this stage we know -- and as Fox News pointed out -- that there was -- there were minutes missing on that. As soon as we found out, we flipped it over. As I said before, the transcript was available, the video was available on other U.S. Government platforms. I can't speak to what happened. I'm not at that point yet, but --

QUESTION: No, no, I know. But yesterday and the day before --

MS TRUDEAU: Yeah.

QUESTION: -- you told us it was a glitch, and I'm wondering if that's still your view.

MS TRUDEAU: It's still my view right now.

QUESTION: Okay.

MS TRUDEAU: So -- but again, we continue to take a look at it. We take it seriously.

Okay, thanks.

QUESTION: Can I -- I'll just wait.

MS TRUDEAU: Okay. Thank you, guys.

Daily Press Briefing, May 11, 2016 [\[LINK\]](#)

QUESTION: Yesterday you intimated that there would be some kind of looking at or review – you didn't want to use the word "investigation," but – into what happened with this video – the video of the briefing in question. Has that – have you determined – have you been able to figure out what exactly --

MS TRUDEAU: Yeah, we're still looking into it. We continue to take a look at our process at that time and also making sure that something like that obviously never happens again. I would reiterate video is – was always available. It's back up now on state.gov. We annotated it on our YouTube channel, so it's been resolved, but we do take it seriously and we're looking.

QUESTION: Well, is – I mean, is there any suspicion that you're aware of that this was not some – it was not simply a "glitch," quote-unquote --

MS TRUDEAU: Thanks for the air quotes.

QUESTION: -- that you --

MS TRUDEAU: At this stage we believe it was a glitch, but we're double-checking and making sure because we have that commitment.

QUESTION: Okay. So do you have any idea how long it will take?

MS TRUDEAU: To be honest, I think people are talking about it now. As soon as I have an update, I'll come back to you.

QUESTION: Thank you.

Daily Press Briefing, May 10, 2016 [\[LINK\]](#)

QUESTION: All right. And then the last one, which is a logistical thing, which is this – the report that the video of a briefing from a couple years back with Jen Psaki was edited to remove questions and her answers about when the Iran negotiations began. What's going on here?

MS TRUDEAU: Yeah, so we saw that report. We actually spoke to Fox about this yesterday, so thanks for that question. I'd back up. The – this is a daily press briefing from 2013. The transcript of that daily press briefing and video was always available – transcript was on state.gov; the video was available on other sites. There was a glitch in the State Department video. When Fox flagged it for us, we actually replaced it with a video from DVIDS, which is

the military repository where a lot of news media gets its video. The whole video was there, and we also annotated it on our YouTube channel.

QUESTION: Yeah, but that -- I mean, a glitch? That just seems awfully strange and coincidental that this --

MS TRUDEAU: Yeah. The transcript was always up, though --

QUESTION: Yeah, but the --

MS TRUDEAU: -- and the video existed on other channels. I can't speak to --

QUESTION: Right, but if you were looking on the state.gov website and going to try to watch that part of the briefing, it wouldn't have been there.

MS TRUDEAU: So the briefing was there. As I said, the full transcript was there.

QUESTION: No -- yeah, but several minutes were, like, missing.

MS TRUDEAU: Yeah. No, and so we have subbed it out.

QUESTION: I know, but can you -- is anyone looking into why?

MS TRUDEAU: So we are. We're looking into it. Genuinely we think it was a glitch, so --

QUESTION: (Inaudible) do you think that -- I mean, are there other briefing videos that are -- have been --

MS TRUDEAU: Not to our knowledge at all. But it's -- what we're taking a look at is process. We were unaware of it, and as soon as we found about it we made sure it was whole.

QUESTION: Okay. But is there any indication that you -- since you -- since this was brought to your attention, I guess yesterday -- yeah -- have you discovered that it was altered at all?

MS TRUDEAU: I -- not to my knowledge. There was a missing portion of it. We pulled it from another online source that this --

QUESTION: I get that, but I'm trying to figure out how exactly the portion that was missing --

MS TRUDEAU: I -- you know what, it's something we're looking into.

[...]

QUESTION: Could I just go back --

MS TRUDEAU: Of course.

QUESTION: -- to the transcript -- I mean the video -- please?

MS TRUDEAU: Yeah. Sure.

QUESTION: Is someone looking into this --

MS TRUDEAU: Yeah.

QUESTION: -- to see whether -- what exactly happened in this case and also to make sure --

MS TRUDEAU: Yeah.

QUESTION: -- that it is not --

MS TRUDEAU: Yeah.

QUESTION: -- that there aren't other videos that are --

MS TRUDEAU: Yeah. It is. We've changed our procedures. And this is so technical, and forgive me for this -- we've changed our procedures on that, but we are taking a look at it. Certainly, transparency and getting information to you guys, not only here in the briefing room but on the web and searchable, is a priority for us. And so absolutely.

QUESTION: All right. So when --

QUESTION: So if the investigation finds that someone deliberately cut that section, that person would face disciplinary procedures?

MS TRUDEAU: I'm not going to get ahead of it. We just found out. We made it whole.

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

MS TRUDEAU: We'll take a look at it.

Okay.

QUESTION: Well, could you -- when you're done with this -- and not you personally, but whoever's looking into it --

MS TRUDEAU: In my free time. (Laughter.)

QUESTION: Yes, on weekends -- can you let us know what the result of the investigation is?

MS TRUDEAU: Yeah. If there is any update, I absolutely will. And I don't want to call it an investigation, because that makes it formal. What I'm -- what we're looking at is what happened.

QUESTION: Well, exactly.

MS TRUDEAU: Yeah.

QUESTION: Well, we would like to know what happened too.

MS TRUDEAU: Yeah.

QUESTION: So can you let us know when you find out what happened?

MS TRUDEAU: As always.

QUESTION: And hopefully this will be, like -- not going to take a year?

MS TRUDEAU: Yeah, I think it's -- yeah. I would characterize it as a glitch.

QUESTION: Is Public Affairs looking into it, or --

MS TRUDEAU: The department is.

Okay.

QUESTION: Has a similar glitch happened in the past?

MS TRUDEAU: Not to my knowledge at all.

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**DEPARTMENT OF STATE REVIEW OF DECEMBER 2, 2013 DAILY
PRESS BRIEFING VIDEO FOOTAGE****I. INTRODUCTION & SUMMARY**

The Department of State publishes written transcripts and videos of its daily press briefings. Transcripts are made available on state.gov, and videos are made available through multiple distribution channels and locations, including state.gov, YouTube, and an online repository called the Defense Video and Imagery Distribution System (DVIDS). In May 2016, the Department became aware that approximately nine minutes of footage concerning Iran were missing from the state.gov and YouTube versions of the daily press briefing video from December 2, 2013. A momentary white flash had been inserted in its place. The full transcript of the briefing had always been available on state.gov, and the complete video had always been available on DVIDS.

The Department conducted factfinding to determine what occurred, and in particular to determine if content was removed from selected parts of the public record in an effort to obscure it. The Department spoke with over 30 individuals and reviewed numerous email accounts to identify potentially relevant information. The Department has briefed the Office of Inspector General on its review and findings.

After extensive interviews and document review, the facts surrounding this matter remain partially unclear and the Department is unable to draw definitive conclusions. Nevertheless, the Department can conclude that the YouTube and state.gov versions of the December 2, 2013, daily press briefing video likely were deliberately edited: the white flash is evidence of deliberate editing and a video technician recalls making the edit. However, the Department has not found any evidence to support a conclusion that the video was edited to hide any content. Because the content reflects an exchange that took place in front of the State Department press corps and was reported on almost immediately by the press, any attempt to obscure the content would have been futile. The uninterrupted availability of the full record transcript and DVIDS video also suggests that the YouTube and state.gov versions of the video were not edited in an effort to hide information. The Department cannot rule out the possibility that the white flash was inserted into the YouTube and state.gov versions of the video in place of technically corrupted footage in those versions.

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Prior to the Department's review of this matter, the Department lacked a policy to prohibit making edits to press briefing footage to obscure content. In June 2016, the Bureau of Public Affairs adopted a policy that makes clear that content-driven editing of the daily press briefing video is not condoned or permitted, absent exceptional circumstances—even if that may not be what occurred here.

II. BACKGROUND

On May 9, 2016, a reporter informed the Department that footage was missing from the Department's daily press briefing video from December 2, 2013. The footage concerned Iran. Reporters questioned whether the footage had been removed to hide it.

The Bureau of Public Affairs (PA) looked into the matter and confirmed that approximately nine minutes of footage were missing from the versions of the briefing video posted on YouTube and on state.gov. See Tab I for a transcript of the missing footage.¹ PA also determined that the entire briefing video was available on another public video repository, the Defense Video and Imagery Distribution System (DVIDS), which is the Department's normal repository for broadcast-quality videos of daily press briefings. PA also determined that the entire official transcript of the briefing was available on state.gov. PA immediately replaced the shortened version of the video on state.gov with the full-length video, and added an annotation to the YouTube video that provided a link to the full-length version on state.gov.

On May 11, a technician in PA's Office of Digital Engagement reported a recollection of making an edit to a video of that daily press briefing in response to a request over the phone from elsewhere in PA. The technician could not, however, remember who made the request.

Soon thereafter, the Department conducted a preliminary inquiry to see if there had been any wrongdoing, including by interviewing the technician and reviewing relevant law, regulations, and directives. The preliminary inquiry concluded that no rules had been broken in posting the edited video. Moreover, as noted above, the DVIDS video and the full written transcript was always publicly available.

¹ The media have focused on the omission of one exchange between the Spokesperson and a Fox News reporter concerning past statements about negotiations with Iran. However, that exchange is not the only content missing from the video: the nine-minute gap covered several exchanges, not exclusively with Fox News. See Tab I. Further, the exchanges were on various aspects of the nuclear deal with Iran, many of which (including meetings in Oman that led up to the negotiations) had been briefed previously.

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Nevertheless, the Department determined that deliberate, content-driven edits to daily press videos generally should be prohibited in the future. On June 1, Assistant Secretary Kirby announced a policy, formally circulated to the PA bureau via email on June 2, that "all video and transcripts from daily press briefings will be immediately and permanently uploaded in their entirety on publicly accessible platforms", and that "[i]n the unlikely event that narrow, compelling circumstances require edits to be made, such as the inadvertent release of privacy-protected or classified national security information, they will only be made with the express permission of the Assistant Secretary...and with an appropriate level of annotation and disclosure." See Tab 2.

At the request of the Secretary, the Department subsequently conducted a broader review of the matter, which is summarized in this report.

III. FINDINGS & CONCLUSIONS

Following are the key findings and conclusions of the Department's review of this matter. In addition, based on interviews and the documentary record, the Department has prepared a rough chronology of likely events surrounding the creation, processing, and distribution of the video. See Tab 3 for an approximate timeline.

Full Record Transcript and Full Video Always Available. The full record transcript and full video of the December 2, 2013, daily press briefing were always available to the public. In addition, the exchange at the press briefing took place before the press corps and was reported on almost immediately.² The written transcript of a daily press briefing is reflected in the applicable Department records disposition schedule as the permanent record of the briefing. As described above, until June 2016, the Department did not have a rule or policy prohibiting the editing of daily press briefing videos for content. A policy is now in place that will govern this issue going forward. See Tab 2. In addition, the Department will work with the National Archives and Records Administration to determine whether any changes to the current records disposition schedules should be made.

Evidence that the Video Was Missing the Footage in Question Soon After the Briefing. Emails suggest that the video likely was already missing the footage in question approximately 18 minutes after the daily press briefing's conclusion on

² See Tab 4 for an example of contemporary press reporting on the exchange.

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December 2, 2013. At that time, the briefing's assigned editor for web distribution internally uploaded for onward processing a version of the briefing that was already almost exactly the length of the shortened version that would eventually be posted to state.gov and YouTube. Therefore, it seems likely that the version of the video uploaded internally by the editor at that time was the same as the version that appeared on state.gov and YouTube.³ The assigned editor had no record or recollection of removing footage of questions and answers from the video, or of anything unusual happening that day.

Evidence of Purposeful Editing. A technician from PA recalled having received a request to edit the video over the phone from a female caller from elsewhere in PA who could credibly assert that an edit should be made. Given the passage of time, the technician's memory was imperfect. The technician did not recall the identity of the caller and the Department has been unable to ascertain it independently through interviews or document review. The technician believed that the call likely came late in the day, well after the briefing would have ended. The technician did not believe the call had come from the Spokesperson. The technician did not recall a reason being given for the edit request, but did believe that the requester had mentioned in the course of the call a Fox network reporter and Iran.⁴ The technician indicated that the requester may also have provided the start and end times for an edit, though the technician also recalls consulting the written transcript to locate the exchange. Although the technician recalled seeking approval from a supervisor, when interviewed the supervisor did not recall that exchange or anything else about the video. The technician also recalled adding a white flash in order to make clear that footage had been removed. However, that technician does not usually engage in any editing, and is usually not involved in the daily press briefing video processing until several steps into the process of preparing the video for web distribution. It is difficult to reconcile the recollection of the video technician with information suggesting that the video was at a shorter total run time minutes after the briefing ended.

Evidence Inconsistent With Content-Driven Edit. The manner in which the video appeared on state.gov and YouTube was inconsistent with an effort to hide the edit. The fact that footage was missing on those sites was clear from the presence of a white flash and the choppy nature of the cut. Ordinarily, when a glitch corrupts a

³ Because of limitations on storage space, no intermediate versions of the video remained in 2016, so the Department was not able to compare versions to confirm this.

⁴ As shown in Tab 1, the missing footage included but was not limited to exchanges with a Fox News reporter on Iran.

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portion of a question-and-answer (which does happen on occasion), the assigned editor edits the entire question-and-answer out of the video as seamlessly as possible. (The Department will review whether some form of marker or notice would be appropriate in such instances.) However, the cut in the December 2, 2013, video was not seamless; it begins in the middle of an answer, and ends in the middle of a sentence. It is possible that the December 2, 2013, video contained a glitch that wasn't noticed until after the video left the assigned editor. There were various technical problems occurring with the video production system during this period, including unpredictable electric voltage dips affecting the studio master control room's servers. However, the Department found no information indicating that such a problem occurred on December 2, 2013.

In addition, it does not appear that the exchanges in question raised policy concerns within the Department. The exchanges were on various aspects of the nuclear deal with Iran, many of which (including meetings in Oman that led up to the negotiations) had been briefed previously, and interviewees familiar with briefing the press did not find the exchange with Fox News to be more notable than many others that occur in daily press briefings. Further, interviews and at least one email suggest that the spokesperson was generally seen to have done an effective job in answering the relevant reporter's questions.

Finally, the Department did not find evidence that editing press briefing videos for content is or was a common practice. Although the Department has not conducted a review of other videos, no interviewee was aware of any other videos of daily press briefings that might have been edited for the purpose of removing content.

Possible Conclusions: Despite 34 interviews and follow-ups, email reviews, and cross-checks of those records still available from the editing and processing of the press briefing video in question, the Department's factfinding has not revealed who may have requested an edit or why the request may have been made.

The context of the incident is also relevant. The videos of the daily press briefing contained information that had already been disclosed, through the briefing itself, to the domestic and international press. In addition, the edit was reflected in versions uploaded to YouTube and state.gov, but not the DVIDS version (which is frequently accessed for broadcast-quality footage) or the written transcript. Further, it is possible that the domestic press pool made its own video of the daily press briefing, as this appears to have already been common at the time.

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Taking into account all of the evidence, the following explanations cannot be ruled out.

- If an effort was made—however clumsy and ineffective—to scrub the public record of an already-public exchange with the press, no documentary evidence or memory of such an effort remains. If such an effort was undertaken, it was not comprehensive (in light of the unedited transcript and DVIDS video) and it was undertaken through a technician who would not normally be involved in the video editing process.
- Alternatively, a glitch in the December 2, 2013, briefing video may have resulted in the corruption of nine minutes from the YouTube and state.gov versions of the press briefing videos. The glitch was identified late in the day and the video technician was asked to address it since the normal editing team was gone for the day. Because the technician was not a normal editor, and in an effort to be transparent about the missing footage, the technician added a white flash to the video.

IV. FACTFINDING PROCESS

In reviewing this matter, the Department interviewed 34 individuals and conducted email searches. Nine of these individuals were senior officials in relevant positions from the relevant time period, including the then Department Spokesperson and Deputy Spokesperson, and numerous others within the PA bureau. Fifteen of the interviewees were in positions in which they might have known who requested an edit or might have been in a position to relay a request for an edit from someone with the perceived authority. The final 10 individuals (including the technician who recalled making the edit) were involved in or familiar with the video production and editing processes in the Department as of December 2013, and might have been involved with the particular video in question or could explain those processes in greater detail. Individuals in this category also provided available records from programs and tools involved in the video production process.

In addition to being asked for any relevant emails on the subject matter, individuals were asked to review emails sent or received for the time period December 2-6, 2013 (the work week of the press briefing in question), and from May 9, 2016 (the

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-7-

date on which the story broke) to the day of the email search.⁵ Individuals were instructed not to delete any relevant email.⁶ The Department does not have records of phone calls made to the video technician that day.

The Department met with staff from the Office of Inspector General twice during the course of the factfinding to brief them on process and findings.

Attachments:

Tab 1 – Excerpt of December 2, 2013 Daily Press Briefing Transcript

Tab 2 – June 2, 2016 Email from Assistant Secretary Kirby

Tab 3 – Approximate Timeline of December 2, 2013, Daily Press Briefing Video

Tab 4 – Example of contemporary press coverage of the relevant exchange

⁵ It appears that the version of the video missing the footage was likely created on the day of the briefing – Monday, December 2, 2013. In any case, the shortened video had been made public on both YouTube and state.gov by Wednesday, December 4. Nevertheless, emails were reviewed for the entire week in question, just in case there were any after-the-fact acknowledgments or discussions of an edit. The recent emails (May 9, 2016 to the date of the search) were reviewed in case the recent attention to the issue prompted emailed recollections of an edit.

⁶ It should be noted that emails were reviewed as a matter of due diligence in the factfinding, not because there was any indication of the existence of email communications that would lead to the identity of an individual who requested an edit or other explanation. Indeed, no email or documentary evidence was discovered that described making the edit.

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Hickey, Lauren A

From: Harf, Marie E
Sent: Monday, May 09, 2016 5:57 PM
To: Hickey, Lauren A; Beechem, Stephanie
Subject: Re: marie

RELEASE IN PART B5

B5

From: Hickey, Lauren A
Sent: Monday, May 9, 2016 5:53 PM
To: Harf, Marie E; Beechem, Stephanie
Subject: marie

B5

This email is UNCLASSIFIED.

From: Trudeau, Elizabeth K
Sent: Wednesday, May 11, 2016 12:46 PM
To: Norris, Emily Y; Holladay, Darby G.
Cc: PA Press Duty
Subject: RE: IRAN PG RE: DRAFT Tasking List for Wednesday, May 11, 2016
Attachments: 051116-IRAN- S travel, Fox video, S 300, Sanctions Compensation, SCOTUS,...docx

RELEASE IN PART B5

Thanks!

From: Norris, Emily Y
Sent: Wednesday, May 11, 2016 12:43 PM
To: Holladay, Darby G.; Trudeau, Elizabeth K
Subject: IRAN PG RE: DRAFT Tasking List for Wednesday, May 11, 2016

Hi Elizabeth,

B5

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] I underlined the lines that most directly respond to your two inquiries.

Let me know if you need anything else.

Emily

This email is UNCLASSIFIED.

From: Holladay, Darby G.
Sent: Wednesday, May 11, 2016 7:02 AM
To: PAO Group
Subject: DRAFT Tasking List for Wednesday, May 11, 2016

Good morning,

Elizabeth will brief at 2pm.

Guidance times:

Guidance collection will be in the 6th floor PA Conference Room (6837.)

10:00 – CA/WHA/AF
10:15 – EAP
10:30 – SCA
10:45 – EUR
11:00 – NEA

Thanks,
DGH

From: Norris, Emily Y
Sent: Wednesday, May 11, 2016 12:47 PM
To: Werberg, Samuel (Cairo)
Subject: Iran Items: Daily Press Briefing with Press Office Director Elizabeth Trudeau - May 10, 2016
Attachments: 05102016+dpb+%23+80+Trudeau+%284%29.pdf

RELEASE IN FULL

(Iran items from yesterday's briefing including the Fox video, Hekmati case, and S-300)

QUESTION: So Iran.

MS. TRUDEAU: Yeah.

QUESTION: You will have seen probably that they say that they have taken delivery of the S-300?

MS. TRUDEAU: Yeah.

QUESTION: Did you guys ever decide whether this was something that was destabilizing or -- destabilizing to the region, that would trigger more sanctions?

MS. TRUDEAU: So we're aware of reports of progress towards the delivery by Russia of the S-300 defensive missile system. We've been making clear our objections to any sale of the S-300 missile system for quite a while. The Secretary has raised it with Foreign Minister Lavrov repeatedly. We have long objected to the sale of such sophisticated defense capabilities. We continue to monitor it closely.

QUESTION: So --

MS. TRUDEAU: And while we're opposed to the sale, it is not a violation of the JCPOA or UN Security Council Resolution 2231.

QUESTION: No, it's not. But it is -- but it is if you determine that it is destabilizing or provocative, you are able to impose sanctions because of it. And the last we checked, you guys were in the process of responding to a letter from the Hill about whether or not this met that standard. So is that --

MS. TRUDEAU: Yeah. I'm not going to get ahead of those sanctions discussions now. But I do take your point.

QUESTION: Well, is the review still going on? Have you responded to the letter?

MS. TRUDEAU: I have no update on that. I'll check in on the status of the letter.

5/5/2016

QUESTION: All right. And then, other thing on Iran is that in Syria today there -- some of these Iranians who were the IRGC troops who were taken captive -- it seems more of them have been killed, it looks like. And there's a question about whether -- about who is holding them. Do you have any insight?

MS. TRUDEAU: I don't. I have nothing to confirm there, Matt.

QUESTION: All right.

QUESTION: Can I go to Syria next?

MS. TRUDEAU: Are we good on Syria? Yeah.

QUESTION: I have one on Iran.

QUESTION: But before we go --

MS. TRUDEAU: Okay, you know what? Let me go to Iran quick.

QUESTION: I just want to follow up on the S-300.

MS. TRUDEAU: Sure.

QUESTION: You said it's -- they are -- it's a defensive weapon, correct?

MS. TRUDEAU: Yes.

QUESTION: So why, in principle, will the United States be opposed --

MS. TRUDEAU: It's a sophisticated military piece of apparatus --

QUESTION: I understand. But it is --

MS. TRUDEAU: -- we have concerns about.

QUESTION: -- but it does -- it cannot be re-equipped to be used offensively, could it?

MS. TRUDEAU: So our concerns are on --

QUESTION: So they're actually -- they will use them if they are attacked, right?

MS TRUDEAU: I'm not going to talk about how they could use them. We've made our concerns known for quite some time on this specific piece of military equipment. It's very sophisticated military equipment. Our position on the S-300 and that sale has not changed.

QUESTION: So there's always the fear that they can use that technology --

MS TRUDEAU: I can --

6/5/2016

QUESTION: -- obtain that technology and use it offensively?

MS TRUDEAU: I'm going to leave that our concerns are there.

Laura, you had a question on Iran.

QUESTION: Amir Hekmati filed a complaint against the Government of Iran -- of Iran in a federal court about the conditions of his imprisonment. I guess, first of all, what's your reaction to this complaint, and does he have a right to sue the Iranian Government?

MS TRUDEAU: Okay. So we're aware of the media reports around this lawsuit. The U.S. Government is not a party to this private civil action and we have no comment on the case.

QUESTION: But just generally speaking --

MS TRUDEAU: I have to leave it there.

QUESTION: -- under this condition could the lawsuit be filed? Are you concerned about possible retribution lawsuits against the U.S.?

MS TRUDEAU: I'm going to leave that there.

Okay, Said.

QUESTION: Can you just take the question about whether or not the Administration is going to take -- I realize you have not yet, but --

MS TRUDEAU: About the sanctions?

QUESTION: Well, because the U.S., the federal government, has intervened in previous similar cases in the past, and there was one case involving the Palestinians where the Department of Justice --

MS TRUDEAU: Oh, on the civil action?

QUESTION: Yeah. Department of Justice --

MS TRUDEAU: I can check with that, and if we have any update --

QUESTION: -- intervened and opposed --

MS TRUDEAU: Yeah.

QUESTION: So --

MS TRUDEAU: I can check on that --

QUESTION: Thank you.

QUESTION: Could I just go back --

MS TRUDEAU: Of course.

QUESTION: -- to the transcript -- I mean the video -- please?

MS TRUDEAU: Yeah. Sure.

QUESTION: Is someone looking into this --

MS TRUDEAU: Yeah.

QUESTION: -- to see whether -- what exactly happened in this case and also to make sure --

MS TRUDEAU: Yeah.

QUESTION: -- that it is not --

MS TRUDEAU: Yeah.

QUESTION: -- that there aren't other videos that are --

MS TRUDEAU: Yeah. It is. We've changed our procedures. And this is so technical, and forgive me for this -- we've changed our procedures on that, but we are taking a look at it. Certainly, transparency and getting information to you guys, not only here in the briefing room but on the web and searchable, is a priority for us. And so absolutely.

QUESTION: All right. So when --

QUESTION: So if the investigation finds that someone deliberately cut that section, that person would face disciplinary procedures?

MS TRUDEAU: I'm not going to get ahead of it. We just found out. We made it whole.

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

20 5/10/2016

MS TRUDEAU: We'll take a look at it.

Okay.

QUESTION: Well, could you -- when you're done with this -- and not you personally, but whoever's looking into it --

MS TRUDEAU: In my free time. (Laughter.)

QUESTION: Yes, on weekends -- can you let us know what the result of the investigation is?

MS TRUDEAU: Yeah. If there is any update, I absolutely will. And I don't want to call it an investigation, because that makes it formal. What I'm -- what we're looking at is what happened.

QUESTION: Well, exactly.

MS TRUDEAU: Yeah.

QUESTION: Well, we would like to know what happened too.

MS TRUDEAU: Yeah.

QUESTION: So can you let us know when you find out what happened?

MS TRUDEAU: As always.

QUESTION: And hopefully this will be, like -- not going to take a year?

MS TRUDEAU: Yeah. I think it's -- yeah. I would characterize it as a glitch.

QUESTION: Is Public Affairs looking into it, or --

MS TRUDEAU: The department is.

Okay.

QUESTION: Has a similar glitch happened in the past?

MS TRUDEAU: Not to my knowledge at all.

Thanks, guys.

QUESTION: Thank you.

(The briefing was concluded at 2:33 p.m.)

###

This email is UNCLASSIFIED.

From: State Department Press Office [mailto:usstatebpa@subscriptions.fcg.gov]

Sent: Tuesday, May 10, 2016 6:28 PM

To: NEA-Press

Subject: Daily Press Briefing with Press Office Director Elizabeth Trudeau - May 10, 2016

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Office of the Spokesperson

For Immediate Release

For your reference, please find attached an indexed DPB, which will be available [here](#).

DAILY PRESS BRIEFING

DPB # 80

TUESDAY, MAY 10, 2016

(ON THE RECORD UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED)

Briefer: Elizabeth Trudeau, Press Office Director

2:01 p.m. EDT

MS TRUDEAU: Hello, everyone. Welcome to the State Department. I have a couple things at the top.

So first, you may have seen reports from the Pentagon, U.S. Special Force – Special Operation Forces partnered with Afghan National Defense and Security Forces today in a counterterrorism operation in Paktika province, Afghanistan. The raid resulted in the successful recovery of Ali Haider Gilani, the son of Pakistan's former Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani, who had been held hostage since May 2013. Senior officials have been in contact with Afghan and Pakistani authorities on the operation as well as on the repatriation of Mr. Gilani. This raid demonstrates the growing capabilities and effectiveness of the Afghan Security Forces and is an excellent example of the strong security and intelligence partnership between Afghan and U.S. forces in counterterrorism operations against the remnants of al-Qaida. Working alongside our Afghan partners will continue to make clear there's no safe haven for terrorists in Afghanistan.

Next, I mentioned this yesterday, but we'd like to say it again. The United States commends the Philippines on its May 9th elections, which by all major accounts appears to have gone smoothly and enjoyed historically high levels of participation. We're still awaiting the official results, but we look forward to congratulating and working with the winners on our active and close bilateral relationship.

QUESTION: Was there some particular reason you decided to repeat what you said yesterday?

MS TRUDEAU: So the – several of the presidential candidates noted that a winner has been unofficially named.

QUESTION: Can I follow up on that?

QUESTION: Right. Well, yeah, I mean – well, so the unofficial winner --

MS TRUDEAU: Yeah.

QUESTION: -- are there -- do you have any concerns about this guy? He's got somewhat of a --

MS TRUDEAU: So --

QUESTION: -- there are allegations of somewhat of a checkered past.

MS TRUDEAU: So as stated, we look forward to working and congratulating the winner. Washington respects the choice of the Philippines people. We gladly work with the leader they've selected.

QUESTION: Okay. So there are no concerns about this guy?

MS TRUDEAU: We look forward to congratulating, welcome, and working with him.

QUESTION: Are you --

QUESTION: So there are no concerns about this guy?

MS TRUDEAU: So we look forward to working with him.

QUESTION: Are there any concerns about this guy?

MS TRUDEAU: At this stage; we'll work with the people -- or the individual that the Filipinos have elected.

QUESTION: Are we talking about the same guy?

MS TRUDEAU: Yes.

QUESTION: The -- Rodrigo Duterte?

MS TRUDEAU: Yes.

QUESTION: Okay. And as Matt said, you're -- there's no concerns about this, about working with him specifically, even though documents do show that --

MS TRUDEAU: So we respect the choice of the Philippines.

QUESTION: Even if he has a pretty colorful offensive language? He has insulted the Pope for example. The U.S. has no -- has not pointed out -- has no concern --

MS TRUDEAU: No. We've spoken about rhetoric around the world and not specifically in this case. We look forward to working with the leader that the Philippines has elected.

QUESTION: And he said also -- he said also on the South China Sea -- he said also that he wants to have a constructive relationship with China and maybe a direct dialogue with China.

MS TRUDEAU: So we --

QUESTION: Do you have any comment?

MS TRUDEAU: Yeah. So we've seen those comments. The United States has consistently expressed support for nations to exercise peaceful means to resolve territorial or maritime disputes without the use of force, intimidation, or coercion. So we expect the official results from the Philippines to come out soon; we look forward to working with the people they elected.

Matt.

QUESTION: Huh? Oh. Well, I just -- I have two logistical things.

MS TRUDEAU: Sure.

QUESTION: They can wait until the end.

MS TRUDEAU: We can do whatever you like.

QUESTION: So Iran.

MS TRUDEAU: Yeah.

QUESTION: You will have seen probably that they say that they have taken delivery of the S-300?

MS TRUDEAU: Yeah.

QUESTION: Did you guys ever decide whether this was something that was destabilizing or – destabilizing to the region, that would trigger more sanctions?

MS TRUDEAU: So we're aware of reports of progress towards the delivery by Russia of the S-300 defensive missile system. We've been making clear our objections to any sale of the S-300 missile system for quite a while. The Secretary has raised it with Foreign Minister Lavrov repeatedly. We have long objected to the sale of such sophisticated defense capabilities. We continue to monitor it closely.

QUESTION: So --

MS TRUDEAU: And while we're opposed to the sale, it is not a violation of the JCPOA or UN Security Council Resolution 2231.

QUESTION: No, it's not. But it is – but it is if you determine that it is destabilizing or provocative, you are able to impose sanctions because of it. And the last we checked, you guys were in the process of responding to a letter from the Hill about whether or not this met that standard. So is that --

MS TRUDEAU: Yeah. I'm not going to get ahead of those sanctions discussions now. But I do take your point.

QUESTION: Well, is the review still going on? Have you responded to the letter?

MS TRUDEAU: I have no update on that. I'll check in on the status of the letter.

QUESTION: All right. And then, other thing on Iran is that in Syria today there – some of these Iranians who were the IRGC troops who were taken captive – it seems more of them have been killed, it looks like. And there's a question about whether – about who is holding them. Do you have any insight?

MS TRUDEAU: I don't. I have nothing to confirm there, Matt.

QUESTION: All right.

QUESTION: Can I go to Syria next?

MS TRUDEAU: Are we good on Syria? Yeah.

QUESTION: I have one on Iran.

QUESTION: But before we go --

MS TRUDEAU: Okay, you know what? Let me go to Iran quick.

QUESTION: I just want to follow up on the S-300.

MS TRUDEAU: Sure.

QUESTION: You said it's -- they are -- it's a defensive weapon, correct?

MS TRUDEAU: Yes.

QUESTION: So why, in principle, will the United States be opposed --

MS TRUDEAU: It's a sophisticated military piece of apparatus --

QUESTION: I understand. But it is --

MS TRUDEAU: -- we have concerns about.

QUESTION: -- but it does -- it cannot be re-equipped to be used offensively, could it?

MS TRUDEAU: So our concerns are on --

QUESTION: So they're actually -- they will use them if they are attacked, right?

MS TRUDEAU: I'm not going to talk about how they could use them. We've made our concerns known for quite some time on this specific piece of military equipment. It's very sophisticated military equipment. Our position on the S-300 and that sale has not changed.

QUESTION: So there's always the fear that they can use that technology --

MS TRUDEAU: I can --

QUESTION: -- obtain that technology and use it offensively?

MS TRUDEAU: I'm going to leave that our concerns are there.

Laura, you had a question on Iran.

QUESTION: Amir Hekmati filed a complaint against the Government Iran -- of Iran in a federal court about the conditions of his imprisonment. I guess, first of all, what's your reaction to this complaint, and does he have a right to sue the Iranian Government?

MS TRUDEAU: Okay. So we're aware of the media reports around this lawsuit. The U.S. Government is not a party to this private civil action and we have no comment on the case.

QUESTION: But just generally speaking --

MS TRUDEAU: I have to leave it there.

QUESTION: -- under this condition could the lawsuit be filed? Are you concerned about possible

retribution lawsuits against the U.S.?

MS TRUDEAU: I'm going to leave that there.

Okay, Said.

QUESTION: Can you just take the question about whether or not the Administration is going to take -- I realize you have not yet, but --

MS TRUDEAU: About the sanctions?

QUESTION: Well, because the U.S., the federal government, has intervened in previous similar cases in the past, and there was one case involving the Palestinians where the Department of Justice --

MS TRUDEAU: Oh, on the civil action?

QUESTION: Yeah. Department of Justice --

MS TRUDEAU: I can check with that, and if we have any update --

QUESTION: -- intervened and opposed --

MS TRUDEAU: Yeah.

QUESTION: So --

MS TRUDEAU: I can check on that --

QUESTION: Thank you.

MS TRUDEAU: -- but I think we'll stay where we are on that.

Said. Yeah.

QUESTION: I wanted to ask you, the Syrian Government issued a statement or it's attributed to them that the situation in Aleppo, that the tensions in Aleppo have been really reduced and the situation has deescalated, that it gives hope for the current pause -- for it to continue. Is that your feeling? Are you advocating for that? Are you pushing for that, for the cessation to continue for another week --

MS TRUDEAU: So we spoke about this --

QUESTION: Yes.

MS TRUDEAU: -- a little bit yesterday, but I appreciate the question. I'm not going to speak to the Syrian Government's exact statement. But let's --

QUESTION: Can you confirm that it has come down a lot?

MS TRUDEAU: So what we've seen is the cessation is not uniformly, not 100 percent has reduced violence, as we've seen. Our view on a cessation of hostilities -- it is a fundamentally good thing, of course. It alleviates, though it doesn't remove, some of the suffering of the Syrian people. Any reduction in

violence is good.

Again, I can't confirm that all reduction – or all violence has been stemmed. We see these periodic reports. But a cessation of hostilities – our goal is that it's open-ended. Our goal is that it's nationwide, because that creates the political space where we can continue to have these conversations under de Mistura and actually seek that political transition.

QUESTION: Now let me ask you conversely, considering or in light of the statements made by Ayman Zawahiri, repeated statements, the head of al-Qaida, are you concerned that this pause in fighting might give al-Qaida a push to sort of regroup and re-attack?

MS TRUDEAU: No, because what we're concerned is that this fighting creates the sort of ungoverned spaces in which terrorists breed and which terrorism spread. So the political transition and a stable Syria is in the best interests of all of us.

QUESTION: Mm-hmm. And finally, so what is the next step in terms of the talks that are ongoing? Do we have --

MS TRUDEAU: So I think you saw Secretary Kerry said today that the ISSG will meet May 17th in Vienna. He will co-host with Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov this meeting to reaffirm and strengthen the nationwide cessation of hostilities throughout Syria. He'll discuss the tangible steps the ISSG can support and take to ensure full, unimpeded, and sustained humanitarian access throughout the country, especially in the besieged and hard-to-reach areas, and he'll advance discussions between the Syrian parties on a genuine political transition in accordance with the Geneva communique.

QUESTION: So yesterday, we went on at length, some length, about the joint U.S.-Russia statement --

MS TRUDEAU: Yeah.

QUESTION: -- which you said that the Administration's position was that this statement reaffirmed the entire cease – the nationwide --

MS TRUDEAU: Yeah.

QUESTION: -- cessation of hostilities and there was no longer, then, any need for these localized extension – or extensions of localized cessations of hostilities. Like an hour after we --

MS TRUDEAU: I know.

QUESTION: -- finished this – that conversation, the Syrian Government announced a 48-hour extension of the localized Aleppo cessation. So I'm wondering: Does that mean that your interpretation of this joint statement is wrong, or does it mean that the Russians and the Syrians have a different interpretation of it? What does it mean?

MS TRUDEAU: I would say that we stand behind our statement yesterday, co-signed by the Russians, co-released by the Russians, which is an open-ended reaffirmation of the cessation of hostilities. As we talked about yesterday, some of these small sort of area-limited, time-limited cessation of hostilities continue to be confidence-building measures. Our reaffirmation is that the cessation of hostilities is open-ended, it's national. That said --

QUESTION: Yes, but it's not.

MS TRUDEAU: So that said, as I said --

QUESTION: I mean, you can't just pretend that it just --

MS TRUDEAU: No, but -- and like I --

QUESTION: -- applies indefinitely across the country, when the Syrians who are actually on the ground doing the fighting --

MS TRUDEAU: Yeah.

QUESTION: -- with the Russians are doing it piecemeal --

MS TRUDEAU: Yeah.

QUESTION: -- and in time-limited durations.

MS TRUDEAU: So our commitment, like I said, is that it is open-ended. That's what the Russians signed up to as well, Matt.

QUESTION: Yeah, but it's not.

MS TRUDEAU: Well, so when you see these small, like, 48-hour, 24-hour cessation of hostilities, as I said -- so our cessation of hostilities, what we said yesterday in the statement, open-ended, nationwide.

QUESTION: Yeah, I know, but that --

MS TRUDEAU: These small ones -- these --

QUESTION: -- doesn't concur with reality. The reality is that the Syrians have not --

MS TRUDEAU: And the reality is there is violence on the ground.

QUESTION: I know. But the reality is not -- I'm talking about in terms of the cessation of hostilities. You say it's one thing and insist that that's what it is, when it's not, because the people who are doing the fighting -- the Syrian Government -- are doing it piecemeal and in short durations.

MS TRUDEAU: We talked about this some yesterday. These small confidence-building measures released are --

QUESTION: So you don't --

MS TRUDEAU: So -- I'm sorry, go ahead.

QUESTION: You don't -- you don't see the localized 48-hour extension that the Syrians announced yesterday as being in contradiction to the joint statement?

MS TRUDEAU: No, I don't.

QUESTION: All right.

MS TRUDEAU: Thank you. Any more on Syria?

QUESTION: Yeah. Can you tell me about the discussion the Secretary had with Lavrov this morning?

MS TRUDEAU: Okay, I can confirm that they did have a call, it's my understanding. It was a logistical call. It's one of the calls that the Secretary and Foreign Minister Lavrov have had frequently in the last couple weeks, but I don't have anything more to read out on that.

QUESTION: There was nothing about the open-ended --

MS TRUDEAU: Short-term cessation? No, but I think our statement, which is very clear yesterday and was agreed to and co-released by the Russians, speaks to that.

Syria?

QUESTION: (Inaudible) neither of these people are paid to make logistical calls.

MS TRUDEAU: I'm sorry?

QUESTION: Why did two ministers-level people make a logistical call?

MS TRUDEAU: I think it talks to the importance that -- of both these countries and the commitment that we have to ensuring the political transition and the cessation. We have these calls.

Syria?

QUESTION: Yes.

MS TRUDEAU: Yeah.

QUESTION: So with the small 48-, 24-hour, 72-hour extensions -- so the one that was announced by the government yesterday, that's set to expire at midnight Thursday, so 12:01 a.m. Syria time Thursday -- what's the current plan? Is there any -- is there any --

MS TRUDEAU: Our current plan, like we've spoke to --

QUESTION: Well, I mean, is there any efforts to extend that further, or is the government just going to say 12:01 Thursday, it's not on?

MS TRUDEAU: Well, it was the Syrian Government who announced it. Our position, as was the Russian position: open-ended, countrywide. We will continue to make the case for that. It doesn't say that there's not violence. It doesn't say that there are these areas where there's conflict that flares up.

QUESTION: But I mean, as of now, the Syrian Government can just -- I mean, will fiat that the ceasefire is not on, on Thursday at 12:01.

MS TRUDEAU: Well, and we expect and we have had the Russians recommit to their influence, and we see that that influence has worked in the past.

QUESTION: Does this mean, Elizabeth, that the U.S. and Russia decide and the opposition and the Syrian regime should imply?

MS TRUDEAU: No. I think what it says is that a cessation of hostilities is best for the people of Syria. And this is the understanding we have seen, speaking specifically, like I just mentioned, that the Russians do have influence, that cessation of hostilities in the past has worked. Just because we see these flares or we see these piecemeal approach doesn't mean that we are backing off our commitment to make it open-ended and nationwide.

Okay, are we done with Syria? Okay.

QUESTION: On China, South China Sea --

MS TRUDEAU: Yeah.

QUESTION: -- in regards to the most recent freedom of navigation exercises, the Chinese Government said that the ships entered the water illegally and that this was a threat to peace and stability in the region. Do you have a response to that?

MS TRUDEAU: Sure. So I've got a bit, so bear with me.

The Department of Defense conducted a freedom of navigation operation in the South China Sea, specifically in the region of Fiery Cross Reef in the Spratly Islands, to uphold the rights and freedoms of all states under international law and to challenge excessive maritime claims of some claimants in the South China Sea. These excessive maritime claims are inconsistent with international law as reflected in the Law of the Sea covenant in that they purport to restrict the navigational rights that the United States and all states are entitled to exercise.

During this operation, a U.S. Navy surface ship exercised the right of innocent passage while transiting inside 12 nautical miles of Fiery Cross Reef, a high-tide feature that is occupied by China but also claimed by the Philippines, Taiwan, and Vietnam. No claimants were notified prior to the transit, which is also consistent with our normal process and international law.

This operation challenged attempts by China, Taiwan, and Vietnam to restrict navigational rights around the features they claim, specifically that these three claimants purport to require prior permission or notification of transits through the territorial sea, contrary to international law. Because the Philippines maritime claims in relation to South China Sea features do not purport to restrict the exercise of navigational rights and freedoms under the Law of the Sea by the United States and others, they were not challenged during this operation.

And you had a specific question on China?

QUESTION: And so do you have a response to the Chinese claims that they were illegal?

MS TRUDEAU: Yeah, well, this operation was not singling out China. The operation challenged maritime claims of China, Taiwan, and Vietnam.

QUESTION: Can I ask two things about this?

MS TRUDEAU: Of course.

QUESTION: Who determines what is an excessive maritime claim? Who determines "excessive"?

MS TRUDEAU: So it is -- there's -- it is consistent with the Law of the Sea. It's the international understanding of what innocent passage is.

QUESTION: The United States is not a party to the UNCLOS, isn't that correct?

MS TRUDEAU: So we have conducted freedom of navigations --

QUESTION: But that's not my question.

MS TRUDEAU: Yeah. So for -- it's --

QUESTION: So do China, Taiwan, and the Philippines say that their own claims are excessive? Seems to me that you have just decided that they're excessive because -- under the terms of a treaty to which you're not a party.

MS TRUDEAU: So they have asserted requirements for vessels transiting and it is inconsistent with International Law of the Sea.

QUESTION: But you didn't --

MS TRUDEAU: The U.S. operation -- our freedom of navigation challenges that as these signatories. So --

QUESTION: Yeah, but you didn't -- but you ignored them. Basically, you just -- this ship just barged in without --

MS TRUDEAU: In -- and consistent with international maritime law.

QUESTION: Yeah, yeah, but I mean, you didn't notify anybody.

MS TRUDEAU: No, we did not notify them.

QUESTION: You just went in, but that's not -- my question is: Who decides whether a claim is excessive?

MS TRUDEAU: So it's -- it is the International Law of the Sea, it's my understanding, that determines --

QUESTION: But you're not a party to the International Law of the Sea.

MS TRUDEAU: But this is a common understanding among these claimants.

QUESTION: Well, do they say that their own claims are excessive?

MS TRUDEAU: So there's three nations --

QUESTION: Yes.

MS TRUDEAU: -- that have -- have done that:

QUESTION: Well, not nations, careful, because one of them's Taiwan.

MS TRUDEAU: Yeah, thank you. Three – well, and the Philippines as well as Taiwan that have said claims to this feature in the South China Sea in the Spratly lines.

QUESTION: (Inaudible) acknowledge any of them except your – you're saying that their claim is excessive?

MS TRUDEAU: So we were operating in accordance with international maritime law.

QUESTION: I know, but do any of them agree with you that their own claims --

MS TRUDEAU: I would ask them.

QUESTION: -- are excessive?

MS TRUDEAU: I would ask them on that.

QUESTION: Well, if they don't, then I don't -- okay. Oh, and then -- no, that's it on that.

MS TRUDEAU: Okay.

QUESTION: Well, I have a follow-up on the claim.

MS TRUDEAU: Sure.

QUESTION: Does one not see this as a -- as prodding China? I know you say here that the operation was not singling out China --

MS TRUDEAU: No.

QUESTION: -- but it is close to a reef that China claims as its own.

MS TRUDEAU: No, we don't believe these are provocative at all. Around the world, we conduct freedom of navigations in accordance with international law.

QUESTION: But does one -- one doesn't sail close to the specific reef or any of those others --

MS TRUDEAU: No, we don't see this as singling out any country. We don't single -- we don't view this as provocative at all. Anything else on South China Sea?

Said.

QUESTION: Can we go to Yemen?

MS TRUDEAU: Of course.

QUESTION: Okay. I know you talked about the talks yesterday --

MS TRUDEAU: Yeah.

QUESTION: -- but I wanted to ask you about the -- apparently the contingent -- the American Special

Forces contingent that went to --

MS TRUDEAU: In Mukalla?

QUESTION: -- into Yemen in Mukalla. Is that part of a, like, grander plan to bring about stability and so on?

MS TRUDEAU: So, no, this was limited support. So the Department of Defense has actually spoken to this. U.S. Central Command provided limited support to an anti-al-Qaida of the Arabian Peninsula operation led by Yemeni, Saudi, and Emirati forces in and around Mukalla. We remain concerned about AQAP and we welcome the operations taken by the Yemeni forces with the support of the Emirati and the Saudi forces to address this. It was limited.

QUESTION: Right. As far as the al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula is concerned, it was really one of the showcases of this Administration, because they basically decimated al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula. But then this war brought them back, by and large due to, let's -- to the war that is being waged --

MS TRUDEAU: It's true.

QUESTION: -- by Saudi Arabia and others. So it's like a -- it's kind of --

MS TRUDEAU: Al-Qaida has taken advantage of the instability in Yemen. This was an operation. And again, we thank the Saudis and the Emiratis as well as the Yemenis for moving forward on this operation.

QUESTION: And lastly, today they exchanged -- the fighting forces exchanged prisoners and so on. Do you see this as a step forward (inaudible)?

MS TRUDEAU: We see -- we've spoken about this before. All the steps forward that lead to the full -- because the peace talks are ongoing -- lead to a successful resolution of that, we do welcome it.

Yeah.

QUESTION: Yes, on Yemen. Many believe that the Saudis' yearlong campaign in Yemen has created a power vacuum which al-Qaida took advantage of, and the U.S. supported that intervention. Are we now seeing a situation where the U.S. contributed to the power vacuum and is now fighting the consequences?

MS TRUDEAU: I think what you see is instability caused in Yemen by the war that was happening here. You see certainly the Saudis as well as other Arab coalition partners seeking to address that. This goes back to what we were talking about in Syria. When you have conflict and you have ungoverned spaces, that's where instability and terrorism breed.

QUESTION: Would you say that the Saudi bombing campaign did not dramatically expend the power vacuum in Yemen?

MS TRUDEAU: What I would say is that we -- the Saudis and the Arab coalition who came in at the invitation of the Yemeni Government are working to reduce the ungoverned space.

QUESTION: (Inaudible) the result?

MS TRUDEAU: I'm sorry?

QUESTION: The result – has it reduced the ungoverned space?

MS TRUDEAU: Well, what you see in the operations like what happened in Mukalla is you see some of that ungoverned space being chipped back. And let's also remember where we're going on this, which is the UN-led peace talks, where you're looking at a real political solution to this. But ungoverned spaces do breed terror.

QUESTION: Yeah, that's right. But does the U.S. still support the Saudi-led bombing campaign in Yemen?

MS TRUDEAU: We support the Saudi-Arab coalition, yeah.

Pat.

QUESTION: Does the U.S. --

MS TRUDEAU: I'm sorry, we're going to move on.

QUESTION: Thank you. Jahanzaib Ali from ARY News TV. Ma'am, U.S. Special Forces in Afghanistan today rescued Ali Haider Gilani, the son of former prime minister Yousuf Raza Gilani. Can you tell us a detail of that operation?

MS TRUDEAU: Okay, so actually I spoke about this at the top.

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

MS TRUDEAU: It's fine. So I'll leave that there, but if you have questions on operations, I'm going to --

QUESTION: Who were the kidnappers?

MS TRUDEAU: So I'm going to refer you to the Department of Defense if you have questions on the exact operational details.

QUESTION: Okay. Secondly, it's about the question of a political party, MQM, in Pakistan. They have announced here in Washington that they have submitted a paper, a memorandum, with the office of Richard Olson, alleged --

MS TRUDEAU: Of SRAP?

QUESTION: Yes. And alleged that Pakistani military killing their workers. And can you share the (inaudible) of that letter with us?

MS TRUDEAU: We have not received that letter.

QUESTION: You haven't received?

MS TRUDEAU: We have not.

QUESTION: Okay.

MS TRUDEAU: Okay.

QUESTION: Thank you very much.

QUESTION: Yeah, quick question on North Korea. Recently, North Korean leader Kim Jong-un suggested peace treaty talk with the United States. What does the U.S. think or consider about his suggestion?

MS TRUDEAU: So on the peace treaty, our position and the position of the international community is clear. It's we will not accept the DPRK as a nuclear state. We have made very clear on this we are open to authentic and credible negotiations to implement the September 20, 2005 joint statement and bring North Korea into compliance with all applicable Security Council resolutions. However, the onus is on North Korea, as it has long been, to take meaningful action to verifiable denuclearization, refrain from any rhetoric or provocative activity. So that's where we're focused – denuclearization.

QUESTION: But the Chinese Government pressure to United States, but between U.S. and North Korea and China, future they would like to talk with peace treaty talks. So would you be – U.S. consider about what the Chinese pressure to these issues?

MS TRUDEAU: Again, our focus is on verifiable, irreversible denuclearization.

QUESTION: All right. Thank you.

MS TRUDEAU: Thank you. Sir.

QUESTION: On Japan, President Obama announced that he will be visiting Hiroshima earlier today. Are you in contact with your Japanese counterparts to discuss sort of the logistical detail, or --

MS TRUDEAU: As it's a presidential visit, I'm going to refer you to the White House. But thank you.

Okay. Matt.

QUESTION: Yesterday in its court submission, the RNC said that you guys had told them that you would not be producing any of Mr. Pagliano – any more, I guess, of Mr. Pagliano's emails. Is that correct?

MS TRUDEAU: So thank you for that, because there's been some unclear reporting on this. So the department has searched Mr. Pagliano's email PST file and has not located one that covers the time period of Secretary Clinton's tenure. The absence of this email file, however, does not indicate that the department has no emails sent or received by him. In fact, we have previously produced through FOIA and to Congress emails sent and received by Mr. Pagliano during Secretary Clinton's tenure. Furthermore, at no point did the State Department convey to the RNC that we did not intend to produce responsive emails within our possession consistent with our obligations under the law.

QUESTION: Okay, but I mean, are you done? Have you given them everything that they are – should get that you have?

MS TRUDEAU: So we continue to take a look at it. We will produce files as we are required under the law.

QUESTION: Right, I understand that. But do you know at the moment if you have – if there are emails

that you have found from that time period that have just not yet been turned over to --

MS TRUDEAU: So the department's ongoing -- conducting a thorough search. I don't have details on that, but at no point did we say to the RNC that we would not produce.

QUESTION: All right. And then the last one, which is a logistical thing, which is this -- the report that the video of a briefing from a couple years back with Jen Psaki was edited to remove questions and her answers about when the Iran negotiations began. What's going on here?

MS TRUDEAU: Yeah, so we saw that report. We actually spoke to Fox about this yesterday, so thanks for that question. I'd back up. The -- this is a daily press briefing from 2013. The transcript of that daily press briefing and video was always available -- transcript was on state.gov; the video was available on other sites. There was a glitch in the State Department video. When Fox flagged it for us, we actually replaced it with a video from DVIDS, which is the military repository where a lot of news media gets its video. The whole video was there, and we also annotated it on our YouTube channel.

QUESTION: Yeah, but that -- I mean, a glitch? That just seems awfully strange and coincidental that this --

MS TRUDEAU: Yeah. The transcript was always up, though --

QUESTION: Yeah, but the --

MS TRUDEAU: -- and the video existed on other channels. I can't speak to --

QUESTION: Right, but if you were looking on the state.gov website and going to try to watch that part of the briefing, it wouldn't have been there.

MS TRUDEAU: So the briefing was there. As I said, the full transcript was there.

QUESTION: No -- yeah, but several minutes were, like, missing.

MS TRUDEAU: Yeah. No, and so we have subbed it out.

QUESTION: I know, but can you -- is anyone looking into why?

MS TRUDEAU: So we are. We're looking into it. Genuinely we think it was a glitch, so --

QUESTION: (Inaudible) do you think that -- I mean, are there other briefing videos that are -- have been --

MS TRUDEAU: Not to our knowledge at all. But it's -- what we're taking a look at is process. We were unaware of it, and as soon as we found about it we made sure it was whole.

QUESTION: Okay. But is there any indication that you -- since you -- since this was brought to your attention, I guess yesterday -- yeah -- have you discovered that it was altered at all?

MS TRUDEAU: I -- not to my knowledge. There was a missing portion of it. We pulled it from another online source that this --

QUESTION: I get that, but I'm trying to figure out how exactly the portion that was missing --

MS TRUDEAU: I – you know what, it's something we're looking into.

QUESTION: Okay.

MS TRUDEAU: Okay.

QUESTION: Elizabeth, can I ask a quick on Egypt?

MS TRUDEAU: Sure, of course. Egypt?

QUESTION: Just to follow what – yes. What you said yesterday – I know you addressed the issue of the sentence of the --

MS TRUDEAU: For the Al Jazeera journalist?

QUESTION: Yeah, for Ibrahim Helal and Alaa Sablan. And you said that they were sentenced in absentia --

MS TRUDEAU: Yeah, that's our understanding.

QUESTION: -- which is another thing, and then you said you were concerned. Is that the extent of your concern, or are you going to, let's say, perhaps issue a stronger statement? I mean, considering that basically that was the essence of a Patrick Leahy letter – I mean, Egypt violates human rights, and if we are – if they are violating human rights --

MS TRUDEAU: Well, this is a court process, so it is actually different. This is something we continue to track. We raise our concerns on a routine and consistent basis with Egyptian authorities, so we don't take this sentence lightly. We did note that this was – apparently the trial was in absentia, so the verdict was – I'm loath to say automatic, but was actually part of the process. But we do raise this. We are concerned.

Okay.

QUESTION: Could I just go back --

MS TRUDEAU: Of course.

QUESTION: -- to the transcript – I mean the video – please?

MS TRUDEAU: Yeah. Sure.

QUESTION: Is someone looking into this --

MS TRUDEAU: Yeah.

QUESTION: -- to see whether – what exactly happened in this case and also to make sure --

MS TRUDEAU: Yeah.

QUESTION: -- that it is not --

MS TRUDEAU: Yeah.

QUESTION: -- that there aren't other videos that are --

MS TRUDEAU: Yeah. It is. We've changed our procedures. And this is so technical, and forgive me for this -- we've changed our procedures on that, but we are taking a look at it. Certainly, transparency and getting information to you guys, not only here in the briefing room but on the web and searchable, is a priority for us. And so absolutely.

QUESTION: All right. So when --

QUESTION: So if the investigation finds that someone deliberately cut that section, that person would face disciplinary procedures?

MS TRUDEAU: I'm not going to get ahead of it. We just found out. We made it whole.

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

MS TRUDEAU: We'll take a look at it.

Okay.

QUESTION: Well, could you -- when you're done with this -- and not you personally, but whoever's looking into it --

MS TRUDEAU: In my free time. (Laughter.)

QUESTION: Yes, on weekends -- can you let us know what the result of the investigation is?

MS TRUDEAU: Yeah. If there is any update, I absolutely will. And I don't want to call it an investigation, because that makes it formal. What I'm -- what we're looking at is what happened.

QUESTION: Well, exactly.

MS TRUDEAU: Yeah.

QUESTION: Well, we would like to know what happened too.

MS TRUDEAU: Yeah.

QUESTION: So can you let us know when you find out what happened?

MS TRUDEAU: As always.

QUESTION: And hopefully this will be, like -- not going to take a year?

MS TRUDEAU: Yeah. I think it's -- yeah. I would characterize it as a glitch.

QUESTION: Is Public Affairs looking into it, or --

MS TRUDEAU: The department is.

Okay.

QUESTION: Has a similar glitch happened in the past?

MS TRUDEAU: Not to my knowledge at all.

Thanks, guys.

QUESTION: Thank you.

(The briefing was concluded at 2:33 p.m.)

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Daily Press Briefing Index

Tuesday, May 10, 2016

2:01 p.m. EDT

Briefer: Elizabeth Trudeau, Press Office Director

~AFGHANISTAN~

RELEASE IN FULL

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~DEPARTMENT~

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE
DAILY PRESS BRIEFING

DPB # 80

TUESDAY, MAY 10, 2016
(ON THE RECORD UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED)

2:01 p.m. EDT

MS. TRUDEAU: Hello, everyone. Welcome to the State Department. I have a couple things at the top.

So first, you may have seen reports from the Pentagon, U.S. Special Force – Special Operation Forces partnered with Afghan National Defense and Security Forces today in a counterterrorism operation in Paktika province, Afghanistan. The raid resulted in the successful recovery of Ali Haider Gilani, the son of Pakistan's former Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani, who had been held hostage since May 2013. Senior officials have been in contact with Afghan and Pakistani authorities on the operation as well as on the repatriation of Mr. Gilani. This raid demonstrates the growing capabilities and effectiveness of the Afghan Security Forces and is an excellent example of the strong security and intelligence partnership between Afghan and U.S. forces in counterterrorism operations against the remnants of al-Qaida. Working alongside our Afghan partners will continue to make clear there's no safe haven for terrorists in Afghanistan.

Next, I mentioned this yesterday, but we'd like to say it again. The United States commends the Philippines on its May 9th elections, which by all major accounts appears to have gone smoothly and enjoyed historically high levels of participation. We're still awaiting the official results, but we look forward to congratulating and working with the winners on our active and close bilateral relationship.

QUESTION: Was there some particular reason you decided to repeat what you said yesterday?

MS. TRUDEAU: So the – several of the presidential candidates noted that a winner has been unofficially named.

QUESTION: Can I follow up on that?

QUESTION: Right. Well, yeah, I mean – well, so the unofficial winner --

MS. TRUDEAU: Yeah.

QUESTION: -- are there -- do you have any concerns about this guy? He's got somewhat of a --

MS. TRUDEAU: So --

QUESTION: -- there are allegations of somewhat of a checkered past.

MS. TRUDEAU: So as stated, we look forward to working and congratulating the winner. Washington respects the choice of the Philippines people. We gladly work with the leader they've selected.

QUESTION: Okay. So there are no concerns about this guy?

MS. TRUDEAU: We look forward to congratulating, welcome, and working with him.

QUESTION: Are you --

QUESTION: So there are no concerns about this guy?

MS. TRUDEAU: So we look forward to working with him.

QUESTION: Are there any concerns about this guy?

MS. TRUDEAU: At this stage, we'll work with the people -- or the individual that the Filipinos have elected.

QUESTION: Are we talking about the same guy?

MS. TRUDEAU: Yes.

QUESTION: The -- Rodrigo Duterte?

MS. TRUDEAU: Yes.

QUESTION: Okay. And as Matt said, you're -- there's no concerns about this, about working with him specifically, even though documents do show that --

MS. TRUDEAU: So we respect the choice of the Philippines.

QUESTION: Even if he has a pretty colorful offensive language? He has insulted the Pope for example. The U.S. has no -- has not pointed out -- has no concern --

MS. TRUDEAU: No. We've spoken about rhetoric around the world and not specifically in this case. We look forward to working with the leader that the Philippines has elected.

QUESTION: And he said also -- he said also on the South China Sea -- he said also that he wants to have a constructive relationship with China and maybe a direct dialogue with China.

MS. TRUDEAU: So we --

QUESTION: Do you have any comment?

MS. TRUDEAU: Yeah. So we've seen those comments. The United States has consistently expressed support for nations to exercise peaceful means to resolve territorial or maritime

disputes without the use of force, intimidation, or coercion. So we expect the official results from the Philippines to come out soon; we look forward to working with the people they elected.

Matt.

QUESTION: Huh? Oh. Well, I just – I have two logistical things.

MS. TRUDEAU: Sure.

QUESTION: They can wait until the end.

MS. TRUDEAU: We can do whatever you like.

QUESTION: So Iran.

MS. TRUDEAU: Yeah.

QUESTION: You will have seen probably that they say that they have taken delivery of the S-300?

MS. TRUDEAU: Yeah.

QUESTION: Did you guys ever decide whether this was something that was destabilizing or – destabilizing to the region, that would trigger more sanctions?

MS. TRUDEAU: So we're aware of reports of progress towards the delivery by Russia of the S-300 defensive missile system. We've been making clear our objections to any sale of the S-300 missile system for quite a while. The Secretary has raised it with Foreign Minister Lavrov repeatedly. We have long objected to the sale of such sophisticated defense capabilities. We continue to monitor it closely.

QUESTION: So --

MS. TRUDEAU: And while we're opposed to the sale, it is not a violation of the JCPOA or UN Security Council Resolution 2231.

QUESTION: No, it's not. But it is – but it is if you determine that it is destabilizing or provocative, you are able to impose sanctions because of it. And the last we checked, you guys were in the process of responding to a letter from the Hill about whether or not this met that standard. So is that --

MS. TRUDEAU: Yeah. I'm not going to get ahead of those sanctions discussions now. But I do take your point.

QUESTION: Well, is the review still going on? Have you responded to the letter?

MS. TRUDEAU: I have no update on that. I'll check in on the status of the letter.

QUESTION: All right. And then, other thing on Iran is that in Syria today there – some of these Iranians who were the IRGC troops who were taken captive – it seems more of them have been killed, it looks like. And there's a question about whether – about who is holding them. Do you have any insight?

MS TRUDEAU: I don't. I have nothing to confirm there, Matt.

QUESTION: All right.

QUESTION: Can I go to Syria next?

MS TRUDEAU: Are we good on Syria? Yeah.

QUESTION: I have one on Iran.

QUESTION: But before we go --

MS TRUDEAU: Okay, you know what? Let me go to Iran quick.

QUESTION: I just want to follow up on the S-300.

MS TRUDEAU: Sure.

QUESTION: You said it's – they are – it's a defensive weapon, correct?

MS TRUDEAU: Yes.

QUESTION: So why, in principle, will the United States be opposed --

MS TRUDEAU: It's a sophisticated military piece of apparatus --

QUESTION: I understand. But it is --

MS TRUDEAU: -- we have concerns about.

QUESTION: -- but it does -- it cannot be re-equipped to be used offensively, could it?

MS TRUDEAU: So our concerns are on --

QUESTION: So they're actually -- they will use them if they are attacked, right?

MS TRUDEAU: I'm not going to talk about how they could use them. We've made our concerns known for quite some time on this specific piece of military equipment. It's very sophisticated military equipment. Our position on the S-300 and that sale has not changed.

QUESTION: So there's always the fear that they can use that technology --

MS TRUDEAU: I can --

QUESTION: -- obtain that technology and use it offensively?

MS TRUDEAU: I'm going to leave that our concerns are there.

Laura, you had a question on Iran.

QUESTION: Amir Hekmati filed a complaint against the Government Iran -- of Iran in a federal court about the conditions of his imprisonment. I guess, first of all, what's your reaction to this complaint, and does he have a right to sue the Iranian Government?

MS TRUDEAU: Okay. So we're aware of the media reports around this lawsuit. The U.S. Government is not a party to this private civil action and we have no comment on the case.

QUESTION: But just generally speaking --

MS TRUDEAU: I have to leave it there.

QUESTION: -- under this condition could the lawsuit be filed? Are you concerned about possible retribution lawsuits against the U.S.?

MS TRUDEAU: I'm going to leave that there.

Okay, Said.

QUESTION: Can you just take the question about whether or not the Administration is going to take -- I realize you have not yet, but --

MS TRUDEAU: About the sanctions?

QUESTION: Well, because the U.S., the federal government, has intervened in previous similar cases in the past, and there was one case involving the Palestinians where the Department of Justice --

MS TRUDEAU: Oh, on the civil action?

QUESTION: Yeah. Department of Justice --

MS TRUDEAU: I can check with that, and if we have any update --

QUESTION: -- intervened and opposed --

MS TRUDEAU: Yeah.

QUESTION: So --

MS TRUDEAU: I can check on that --

QUESTION: Thank you.

MS TRUDEAU: -- but I think we'll stay where we are on that.

Said. Yeah.

QUESTION: I wanted to ask you, the Syrian Government issued a statement or it's attributed to them that the situation in Aleppo, that the tensions in Aleppo have been really reduced and the situation has deescalated, that it gives hope for the current pause -- for it to continue. Is that your feeling? Are you advocating for that? Are you pushing for that, for the cessation to continue for another week --

MS TRUDEAU: So we spoke about this --

QUESTION: Yes.

MS TRUDEAU: -- a little bit yesterday, but I appreciate the question. I'm not going to speak to the Syrian Government's exact statement. But let's --

QUESTION: Can you confirm that it has come down a lot?

MS TRUDEAU: So what we've seen is the cessation is not uniformly, not 100 percent has reduced violence, as we've seen. Our view on a cessation of hostilities -- it is a fundamentally good thing, of course. It alleviates, though it doesn't remove, some of the suffering of the Syrian people. Any reduction in violence is good.

Again, I can't confirm that all reduction -- or all violence has been stemmed. We see these periodic reports. But a cessation of hostilities -- our goal is that it's open-ended. Our goal is that it's nationwide, because that creates the political space where we can continue to have these conversations under de Mistura and actually seek that political transition.

QUESTION: Now let me ask you conversely, considering or in light of the statements made by Ayman Zawahiri, repeated statements, the head of al-Qaida, are you concerned that this pause in fighting might give al-Qaida a push to sort of regroup and re-attack?

MS TRUDEAU: No, because what we're concerned is that this fighting creates the sort of ungoverned spaces in which terrorists breed and which terrorism spread. So the political transition and a stable Syria is in the best interests of all of us.

QUESTION: Mm-hmm. And finally, so what is the next step in terms of the talks that are ongoing? Do we have --

MS TRUDEAU: So I think you saw Secretary Kerry said today that the ISSG will meet May 17th in Vienna. He will co-host with Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov this meeting to reaffirm and strengthen the nationwide cessation of hostilities throughout Syria. He'll discuss the tangible steps the ISSG can support and take to ensure full, unimpeded, and sustained humanitarian access throughout the country, especially in the besieged and hard-to-reach areas, and he'll advance discussions between the Syrian parties on a genuine political transition in accordance with the Geneva communique.

QUESTION: So yesterday, we went on at length, some length, about the joint U.S.-Russia statement --

MS TRUDEAU: Yeah.

QUESTION: -- which you said that the Administration's position was that this statement reaffirmed the entire cease -- the nationwide --

MS TRUDEAU: Yeah.

QUESTION: -- cessation of hostilities and there was no longer, then, any need for these localized extension -- or extensions of localized cessations of hostilities. Like an hour after we --

MS TRUDEAU: I know.

QUESTION: -- finished this -- that conversation, the Syrian Government announced a 48-hour extension of the localized Aleppo cessation. So I'm wondering: Does that mean that your interpretation of this joint statement is wrong, or does it mean that the Russians and the Syrians have a different interpretation of it? What does it mean?

MS TRUDEAU: I would say that we stand behind our statement yesterday, co-signed by the Russians, co-released by the Russians, which is an open-ended reaffirmation of the cessation of hostilities. As we talked about yesterday, some of these small sort of area-limited, time-limited cessation of hostilities continue to be confidence-building measures. Our reaffirmation is that the cessation of hostilities is open-ended, it's national. That said --

QUESTION: Yes, but it's not.

MS TRUDEAU: So that said, as I said --

QUESTION: I mean, you can't just pretend that it just --

MS TRUDEAU: No, but -- and like I --

QUESTION: -- applies indefinitely across the country, when the Syrians who are actually on the ground doing the fighting --

MS TRUDEAU: Yeah.

QUESTION: -- with the Russians are doing it piecemeal --

MS TRUDEAU: Yeah.

QUESTION: -- and in time-limited durations.

MS TRUDEAU: So our commitment, like I said, is that it is open-ended. That's what the Russians signed up to as well, Matt.

QUESTION: Yeah, but it's not.

MS TRUDEAU: Well, so when you see these small, like, 48-hour, 24-hour cessation of hostilities, as I said -- so our cessation of hostilities, what we said yesterday in the statement, open-ended, nationwide.

QUESTION: Yeah, I know, but that --

MS TRUDEAU: These small ones -- these --

QUESTION: -- doesn't concur with reality. The reality is is that the Syrians have not --

MS TRUDEAU: And the reality is there is violence on the ground.

QUESTION: I know. But the reality is not -- I'm talking about in terms of the cessation of hostilities. You say it's one thing and insist that that's what it is, when it's not, because the people who are doing the fighting -- the Syrian Government -- are doing it piecemeal and in short durations.

MS TRUDEAU: We talked about this some yesterday. These small confidence-building measures released are --

QUESTION: So you don't --

MS TRUDEAU: So -- I'm sorry, go ahead.

QUESTION: You don't -- you don't see the localized 48-hour extension that the Syrians announced yesterday as being in contradiction to the joint statement?

MS TRUDEAU: No, I don't.

QUESTION: All right.

MS TRUDEAU: Thank you. Any more on Syria?

QUESTION: Yeah. Can you tell me about the discussion the Secretary had with Lavrov this morning?

MS TRUDEAU: Okay, I can confirm that they did have a call, it's my understanding. It was a logistical call. It's one of the calls that the Secretary and Foreign Minister Lavrov have had frequently in the last couple weeks, but I don't have anything more to read out on that.

QUESTION: There was nothing about the open-ended --

MS TRUDEAU: Short-term cessation? No, but I think our statement, which is very clear yesterday and was agreed to and co-released by the Russians, speaks to that.

Syria?

QUESTION: (Inaudible) neither of these people are paid to make logistical calls.

MS TRUDEAU: I'm sorry?

QUESTION: Why did two ministers-level people make a logistical call?

MS TRUDEAU: I think it talks to the importance that -- of both these countries and the commitment that we have to ensuring the political transition and the cessation. We have these calls.

Syria?

QUESTION: Yes.

MS TRUDEAU: Yeah.

QUESTION: So with the small 48-, 24-hour, 72-hour extensions -- so the one that was announced by the government yesterday, that's set to expire at midnight Thursday, so 12:01 a.m. Syria time Thursday -- what's the current plan? Is there any -- is there any --

MS TRUDEAU: Our current plan, like we've spoke to --

QUESTION: Well, I mean, is there any efforts to extend that further, or is the government just going to say 12:01 Thursday, it's not on?

MS TRUDEAU: Well, it was the Syrian Government who announced it. Our position, as was the Russian position: open-ended, countrywide. We will continue to make the case for that. It doesn't say that there's not violence. It doesn't say that there are these areas where there's conflict that flares up.

QUESTION: But I mean, as of now, the Syrian Government can just -- I mean, will fiat that the ceasefire is not on, on Thursday at 12:01.

MS TRUDEAU: Well, and we expect and we have had the Russians recommit to their influence, and we see that that influence has worked in the past.

QUESTION: Does this mean, Elizabeth, that the U.S. and Russia decide and the opposition and the Syrian regime should imply?

MS TRUDEAU: No. I think what it says is that a cessation of hostilities is best for the people of Syria. And this is the understanding we have seen, speaking specifically, like I just mentioned, that the Russians do have influence, that cessation of hostilities in the past has worked. Just because we see these flares or we see these piecemeal approach doesn't mean that we are backing off our commitment to make it open-ended and nationwide.

Okay, are we done with Syria? Okay.

QUESTION: On China, South China Sea --

MS TRUDEAU: Yeah.

QUESTION: -- in regards to the most recent freedom of navigation exercises, the Chinese Government said that the ships entered the water illegally and that this was a threat to peace and stability in the region. Do you have a response to that?

MS TRUDEAU: Sure. So I've got a bit, so bear with me.

The Department of Defense conducted a freedom of navigation operation in the South China Sea, specifically in the region of Fiery Cross Reef in the Spratly Islands, to uphold the rights and freedoms of all states under international law and to challenge excessive maritime claims of some claimants in the South China Sea. These excessive maritime claims are inconsistent with international law as reflected in the Law of the Sea covenant in that they purport to restrict the navigational rights that the United States and all states are entitled to exercise.

During this operation, a U.S. Navy surface ship exercised the right of innocent passage while transiting inside 12 nautical miles of Fiery Cross Reef, a high-tide feature that is occupied by China but also claimed by the Philippines, Taiwan, and Vietnam. No claimants were notified prior to the transit, which is also consistent with our normal process and international law.

This operation challenged attempts by China, Taiwan, and Vietnam to restrict navigational rights around the features they claim, specifically that these three claimants purport to require prior permission or notification of transits through the territorial sea, contrary to international law. Because the Philippines maritime claims in relation to South China Sea features do not purport to restrict the exercise of navigational rights and freedoms under the Law of the Sea by the United States and others, they were not challenged during this operation.

And you had a specific question on China?

QUESTION: And so do you have a response to the Chinese claims that they were illegal?

MS TRUDEAU: Yeah, well, this operation was not singling out China. The operation challenged maritime claims of China, Taiwan, and Vietnam.

QUESTION: Can I ask two things about this?

MS TRUDEAU: Of course.

QUESTION: Who determines what is an excessive maritime claim? Who determines "excessive"?

MS TRUDEAU: So it is -- there's -- it is consistent with the Law of the Sea. It's the international understanding of what innocent passage is.

QUESTION: The United States is not a party to the UNCLOS, isn't that correct?

MS TRUDEAU: So we have conducted freedom of navigations --

QUESTION: But that's not my question.

MS TRUDEAU: Yeah. So for -- it's --

QUESTION: So do China, Taiwan, and the Philippines say that their own claims are excessive? Seems to me that you have just decided that they're excessive because -- under the terms of a treaty to which you're not a party.

MS TRUDEAU: So they have asserted requirements for vessels transiting and it is inconsistent with International Law of the Sea.

QUESTION: But you didn't --

MS TRUDEAU: The U.S. operation -- our freedom of navigation challenges that as these signatories. So --

QUESTION: Yeah, but you didn't -- but you ignored them. Basically, you just -- this ship just barged in without --

MS TRUDEAU: In -- and consistent with international maritime law.

QUESTION: Yeah, yeah, but I mean, you didn't notify anybody.

MS TRUDEAU: No, we did not notify them.

QUESTION: You just went in, but that's not -- my question is: Who decides whether a claim is excessive?

MS TRUDEAU: So it's -- it is the International Law of the Sea, it's my understanding, that determines --

QUESTION: But you're not a party to the International Law of the Sea.

MS TRUDEAU: But this is a common understanding among these claimants.

QUESTION: Well, do they say that their own claims are excessive?

MS TRUDEAU: So there's three nations --

QUESTION: Yes.

MS TRUDEAU: -- that have -- have done that.

QUESTION: Well, not nations, careful, because one of them's Taiwan.

MS TRUDEAU: Yeah, thank you. Three – well, and the Philippines as well as Taiwan that have said claims to this feature in the South China Sea in the Spratly lines.

QUESTION: (Inaudible) acknowledge any of them except your – you're saying that their claim is excessive?

MS TRUDEAU: So we were operating in accordance with international maritime law.

QUESTION: I know, but do any of them agree with you that their own claims --

MS TRUDEAU: I would ask them.

QUESTION: -- are excessive?

MS TRUDEAU: I would ask them on that.

QUESTION: Well, if they don't, then I don't – okay. Oh, and then – no, that's it on that.

MS TRUDEAU: Okay.

QUESTION: Well, I have a follow-up on the claim.

MS TRUDEAU: Sure.

QUESTION: Does one not see this as a – as prodding China? I know you say here that the operation was not singling out China --

MS TRUDEAU: No.

QUESTION: -- but it is close to a reef that China claims as its own.

MS TRUDEAU: No, we don't believe these are provocative at all. Around the world, we conduct freedom of navigations in accordance with international law.

QUESTION: But does one – one doesn't sail close to the specific reef or any of those others --

MS TRUDEAU: No, we don't see this as singling out any country. We don't single – we don't view this as provocative at all. Anything else on South China Sea?

Said.

QUESTION: Can we go to Yemen?

MS TRUDEAU: Of course.

QUESTION: Okay. I know you talked about the talks yesterday --

MS TRUDEAU: Yeah.

QUESTION: -- but I wanted to ask you about the -- apparently the contingent -- the American Special Forces contingent that went to --

MS TRUDEAU: In Mukalla?

QUESTION: -- into Yemen in Mukalla. Is that part of a, like, grander plan to bring about stability and so on?

MS TRUDEAU: So, no, this was limited support. So the Department of Defense has actually spoken to this. U.S. Central Command provided limited support to an anti-al-Qaida of the Arabian Peninsula operation led by Yemeni, Saudi, and Emirati forces in and around Mukalla. We remain concerned about AQAP and we welcome the operations taken by the Yemeni forces with the support of the Emirati and the Saudi forces to address this. It was limited.

QUESTION: Right. As far as the al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula is concerned, it was really one of the showcases of this Administration, because they basically decimated al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula. But then this war brought them back, by and large due to, let's -- to the war that is being waged --

MS TRUDEAU: It's true.

QUESTION: -- by Saudi Arabia and others. So it's like a -- it's kind of --

MS TRUDEAU: Al-Qaida has taken advantage of the instability in Yemen. This was an operation. And again, we thank the Saudis and the Emiratis as well as the Yemenis for moving forward on this operation.

QUESTION: And lastly, today they exchanged -- the fighting forces exchanged prisoners and so on. Do you see this as a step forward (inaudible)?

MS TRUDEAU: We see -- we've spoken about this before. All the steps forward that lead to the full -- because the peace talks are ongoing -- lead to a successful resolution of that, we do welcome it.

Yeah.

QUESTION: Yes, on Yemen. Many believe that the Saudis' yearlong campaign in Yemen has created a power vacuum which al-Qaida took advantage of, and the U.S. supported that intervention. Are we now seeing a situation where the U.S. contributed to the power vacuum and is now fighting the consequences?

MS TRUDEAU: I think what you see is instability caused in Yemen by the war that was happening here. You see certainly the Saudis as well as other Arab coalition partners seeking to address that. This goes back to what we were talking about in Syria. When you have conflict and you have ungoverned spaces, that's where instability and terrorism breed.

QUESTION: Would you say that the Saudi bombing campaign did not dramatically expend the power vacuum in Yemen?

MS TRUDEAU: What I would say is that we – the Saudis and the Arab coalition who came in at the invitation of the Yemeni Government are working to reduce the ungoverned space.

QUESTION: (Inaudible) the result?

MS TRUDEAU: I'm sorry?

QUESTION: The result – has it reduced the ungoverned space?

MS TRUDEAU: Well, what you see in the operations like what happened in Mukalla is you see some of that ungoverned space being chipped back. And let's also remember where we're going on this, which is the UN-led peace talks, where you're looking at a real political solution to this. But ungoverned spaces do breed terror.

QUESTION: Yeah, that's right. But does the U.S. still support the Saudi-led bombing campaign in Yemen?

MS TRUDEAU: We support the Saudi-Arab coalition, yeah.

Pat.

QUESTION: Does the U.S. --

MS TRUDEAU: I'm sorry, we're going to move on.

QUESTION: Thank you. Jahanzaib Ali from ARY News TV. Ma'am, U.S. Special Forces in Afghanistan today rescued Ali Haider Gilani, the son of former prime minister Yousuf Raza Gilani. Can you tell us a detail of that operation?

MS TRUDEAU: Okay, so actually I spoke about this at the top.

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

MS TRUDEAU: It's fine. So I'll leave that there, but if you have questions on operations, I'm going to --

QUESTION: Who were the kidnappers?

MS TRUDEAU: So I'm going to refer you to the Department of Defense if you have questions on the exact operational details.

QUESTION: Okay. Secondly, it's about the question of a political party, MQM, in Pakistan. They have announced here in Washington that they have submitted a paper, a memorandum, with the office of Richard Olson, alleged --

MS TRUDEAU: Of SRAP?

QUESTION: Yes. And alleged that Pakistani military killing their workers. And can you share the (inaudible) of that letter with us?

MS TRUDEAU: We have not received that letter.

QUESTION: You haven't received?

MS TRUDEAU: We have not.

QUESTION: Okay.

MS TRUDEAU: Okay.

QUESTION: Thank you very much.

QUESTION: Yeah, quick question on North Korea. Recently, North Korean leader Kim Jong-un suggested peace treaty talk with the United States. What does the U.S. think or consider about his suggestion?

MS TRUDEAU: So on the peace treaty, our position and the position of the international community is clear. It's we will not accept the DPRK as a nuclear state. We have made very clear on this we are open to authentic and credible negotiations to implement the September 20, 2005 joint statement and bring North Korea into compliance with all applicable Security Council resolutions. However, the onus is on North Korea, as it has long been, to take meaningful action to verifiable denuclearization, refrain from any rhetoric or provocative activity. So that's where we're focused – denuclearization.

QUESTION: But the Chinese Government pressure to United States, but between U.S. and North Korea and China, future they would like to talk with peace treaty talks. So would you be – U.S. consider about what the Chinese pressure to these issues?

MS TRUDEAU: Again, our focus is on verifiable, irreversible denuclearization.

QUESTION: All right. Thank you.

MS TRUDEAU: Thank you. Sir.

QUESTION: On Japan, President Obama announced that he will be visiting Hiroshima earlier today. Are you in contact with your Japanese counterparts to discuss sort of the logistical detail, or --

MS TRUDEAU: As it's a presidential visit, I'm going to refer you to the White House. But thank you.

Okay. Matt.

QUESTION: Yesterday in its court submission, the RNC said that you guys had told them that you would not be producing any of Mr. Pagliano – any more, I guess, of Mr. Pagliano's emails. Is that correct?

MS TRUDEAU: So thank you for that, because there's been some unclear reporting on this. So the department has searched Mr. Pagliano's email PST file and has not located one that covers the time period of Secretary Clinton's tenure. The absence of this email file, however, does not indicate that the department has no emails sent or received by him. In fact, we have previously produced through FOIA and to Congress emails sent and received by Mr. Pagliano during Secretary Clinton's tenure. Furthermore, at no point did the State Department convey to the RNC that we did not intend to produce responsive emails within our possession consistent with our obligations under the law.

QUESTION: Okay, but I mean, are you done? Have you given them everything that they are – should get that you have?

MS TRUDEAU: So we continue to take a look at it. We will produce files as we are required under the law.

QUESTION: Right, I understand that. But do you know at the moment if you have – if there are emails that you have found from that time period that have just not yet been turned over to --

MS TRUDEAU: So the department's ongoing – conducting a thorough search. I don't have details on that, but at no point did we say to the RNC that we would not produce.

QUESTION: All right. And then the last one, which is a logistical thing, which is this – the report that the video of a briefing from a couple years back with Jen Psaki was edited to remove questions and her answers about when the Iran negotiations began. What's going on here?

MS TRUDEAU: Yeah, so we saw that report. We actually spoke to Fox about this yesterday, so thanks for that question. I'd back up. The – this is a daily press briefing from 2013. The transcript of that daily press briefing and video was always available – transcript was on state.gov; the video was available on other sites. There was a glitch in the State Department video. When Fox flagged it for us, we actually replaced it with a video from DVIDS, which is the military repository where a lot of news media gets its video. The whole video was there, and we also annotated it on our YouTube channel.

QUESTION: Yeah, but that – I mean, a glitch? That just seems awfully strange and coincidental that this --

MS TRUDEAU: Yeah. The transcript was always up, though --

QUESTION: Yeah, but the --

MS TRUDEAU: -- and the video existed on other channels. I can't speak to --

QUESTION: Right, but if you were looking on the state.gov website and going to try to watch that part of the briefing, it wouldn't have been there.

MS TRUDEAU: So the briefing was there. As I said, the full transcript was there.

QUESTION: No -- yeah, but several minutes were, like, missing.

MS TRUDEAU: Yeah. No, and so we have subbed it out.

QUESTION: I know, but can you -- is anyone looking into why?

MS TRUDEAU: So we are. We're looking into it. Genuinely we think it was a glitch, so --

QUESTION: (Inaudible) do you think that -- I mean, are there other briefing videos that are -- have been --

MS TRUDEAU: Not to our knowledge at all. But it's -- what we're taking a look at is process. We were unaware of it, and as soon as we found about it we made sure it was whole.

QUESTION: Okay. But is there any indication that you -- since you -- since this was brought to your attention, I guess yesterday -- yeah -- have you discovered that it was altered at all?

MS TRUDEAU: I -- not to my knowledge. There was a missing portion of it. We pulled it from another online source that this --

QUESTION: I get that, but I'm trying to figure out how exactly the portion that was missing --

MS TRUDEAU: I -- you know what, it's something we're looking into.

QUESTION: Okay.

MS TRUDEAU: Okay.

QUESTION: Elizabeth, can I ask a quick on Egypt?

MS TRUDEAU: Sure, of course. Egypt?

QUESTION: Just to follow what -- yes. What you said yesterday -- I know you addressed the issue of the sentence of the --

MS TRUDEAU: For the Al Jazeera journalist?

QUESTION: Yeah, for Ibrahim Helal and Alaa Sablan. And you said that they were sentenced in absentia --

MS TRUDEAU: Yeah, that's our understanding.

QUESTION: -- which is another thing, and then you said you were concerned. Is that the extent of your concern, or are you going to, let's say, perhaps issue a stronger statement? I mean, considering that basically that was the essence of a Patrick Leahy letter -- I mean, Egypt violates human rights, and if we are -- if they are violating human rights --

MS TRUDEAU: Well, this is a court process, so it is actually different. This is something we continue to track. We raise our concerns on a routine and consistent basis with Egyptian authorities, so we don't take this sentence lightly. We did note that this was -- apparently the trial was in absentia, so the verdict was -- I'm loath to say automatic, but was actually part of the process. But we do raise this. We are concerned.

Okay.

QUESTION: Could I just go back --

MS TRUDEAU: Of course.

QUESTION: -- to the transcript -- I mean the video -- please?

MS TRUDEAU: Yeah. Sure.

QUESTION: Is someone looking into this --

MS TRUDEAU: Yeah.

QUESTION: -- to see whether -- what exactly happened in this case and also to make sure --

MS TRUDEAU: Yeah.

QUESTION: -- that it is not --

MS TRUDEAU: Yeah.

QUESTION: -- that there aren't other videos that are --

MS TRUDEAU: Yeah. It is. We've changed our procedures. And this is so technical, and forgive me for this -- we've changed our procedures on that, but we are taking a look at it. Certainly, transparency and getting information to you guys, not only here in the briefing room but on the web and searchable, is a priority for us. And so absolutely.

QUESTION: All right. So when --

QUESTION: So if the investigation finds that someone deliberately cut that section, that person would face disciplinary procedures?

MS TRUDEAU: I'm not going to get ahead of it. We just found out. We made it whole.

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

MS TRUDEAU: We'll take a look at it.

Okay.

QUESTION: Well, could you -- when you're done with this -- and not you personally, but whoever's looking into it --

MS TRUDEAU: In my free time. (Laughter.)

QUESTION: Yes, on weekends -- can you let us know what the result of the investigation is?

MS TRUDEAU: Yeah. If there is any update, I absolutely will. And I don't want to call it an investigation, because that makes it formal. What I'm -- what we're looking at is what happened.

QUESTION: Well, exactly.

MS TRUDEAU: Yeah.

QUESTION: Well, we would like to know what happened too.

MS TRUDEAU: Yeah.

QUESTION: So can you let us know when you find out what happened?

MS TRUDEAU: As always.

QUESTION: And hopefully this will be, like -- not going to take a year?

MS TRUDEAU: Yeah. I think it's -- yeah. I would characterize it as a glitch.

QUESTION: Is Public Affairs looking into it, or --

MS TRUDEAU: The department is.

Okay.

QUESTION: Has a similar glitch happened in the past?

MS TRUDEAU: Not to my knowledge at all.

Thanks, guys.

QUESTION: Thank you.

(The briefing was concluded at 2:33 p.m.)

###

From: Norris, Emily Y **RELEASE IN PART B6**
Sent: Tuesday, May 10, 2016 3:09 PM
To: Werberg, Samuel (Cairo)
Subject: Latest State Iran PG : May 10, 2016
Attachments: 051016-IRAN- Glitch Video and JCPOA, Hekmati Lawsuit, S-300 .docx

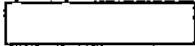
Hi All,

Please find today's Iran PG attached – covering Fox reporting on an old briefing clip, Hekmati's Lawsuit and s300.

Emily

Emily Yasmin Norris

Office of Iranian Affairs
U.S. Department of State
norrisey@state.gov
(202) 647-3719



B6

This email is UNCLASSIFIED.

From: Norris, Emily Y
Sent: Thursday, May 12, 2016 3:42 PM
To: Werberg, Samuel (Cairo)
Subject: Latest State Iran PG, May 11-12
Attachments: 051216-IRAN- S outreach travel, Holocaust cartoons, Hajj and Saudi.docx; 051116-IRAN- S travel, Fox video, S 300, Sanctions Compensation; SCOTUS, Syria.docx

RELEASE IN PART B6

Hi all,

Please find today and yesterday's PG attached.

Cheers,
Emily

Emily Yasmine Norris

Office of Iranian Affairs
U.S. Department of State
norrisev@state.gov
(202) 647-3719

[Redacted]

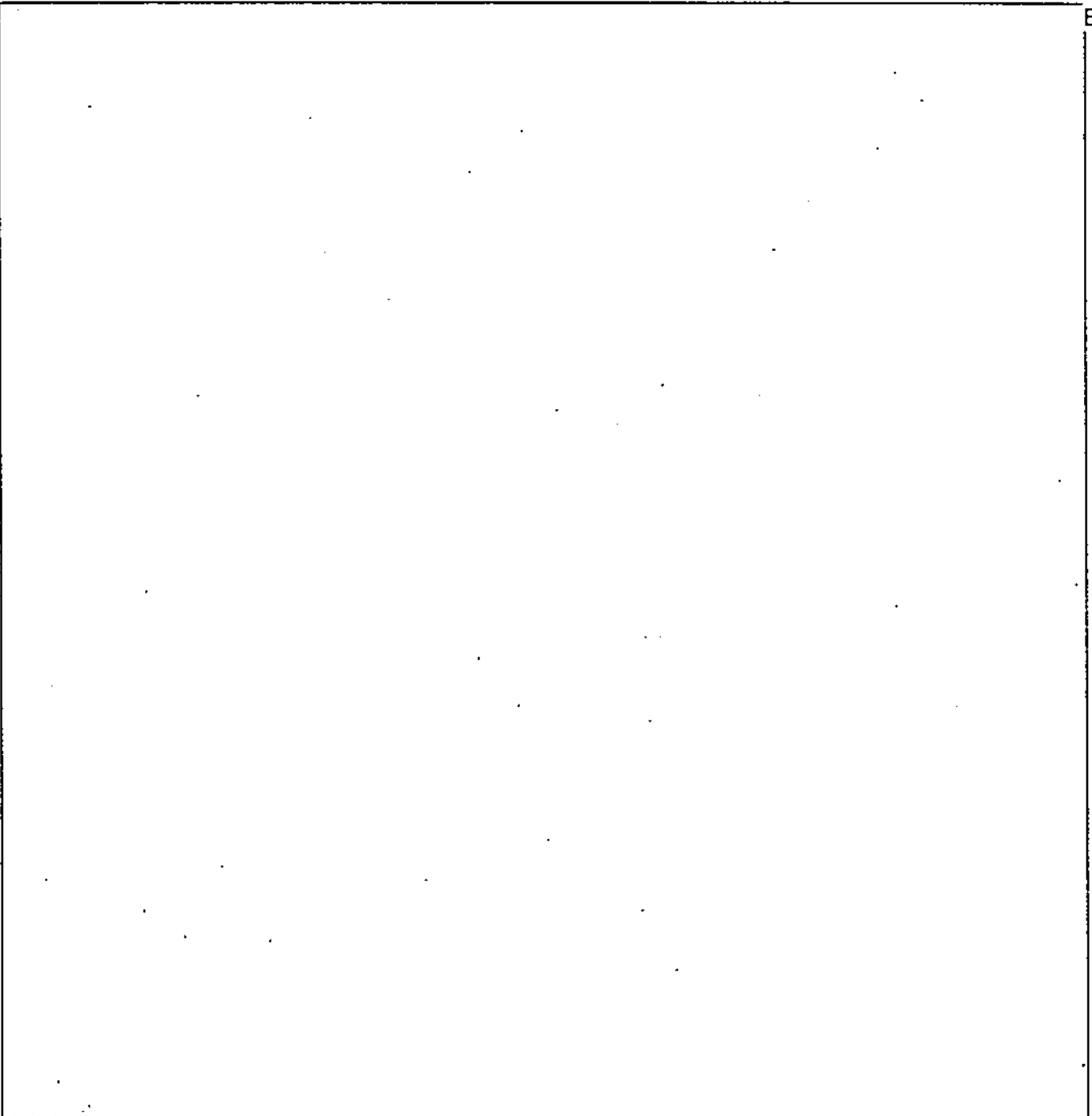
B6

This email is UNCLASSIFIED.

NEA Press Guidance
May 11, 2016

IRAN: S Travel, Fox video, Sanctions Relief 3 billion, SCOTUS Compensation, Syria

Secretary Travel to Europe Bank Meeting



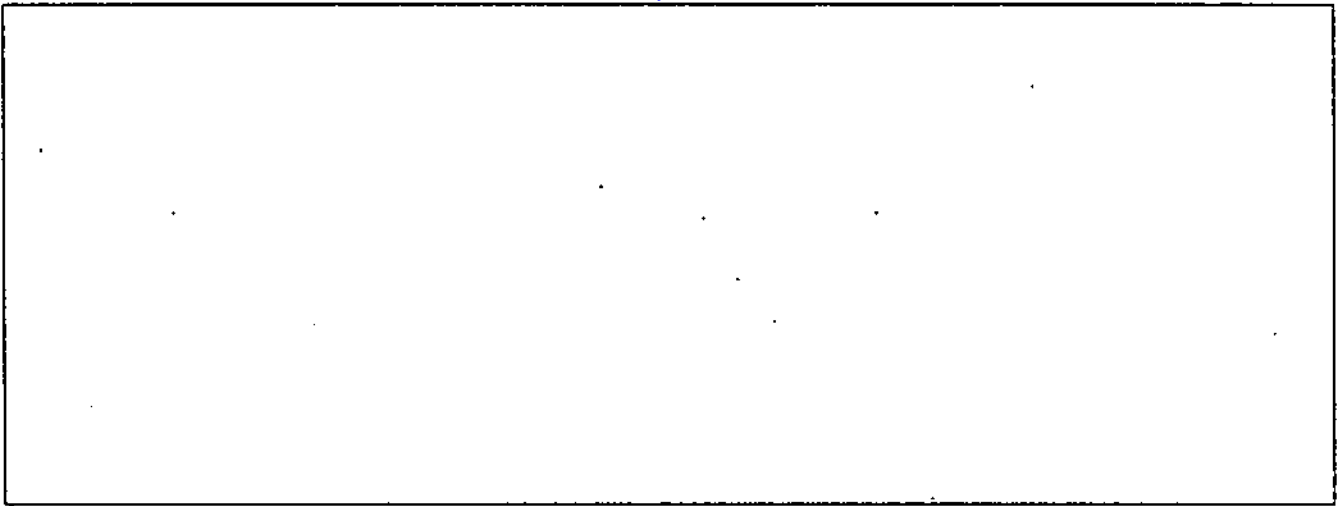
B5

IRAN PRESS GUIDANCE – May 11, 2016, 2016

1

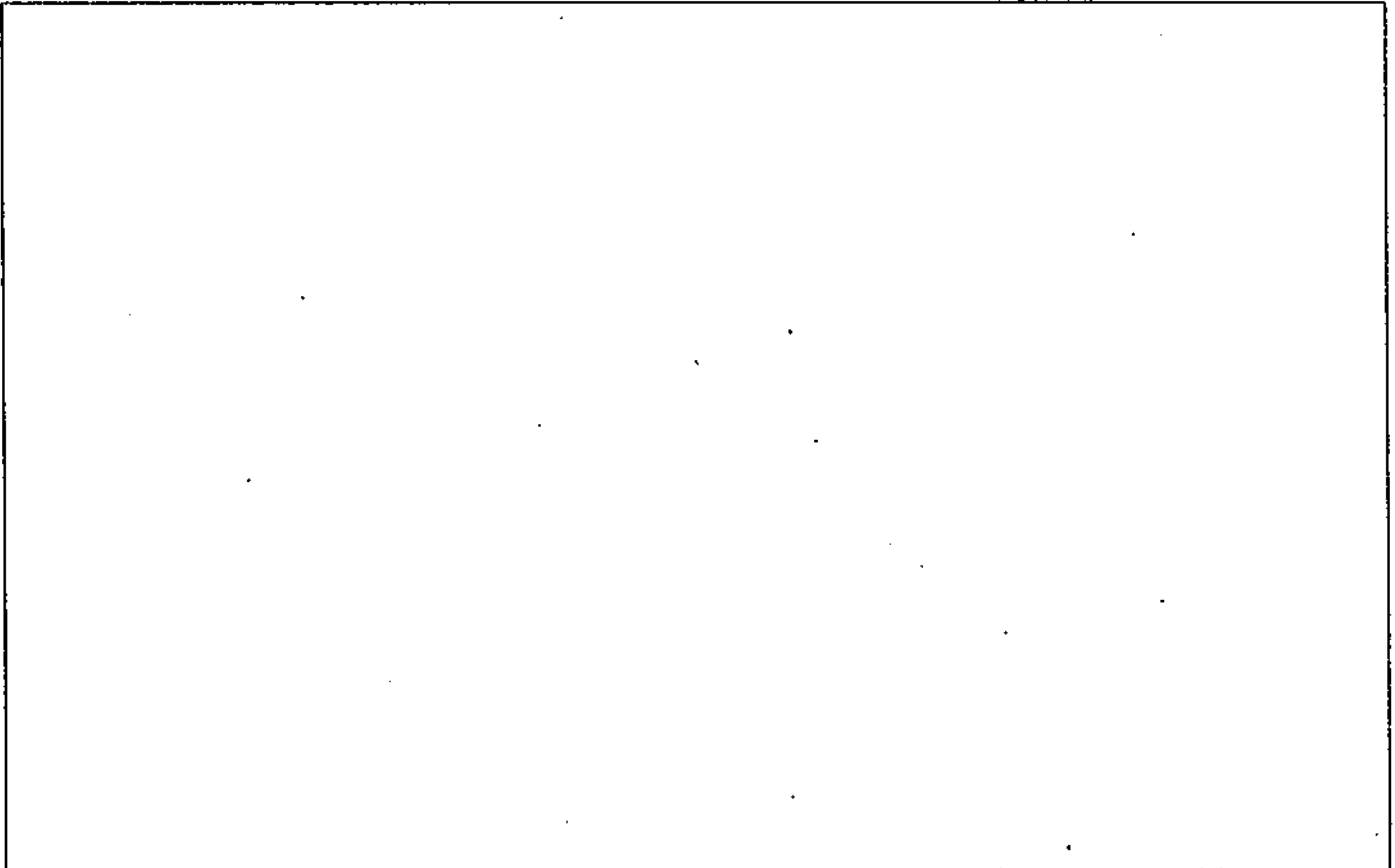
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B5



Fox JCPOA Video

B5

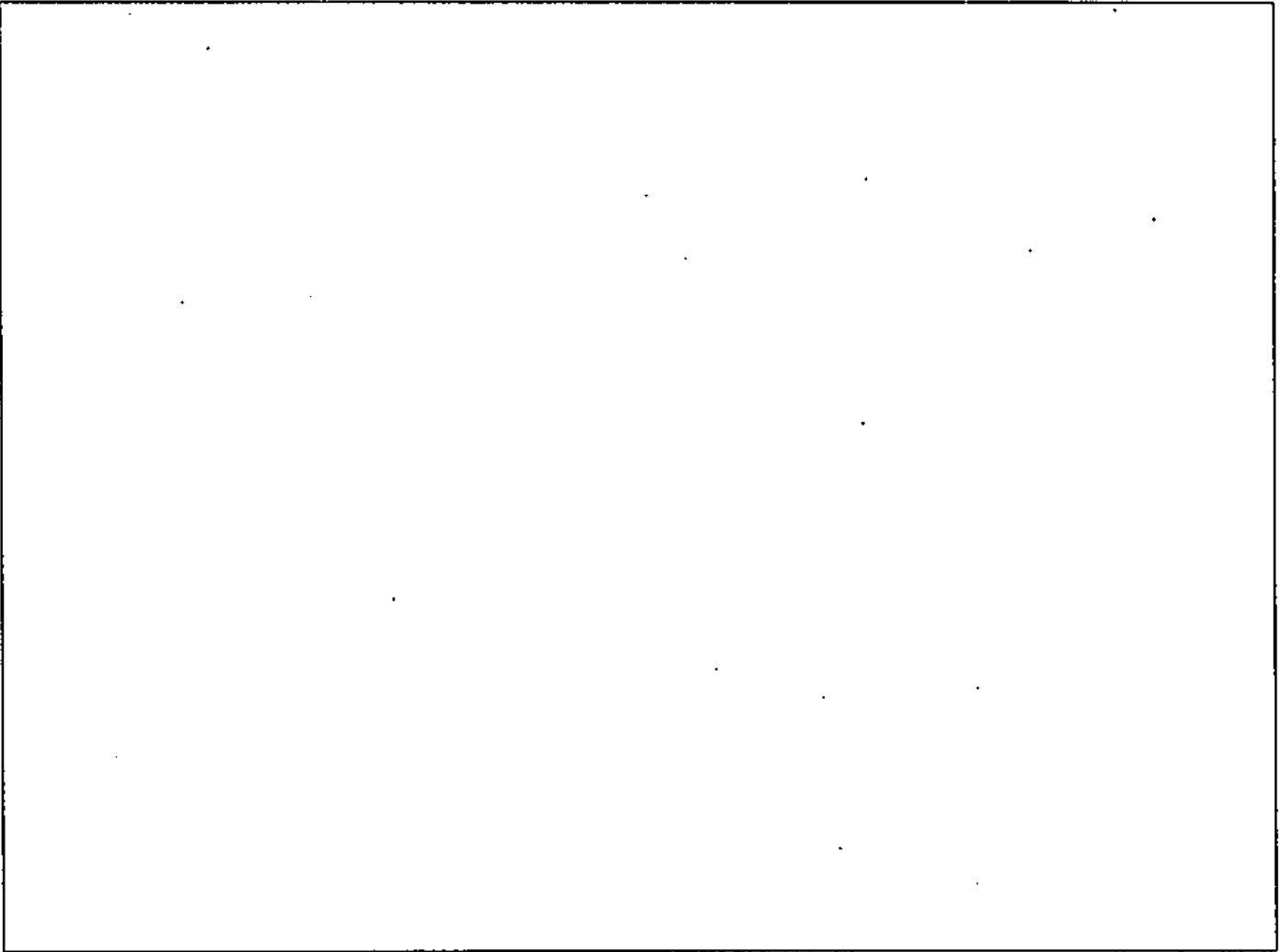


3

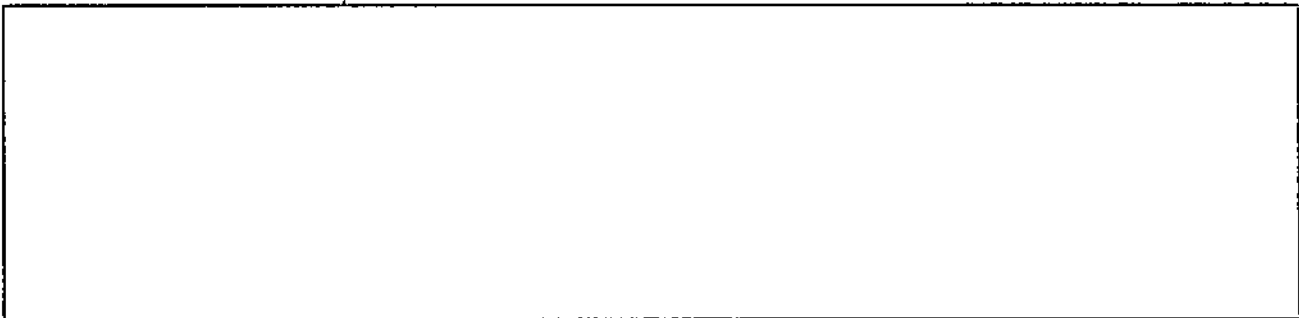
IRAN PRESS GUIDANCE – May 11, 2016, 2016

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B5



Hekmati lawsuit against Iran



B5

IRAN PRESS GUIDANCE – May 11, 2016, 2016

5

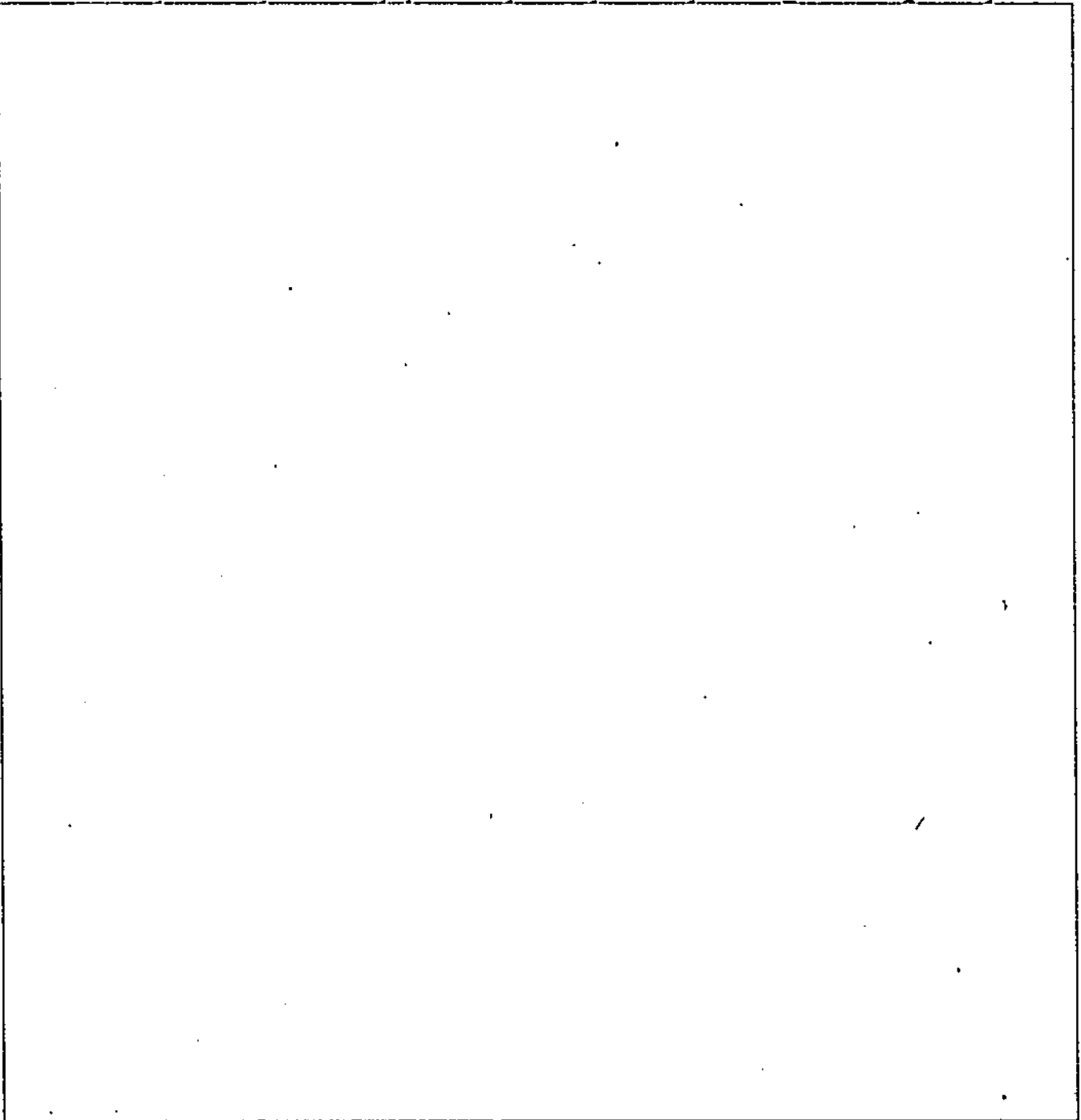
85

Russian S-300 Delivery

85

6

IRAN PRESS GUIDANCE - May 11, 2016, 2016



\$3 Billion Post JCPOA Relief

IRAN PRESS GUIDANCE – May 11, 2016, 2016

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B5

SYRIA

B5

10

IRAN PRESS GUIDANCE ~ May 11, 2016, 2016

B5

SCOTUS RULING

B5

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From: Harf, Marie E
Sent: Tuesday, May 10, 2016 12:14 PM
To: Norris, Emily Y
Subject: Re: lines on fox new story

RELEASE IN PART
B5, B6

I would replace the tic below with the language as I edited it

[REDACTED]

B5

From: Norris, Emily Y
Sent: Tuesday, May 10, 2016 12:06 PM
To: Harf, Marie E
Subject: RE: lines on fox new story

Thank you!

This email is UNCLASSIFIED.

From: Harf, Marie E
Sent: Tuesday, May 10, 2016 12:06 PM
To: Norris, Emily Y
Subject: Re: lines on fox new story

Yep will look at now

From: Norris, Emily Y
Sent: Tuesday, May 10, 2016 11:55 AM
To: Harf, Marie E
Subject: lines on fox new story

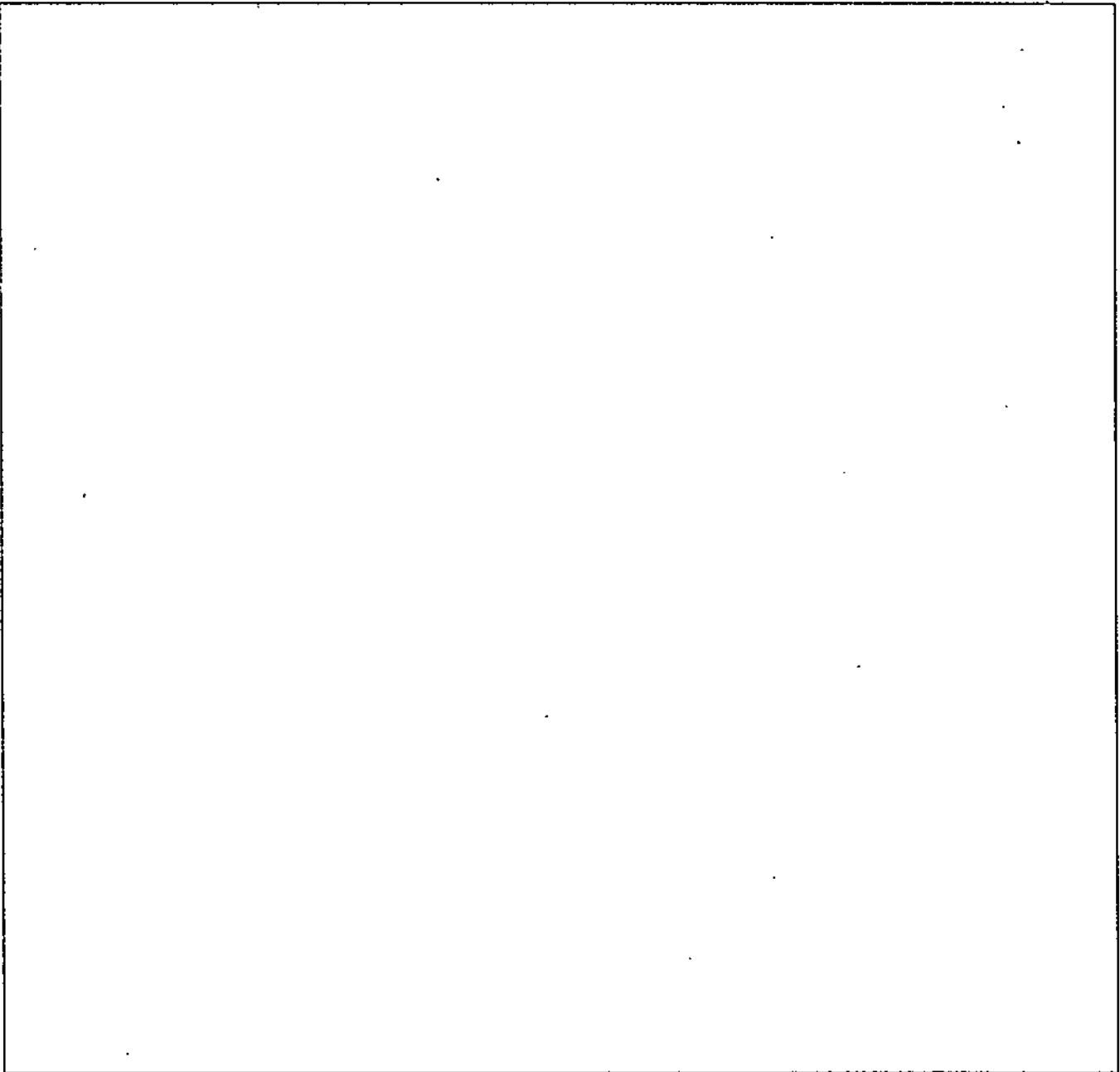
Hi Marie,

It was mentioned to me that you may have some points on this that you would suggest we use. Could you let me know what you think of this? [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Fox JCPOA Glitch Video

B5



Emily Hasmina Norris

Office of Iranian Affairs
U.S. Department of State
norrisey@state.gov
(202) 647-3719

B6

This email is UNCLASSIFIED:

From: Rapp, Laurel T
Sent: Tuesday, May 10, 2016 9:42 AM
To: Norris, Emily Y; P NEA Duty
Subject: RE: Please Clear: Iran PG

RELEASE IN PART B6

Clear . What was this glitch, exactly?

Laurel Rapp
Special Assistant to the Deputy Secretary
Department of State
Office - 202.647.8690
Mobile: [REDACTED]
RappLT@state.gov

B6

From: Norris, Emily Y
Sent: Tuesday, May 10, 2016 9:39 AM
To: P NEA Duty; Rapp, Laurel T
Subject: Please Clear: Iran PG

Hi Anna and Laurel,

Could you please clear the attached Iran PG on a Fox report last night saying we lied about eh JCPOA and the announcement that Amir Hekmati is suing the Iranian gov?

Thanks,
Emily

Emily Yasmin Norris

Office of Iranian Affairs
U.S. Department of State
norrisey@state.gov
(202) 647-3719
[REDACTED]

B6

This email is UNCLASSIFIED.

From: Tiantawach, Dew D. EOP/NSC [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, May 09, 2016 6:24 PM
To: Norris, Emily Y; Beechem, Stephanie; Werberg, Samuel (Cairo); Trudeau, Elizabeth K
Subject: RE: Urgent

B6

RELEASE IN PART
B5, B6

B5

-----Original Message-----

From: Norris, Emily Y [<http://redirect.state.sbu/?url=mailto:NorrisEY@state.gov>]
Sent: Monday, May 9, 2016 5:28 PM
To: Beechem, Stephanie <BeechemS@state.gov>; Werberg, Samuel <WerbergS@state.gov>; Tiantawach, Dew D. EOP/NSC [REDACTED]
Subject: RE: Urgent

Looping in Dew who was in NEA/IR at the time and may have background info on this issue.

This email is UNCLASSIFIED.

From: Beechem, Stephanie
Sent: Monday, May 09, 2016 5:24 PM
To: Werberg, Samuel; Norris, Emily Y
Subject: FW: Urgent

Do you know anything about this??

This email is UNCLASSIFIED.

From: Rosen, James [[http://redirect.state.sbu/?url=mailto:\[REDACTED\]](http://redirect.state.sbu/?url=mailto:[REDACTED])]
Sent: Monday, May 09, 2016 5:21 PM
To: Trudeau, Elizabeth K; Kirby, John
Cc: Toner, Mark C; Beechem, Stephanie; Hickey, Lauren A
Subject: RE: Urgent

B6

At the 12/2/13 briefing, I confronted Jen Psaki with the false statement made to me by Toria Nuland at the 2/6/13 briefing. That earlier exchange went like this:

ROSEN: There have been reports that intermittently, and outside of the formal P-5+1 mechanisms the Obama Administration, or members of it, have conducted direct, secret, bilateral talks with Iran. Is that true or false?

NULAND: We have made clear, as the Vice President did at Munich, that in the context of the larger P-5+1 framework, we would be prepared to talk to Iran bilaterally. But with regard to the kind of thing that you're talking about on a government-to-government level, no.

Of course, the secret Iran talks had begun eight months before that exchange.

The transcript for the 12/2/13 briefing is below, with the yellow part signifying the part that has been edited out of DOS's video of the briefing on its website and YT channel.

We want to know why and when DOS inserted a white-flash into the 12/2/13 video to censor the part where I asked Jen Psaki about Toria Nuland's false statement on the Iran talks (and Psaki in essence said the administration needed "privacy").

All of this is obviously relevant in light of the NYTM questions about whether Rhodes/DOS et al misled the people, and the press, about the origins and timing of the Iran talks.

If we don't hear back by 5:45p - we just discovered this act of censorship - we are going to report it as such in our 6p show.

James Rosen

Chief Washington Correspondent

Host, "The Foxhole"

Twitter: @JamesRosenFNC

[redacted] (office)

[redacted] (mobile)

[redacted]

B6

Author, Cheney One on One

<http://redirect.state.sbu/?url=http://redirect.state.sbu/?url=http://redirect.state.sbu/?url=http://www.amazon.com/Cheney-One-Conversation-Controversial-Statesman/dp/1621574628/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1442415629&sr=8-1&keywords=cheney+rosen>

From: Trudeau, Elizabeth K

[><http://redirect.state.sbu/?url=http://redirect.state.sbu/?url=http://redirect.state.sbu/?url=mailto:trudeauek@state.gov><

Sent: Monday, May 09, 2016 5:13 PM

To: Rosen, James; Kirby, John

Cc: Toner, Mark C; Beechem, Stephanie; Hickey, Lauren A

Subject: RE: Urgent

James, I am solo in town today - Kirby and Toner on road. Adding Beechem and Hickey on this.

Not sure I understand Q.

From: Rosen, James

[><http://redirect.state.sbu/?url=http://redirect.state.sbu/?url=http://redirect.state.sbu/?url=mailto:>

B6

Sent: Monday, May 09, 2016 5:10 PM

To: Kirby, John

Cc: Trudeau, Elizabeth K; Toner, Mark C

Subject: Urgent

Need a call from one of you in the next thirty minutes or so. We are going to go to air with the information below, in the context of the whole Ben Rhodes controversy, at 6p, and we'd like to give DOS a chance to clear it up. My contact info is below. The relevant info is also below, courtesy of one of our video librarians in the Fox News Washington bureau. The basic question is why - and when - DOS censored its video of the highlighted portion of the 12/2/13 briefing (26:58 into the clip) with a white flash, on both the DOS web page and the DOS YT channel. Yours cordially, James

James Rosen

Chief Washington Correspondent

Host, "The Foxhole"

Twitter: @JamesRosenFNC

(office)

B6

[redacted] (mobile)

[redacted]
Author, Cheney One on One

Highlighted below. The video posted online here

(>[http://redirect.state.sbu/?url=http://redirect.state.sbu/?url=http://redirect.state.sbu/?url=http://redirect.state.sbu/?url=http://redirect.state.sbu/?url=http://video.state.gov/en/video/2886914568001](http://redirect.state.sbu/?url=http://redirect.state.sbu/?url=http://redirect.state.sbu/?url=http://redirect.state.sbu/?url=http://redirect.state.sbu/?url=http://redirect.state.sbu/?url=http://video.state.gov/en/video/2886914568001)<) ends with Psaki responding to Roz's question saying "....and so that has not changed that." White flash on screen at 26:58 and then it picks up with Roz talking again.

TRANSCRIPT:

1:54 p.m. EST

MS. PSAKI: Hi, everyone. Happy --

QUESTION: Happy belated birthday.

MS. PSAKI: Thank you. Thank you very much. Twenty-two. It's glorious. (Laughter.)

QUESTION: And you will be 22 for the next --

MS. PSAKI: I will be.

QUESTION: What, 10, 15 years?

MS. PSAKI: At least, at least. Well, I have nothing at the top, so Matt, let's go to what's on your mind.

QUESTION: Let's see. I have a lot --

MS. PSAKI: Okay.

QUESTION: -- but nothing is really worth starting with, so let's just start with the Secretary's trip.

MS. PSAKI: Okay.

QUESTION: Both - excluding the middle stop in Moldova, at the beginning, how much of the NAC do you expect is going to be concentrated on Afghanistan and then talking about the BSA? Will there be any Afghan officials there to talk with? And then - well, that'll be that one question for --

MS. PSAKI: Okay. Well, we'll clearly, as we typically do, be doing a briefing en route about the trip and about our visit to the NATO Ministerial tomorrow, where we will venture to have more specific details about who will be attending. Obviously, Afghanistan and the ongoing presence there post-2014 of the United States and of NATO will certainly be a big topic of discussion. But I will let our briefers outline more specifics en route to Brussels.

QUESTION: All right. Well, I was going to ask about the Middle East but - as well, the stop in Israel and the PA. But if you're just - are you going to give me the same answer, wait for the briefing on the plane?

MS. PSAKI: I likely will, yes.

QUESTION: Okay. Well, then never mind.

MS. PSAKI: Okay.

QUESTION: And then quickly on Afghanistan --

MS. PSAKI: Sure, Lesley.

QUESTION: Is - what further is happening as far as trying to resolve this issue with Afghanistan?

MS. PSAKI: Well --

QUESTION: As far as - is it true that --

MS. PSAKI: The BSA.

QUESTION: The - exactly.

MS. PSAKI: The signing, I assume.

QUESTION: Is it true that Special Envoy Dobbins has gone - is on his way to Afghanistan?

MS. PSAKI: I don't have any announcements at this point on travel for him or anyone else. Obviously, our team on the ground, Ambassador Cunningham and others, have been in close contact. At this point, we've made our position clear, and so have the Afghan people. Signing the BSA soon is the path forward, as we've said many times, to sustaining a partnership between the United States and Afghanistan to support Afghans in achieving lasting peace, security, and development. That's the message that we're conveying at every level. And as we've said before but important to reiterate here, given it's a week later now: We - deferring the signature of the agreement until after next year's election is not viable. It would not provide Afghans with the certainty that they deserve regarding their future in the critical months leading to the elections, nor would it provide the United States and NATO allies the clarity necessary for a potential post-2014 military presence.

So we're continuing to convey that. Our team on the ground is certainly hard at work. I don't have any travel announcements. If that changes, we'll certainly let all of you know.

QUESTION: Has Secretary spoken to President Karzai in the last couple of days on BSA?

MS. PSAKI: He has not spoken with him in the last couple of days.

QUESTION: And the Pentagon today said that this is not the end of it; after BSA is signed, the U.S. and Afghanistan have to negotiate and sign their agreement called SOFA, and that would be done by the State Department. Has any process started on SOFA, signing of SOFA with Afghanistan?

MS. PSAKI: I'd have to look more specifically at what they said. Maybe you're referring to the NATO SOFA that they may have to negotiate and sign, I believe, as a step? But for our purposes, there's the signing; it goes through parliament, then it would have to be signed again. Obviously, as you all are very familiar with, this doesn't outline a specific number for a troop presence, so there would be a great deal of planning in regards to that that DOD would certainly be very engaged with. But in terms of that, I'd have to look at specifically what they said. I'm not familiar with that --

QUESTION: Is December 21st the redline, the deadline for signing of BSA, after which you will begin preparing for all troops pull out from Afghanistan post 2014.

MS. PSAKI: I am not going to get into new redlines or deadlines today, I will say. But on the trip question, well, as you all know, a decision hasn't been made. You would know if it had been. It's not our preference, but no troops is certainly a potential outcome for Afghanistan if there is no BSA. So that is, again, not our preference, but natural that planning would have to take place for all different options.

QUESTION: Have you tried to understand why President Karzai is doing what he's doing or conducting himself the way he has? Do you have a clearer picture than we do, for instance?

MS. PSAKI: I don't know that I have any further insight than you do. Obviously, the Secretary spoke with him last week, as you all well know. We continue to press our case for why this should be signed as quickly as possible, but I don't have any analysis of particular actions or comments in Afghanistan.

QUESTION: So you think that he's perhaps more concerned about his personal safety post the elections?

MS. PSAKI: I will let you, Said, do your own analysis. I don't have any other analysis on it.

Do we have any more on Afghanistan?

QUESTION: Just the trip?

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: For those of us who are interested in Moldova --

MS. PSAKI: Yes.

QUESTION: -- could you just tell us why stop in Moldova? What's the importance? We see the winery, et cetera.

MS. PSAKI: Sure. Moldova is a country that has taken a number of important reform steps in recent years. They have - they're taking steps to help grow their economy, and wine is obviously a significant export. But they have a number of exports they also work with. And given the steps they've taken, the Secretary felt it would be an important opportunity to pay a visit. You'd have to check my history and facts here, but I believe he may be, if not the first, one of the first Secretaries to pay a bilateral visit to Moldova.

QUESTION: And also it comes, obviously, right after Ukraine decided not to sign the agreement with the EU.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: Moldova did. So you could read into this that the Secretary wants to buck them up or give them something, a sign of support.

MS. PSAKI: Well, we had planned this trip - this trip was in the works before that decision was made. But certainly, they have put a number of reforms in place and they're working hard on their economy and the - if - the Secretary felt it was important to highlight that.

QUESTION: Following on that --

QUESTION: Okay. Can I go over just to Afghanistan for one very briefly?

MS. PSAKI: Sure. Okay, and then we'll go to Anne.

QUESTION: I was gone last week so I'm - most of last week, so what - did the Secretary speak with Karzai before or after Ambassador Rice was there?

MS. PSAKI: Let's see. He spoke with Karzai - President Karzai - I'd have to look back. I believe it was prior to her visit. Let me double check that for you to make sure.

QUESTION: So the last senior official to speak with Karzai, as far as you know, was Ambassador Rice.

MS. PSAKI: I believe that's correct, yes.

QUESTION: Just following on the Moldova for Ukraine substitution, in saying that Secretary Kerry would not, as had been widely expected, attend the OSCE - when you said that, I don't know, about 10 days ago or so --

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: -- we were just at the very beginning of this whole episode.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: And at that point you said it was scheduling issues that had - it would force his cancellation. Are you sticking with that? Is that still the case? Or might there be some policy implications to his decision not to go to the OSCE?

MS. PSAKI: I am sticking with that. I'm just looking at Lesley here in my - corner of my eye. I am sticking with that. I don't have any new guidance for you on that front. Assistant Secretary Nuland is still planning to attend and travel there after joining us for the first part of the visit.

QUESTION: On Syria?

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: Is it --

QUESTION: Can you tell us the - oh, sorry.

QUESTION: Sorry. Just on this charade - charade, for Lesley - of scheduling reasons, is it not the case that not doing - not going on this trip - not going to Kyiv is a sign of displeasure?

MS. PSAKI: I will let you do your own reporting, Matt. I don't have any more analysis or comments on it from here.

QUESTION: But there was --

QUESTION: And one more quick one on Ukraine.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: Obviously, we're seeing the demonstrations, violent crackdown.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: What's the response from the State Department?

MS. PSAKI: Well, we're of course, naturally, closely monitoring the ongoing demonstrations, not only in Kyiv but in cities around Ukraine. As you know, since the demonstrations began on November 21st, there have been an increasing number of violent incidents, including against journalists. We stress there is no room, and we continue to stress there is no room for violence in a country that aspires to a democratic future. We continue to call on all sides to maintain calm, and on Ukrainian authorities to ensure that members of the public and the press are able to safely and peacefully exercise their rights of speech and assembly.

As I mentioned a little bit before, we still have - Assistant Secretary Nuland is still planning to travel there. The Ukrainian foreign ministry announced that the ministerial is proceeding as planned.

QUESTION: But there was -

QUESTION: Are you sure that Ukraine is a country that aspires to a democratic future?

MS. PSAKI: Any country that may aspire, certainly, these are important values to follow through on.

QUESTION: Right. But are you still convinced that Ukraine aspires to a westward-looking, democratic future?

MS. PSAKI: Well, we will see, Matt. Time will tell. Actions speak louder than words.

QUESTION: Do you - does this --

QUESTION: Do you still stand by the comments made by Ambassador Nuland in her speech to the Atlantic Council a couple of weeks ago and also comments from this podium that it is your belief that Ukraine should be following the path towards joining some kind of association agreement with the EU?

MS. PSAKI: Sure. Our view has not changed on that. Obviously, there have been a lot of events that have happened since then, but --

QUESTION: And do you believe that the demonstrations on the streets are actually - that's what they want? I mean, it seems to be that they're demonstrating because they're angry that the government hasn't taken this path that's been laid out for them.

MS. PSAKI: I would point you to the comments of the demonstrators, of which there have been many. I don't want to speak on their behalf, but our position hasn't changed on what steps they could take. Obviously, it's up to Ukraine to take those steps.

QUESTION: So - but, I mean, the United States is - if you don't want to give your backing to them - at least sympathetic to what the demonstrators are asking for.

MS. PSAKI: Again, the demonstrators are saying a range of things, so I don't - beyond what we've stated publicly many times, I don't have any other further public statements on our position, which has been stated by Assistant Secretary Nuland and by other officials in the past several weeks.

QUESTION: Given the estimates of some 300,000 people who were demonstrating across the country on Sunday, and given that they all seem, to a person, to be saying that the government is ignoring their wish to be more closely aligned with Europe, isn't it a bit disingenuous for this building to suggest that they need to show any restraint? They're not the ones who are bludgeoning people with battering rams and turning rubber bullets on the police. It seems they're taking the brunt of everything that's been happening.

MS. PSAKI: I don't think I took sides. I think I said that it's important for all sides to maintain calm, that there's no place for violence in a country that aspires to a democratic future. So I don't - I would disagree with the premise of your claims.

QUESTION: What does this building think of the prime minister's - call for his security forces to show restraint and seemingly to be missing in action when on Sunday there was more violence heaped upon the demonstrators, particularly in Kyiv?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I think I just expressed what our view is of violence against demonstrators, so that's what our view is.

QUESTION: Can I - has the Secretary spoken to somebody in Ukraine, his counterpart?

MS. PSAKI: He has not in the last several days. I can check if there's been any other calls I'm not aware of.

QUESTION: Because one of the big issues for Ukraine is tearing itself away from Russia and looking towards Western Europe for economic support. And one of the big things is that the president of Ukraine is heading to China to look for that. And if - I was wondering if the U.S. had offered them kind of - some kind of assurance or reassurance economically that they could be better off by signing these deals and with the support - and the U.S. would support any kind of reform through the International Monetary Fund.

MS. PSAKI: Well, aside from public statements we've made, which, as Jo referenced, is - that our belief is that European integration is the surest course to economic growth and strengthening Ukraine's democracy. That's still our belief. That's been consistently our belief. But beyond that, I'm not aware of any other discussions. Obviously, there's a lot of - that's going on with the EU and with Russia, and beyond that we have made our position clear.

QUESTION: And what is the building's position on the detention of Yulia Tymoshenko?

MS. PSAKI: Well, we have consistently spoken about this in the past and expressed our concern about her detention. I know this was also a component that was potentially being worked through as an element of Ukraine getting into the EU. So we've consistently expressed concern, encouraged them to take steps forward. Obviously, there hasn't been progress on that on the ground.

QUESTION: I'm sorry, what did you say was the surest way to economic growth?

MS. PSAKI: I said European integration is the surest course to economic growth and strengthening --

QUESTION: Did you give the same advice to the Greeks?

(Laughter.)

MS. PSAKI: Matt. Behave.

Do we have any more on Ukraine or Afghanistan, since we touched on that too?

QUESTION: Still on Ukraine.

MS. PSAKI: Okay.

QUESTION: The Russians have proposed that the EU, Ukraine, and Russia get together to discuss some of these problems. Would the United States be in favor of that, some kind of a trilateral discussion to discuss the economic situation and political differences?

MS. PSAKI: It wouldn't involve the United States, so I don't have a particular position. I'm happy to talk to our team and see if we have a view on that.

Ukraine or Afghanistan? Okay, should we move on to Syria? Let's go to Margaret.

QUESTION: Thank you. Jen, the OPCW said over the past few days that the U.S. has stepped up, that they're going to give operational support, offering up financing. Can you give us some more detail on that?

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm. Well, I don't know if it will be satisfying, but let me try. (Laughter.) Well, as you know, the United States is committed to supporting the international community's efforts to destroy Syria's chemical weapons in the safest, most efficient and effective means possible. We have offered and are currently outfitting a U.S. vessel with field-deployable hydrolysis system technology to support the OPCW's efforts. We are in close contact with the OPCW and our international partners and remain confident that we can meet the milestones for destruction set out by the OPCW. Of course, the OPCW remains - and the UN - remain the lead coordinators on reaching out to countries and coordinating steps forward and any timeline, et cetera.

QUESTION: But on the financing, what is it exactly that we're offering? Is that a chunk of change? Is that financing and loans, or --

MS. PSAKI: Well, we've offered - we've offered in the - prior to this, we have offered - we have given 6 million to the OPCW and the UN Trust Fund, both in financial contributions and in kind, so I think we gave some materials as well. But this, of course, would be a DOD vessel. So I would point you to them on the specific costs. This, at this point, is an offer. So I think that's still being worked through.

QUESTION: So - but beyond the vessel, the OPCW says the cost is going to be between 35 to 40 million euros for the private contractors who would actually be --

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: -- be doing the disposal themselves. So is any of that money coming through the State Department, or is the State Department topped out at \$6 million?

MS. PSAKI: Well, we've said we'd be open to exploring additional ways to provide assistance. I don't have any announcements today of additional assistance we're planning to provide, but that certainly is something we're in discussions with the OPCW about.

QUESTION: So we can understand correctly, it is a commercial vessel, correct, that they are trying --

MS. PSAKI: It is a --

QUESTION: -- (inaudible) --

MS. PSAKI: -- U.S. Government vessel, not a commercial vessel.

QUESTION: Right.

MS. PSAKI: But there is a part of this - and this may be what you're asking about - which is the OPCW reaching out to commercial companies about the destruction capabilities.

QUESTION: Okay.

QUESTION: So what - so DOD is outfitting its own boat, which will be staffed with DOD personnel who will do this?

MS. PSAKI: I'd have to check on the specifics of that. I think some of it may still be work - be going through the process of being worked out, Matt, because they've offered - but obviously, how it would be staffed and the materials and the money - I mean, all of those are pieces that are still being discussed.

QUESTION: Do you actually have a timeline and the location for where this would happen?

MS. PSAKI: I don't have a location. That's still being discussed. The timeline, as you know, is - the next deadline is - not deadline, it's a target - is December 31st. And that is to get all of the chemical weapons out. But in terms of when the next step would be, I don't have a timeline of that.

Anne.

QUESTION: I realize part of this is kind of DOD-flavored, but you might know the answer.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: So is it proper to call this a warship, or is it a military-owned, but not non-warship ship?

(Laughter:)

MS. PSAKI: That is a very specific ship question. I would hesitate to answer incorrectly. I'd have to check on specifically how we categorize it. I don't believe it is a warship, but let me see if we can get more specification on how we - what we call it exactly.

QUESTION: Okay. And on the policy side, I mean, is there any disappointment here that after casting about to - for a friend here, it ends up being the U.S. having to essentially do this on its own?

MS. PSAKI: I wouldn't categorize it that way. I mean, certainly this is a priority for the U.S., as it is for the international community, to destroy and eliminate the chemical weapons. The OPCW is still talking to countries. There are countries that have made public comments about their willingness to help, so we'll see how that all shakes out. And certainly, we'd welcome the support or contribution of other countries.

QUESTION: Well, I'd imagine from your perspective, it should be a shared priority among many nations who would also share the same goal of the ultimate destruction, right? I mean, everybody was waving a flag when that - when the thing was signed.

MS. PSAKI: Certainly, and there are countries, as you know, throughout that have been open to contributing that couldn't for a variety of reasons, whether it's regulations or capacity or resources. But they're still talking to countries about contributing and being a part of this, and certainly we're hopeful of that as well.

QUESTION: So if the question is: "Are you surprised that you've been left holding the bag on this, once again," --

MS. PSAKI: We're not holding the bag yet, Matt.

QUESTION: -- the answer would be no, you're not surprised. You expected your friends in Europe to wimp out.

MS. PSAKI: Well, we made clear we were open to contributing from the beginning, Matt. There are other countries that have expressed an openness to contributing in some capacity. They're all going to make their decisions about what that will - what will - that will entail, and we'll let the OPCW decide how all of it will work together.

QUESTION: What about Russia, who you made this deal with and has been instrumental, as you say, in helping move this towards a resolution? Why can't Russia contribute in a significant way like you can?

MS. PSAKI: I'm not familiar with what they have contributed or what they've committed to contribute or what they have not. Obviously, there are financial ways - there are a number of ways to contribute. We certainly welcome any country's contribution. There are different ways that each country can do that.

QUESTION: Are you in touch with the Russians specifically about making an - a contribution?

MS. PSAKI: I'm not sure. I'd have to check on that and see if it's a discussion that's been a part of the regular discussions with Foreign Minister Lavrov.

QUESTION: Jen, still on Syria.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: Yesterday, Mike Rogers, the chair of the Intelligence Committee, warned that there are many jihadis that are Americans and Europeans and Westerners and so on, that they go back and forth and so on. Are you concerned about these jihadis being trained in Syria and now they come back to the United States and perhaps organize terrorist acts?

MS. PSAKI: I haven't seen his comments specifically. I know - I believe he may have been on a Sunday show yesterday. I haven't read them fully. We've - we're naturally concerned, as you know, about extremists whether they're going in and certainly and if they're coming out. I talked a little bit, I think it was a week or two ago, about ways that we coordinate with our international partners in the region to kind of track this and efforts we undertake to make sure we're watching, but of course we're concerned. I don't have any other specifics for you.

QUESTION: Are you pressing your partners in this case, like the Saudis and the Gulf Cooperation Council countries, that have been supplying arms and money in the past for these extremist groups - are you pressing them not to do so?

MS. PSAKI: We have consistently, and all the countries, as you know, have agreed repeatedly to contribute assistance through the SMC.

QUESTION: Finally, yesterday there was a report in the Telegraph, The London Telegraph, that says basically the Free Syrian Army now is becoming a group of warlords and accumulating money and gangs and so on and have no interest, really, in reaching a settlement. Is that your assessment, or are you still working very closely with General Idris?

MS. PSAKI: We are still working very closely with General Idris, we're still working towards a Geneva conference in January, and we still believe there's no military solution, as you know.

More on Syria?

QUESTION: Still on Syria.

MS. PSAKI: Or - go ahead, Roz.

QUESTION: Still on Syria, the Iranian Foreign Minister Zarif did an interview with Al Jazeera this morning. And when it came to Geneva II, he said that while Iran is, quote: not begging to attend the talks in January, it would attend if invited. My first question: Would the U.S. be willing to invite Iran to take part in these talks? And if so, what does the U.S. believe that Iran could bring to this situation to try to end the civil war?

MS. PSAKI: Well, no decisions have been made about participation yet. There's another trilateral meeting on December 20th coming up that we'll be participating in with the UN and the Russians. Our position hasn't changed on Iran's participation or whether we believe they should be invited. They have not endorsed the Geneva communique. That's a condition we feel is necessary, but obviously this will continue to be discussed at the next trilateral meeting.

QUESTION: But given the - that the UN is now estimating that upwards of 120-25,000 people may have been killed in the civil war to date --

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: -- is there some sort of leverage that Tehran could bring to the table to try to induce the Assad regime to, if nothing else, stop the killing and try to at least put in some sort of ceasefire?

MS. PSAKI: Well, this goes back to the premise that attendees should be endorsing the Geneva communique, because that is what the purpose and the goal of the conference is. So, I don't have any speculation on what leverage they may or may not have, but the conversations we have had with them in recent weeks have been about their nuclear program and moving towards a first-step agreement on that. They've not been focused on Syria. And our position on whether or not they should attend the Geneva conference in January hasn't changed.

QUESTION: But you do feel that if they do endorse Geneva I, there's a great deal of value for Iran's participation --

MS. PSAKI: Well, we'd have to --

QUESTION: -- considering that it is --

MS. PSAKI: We'd have to evaluate it, Said. I don't want to get ahead of --

QUESTION: But it's a very ally of the regime. It supports other elements that help the regime in its fight, like Hezbollah so on.

MS. PSAKI: If that is a step they take, we can have a robust discussion in here about it.

QUESTION: Jen, are there any contacts currently between the United States Government and the Syrian regime? I mean, I know Secretary Kerry spoke months and months ago --

MS. PSAKI: Sure.

QUESTION: -- to Foreign Minister Muallem. Is there anything going on at the moment?

MS. PSAKI: And we have for some time, as you know, have had different channels, but I don't have anything specific for you. I can check if there have been any recent contacts on any level.

QUESTION: So there were reports over the weekend that some European countries are quietly beginning to --

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: -- reopen diplomatic conversations or channels with the Syrian regime because, I think, the fear is that this is just so blocked at the moment that they're --

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: -- it's not going anywhere.

MS. PSAKI: Well, let me see if there have been any contacts at any level of the regime. We've - they have happened in the past, as you mentioned, so I will see if there's more to report on that.

QUESTION: Can I go back to the Iranians and taking part in Geneva? I mean, I think over the last week or so, when there's been, like, various bouts of violence in Syria, that the Iranian Government has said that there needs to be a political solution to the situation in Syria. So don't you think that Iran is making more positive comments? I mean, I don't think the Russians have gone far beyond saying that there needs to be a political solution. They haven't said anything about President Assad leaving (inaudible).

MS. PSAKI: Well, the whole premise - I mean the whole goal is to create a transitional governing body. That's the goal of a Geneva conference. So, certainly, they haven't embraced that as the focus of the Geneva communique, and --

QUESTION: Well, even though the Russians have agreed to a political transition, your definition of a transition is far different from the - than the Russians' definition of a transition. So if the Iranians were to say, like, okay, we accept a political transition, I mean, does that really mean that they --

MS. PSAKI: It's not just about a political transition. It's about embracing the Geneva communique, which they have not done. If they do that, we will evaluate whether or not we'd support their - an invitation to them to attend the conference.

QUESTION: Zarif also told us that his country is not interested in aggravating any sectarian tensions between Shiite and Sunni, between Alawite and other major Islamic communities; that they're trying to, in their efforts, promote more harmony, more peace. Does that add any - does that change the complexion at all, particularly in Syria?

MS. PSAKI: I don't want to speak too specifically to an interview I haven't yet seen yet, and neither has anyone on our team. Broadly speaking, obviously we took a significant step forward with the first-step agreement on their nuclear program, but there are remaining concerns that we have, as you all are familiar with, whether it's their involvement in support of the regime in Syria or humanitarian issues, and so that has not changed that. I can take a closer look once we see the transcript of the interview and see if we have more comments on Foreign Minister Zarif's comments.

QUESTION: You're saying your team does not watch Al Jazeera?

MS. PSAKI: Well, that is not true; we do. However, I believe there's only been a very short clip that has played of this interview that I'm sure will get lots of attention once it all plays.

QUESTION: Beyond the interview, he's freely reaching out. He visited Kuwait. He's reaching out to the other Gulf countries. He wants to visit Saudi Arabia. I mean, there is an effort underway to alleviate their fears and actually encourage them towards participating in Geneva II to make it a success. You must have some sort of a reading of this effort.

MS. PSAKI: I don't have any particular reading of it for you, Said. Our position, I think, has been pretty clear on whether or not they attend the Geneva conference.

QUESTION: I have another really quick logistics thing. On the December 20th meeting, that's Wendy Sherman and that - it's the same iteration?

MS. PSAKI: It is that level. Exactly, yes. Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: Is that new or was that announced last week or something --

MS. PSAKI: I believe we talked about it last week as being the next meeting.

QUESTION: On China - (inaudible).

QUESTION: Please, Jen, can we stay on Iran, please?

MS. PSAKI: Sure. Let's stay on Iran and then we can go to China.

QUESTION: On the 6th of February in this room, I had a very brief exchange with your predecessor, Victoria Nuland --

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: -- about Iran. And with your indulgence, I will read it in its entirety for the purpose of the record and so you can respond to it.

"Rosen: There have been reports that intermittently, and outside of the formal P5+1 mechanisms, the Obama Administration, or members of it, have conducted direct secret bilateral talks with Iran. Is that true or false?"

"Nuland: We have made clear, as the Vice President did at Munich, that in the context of the larger P5+1 framework, we would be prepared to talk to Iran bilaterally. But with regard to the kind of thing that you're talking about on a government-to-government level, no."

That's the entirety of the exchange.

As we now know, senior state department officials had, in fact, been conducting direct, secret bilateral talks with senior officials of the Iranian Government in Oman, perhaps dating back to 2011 by that point.

So the question today is a simple one: When the briefer was asked about those talks and flatly denied them from the podium, that was untrue, correct?

MS. PSAKI: I mean, James, I - that - you're talking about a February briefing, so 10 months ago. I don't think we've outlined or confirmed contacts or specifics beyond a March meeting. I'm not going to confirm others beyond that at this point. So I don't know that I have any more for you.

QUESTION: Do you stand by the accuracy of what Ms. Nuland told me, that there had been no government-to-government contacts, no secret direct bilateral talks with Iran as of the date of that briefing, February 6th? Do you stand by the accuracy of that?

MS. PSAKI: James, I have no new information for you today on the timing of when there were any discussions with any Iranian officials.

QUESTION: Let me try it one last way, Jen --

MS. PSAKI: Okay.

QUESTION: -- and I appreciate your indulgence.

MS. PSAKI: Sure.

QUESTION: Is it the policy of the State Department, where the preservation or the secrecy of secret negotiations is concerned, to lie in order to achieve that goal?

MS. PSAKI: James, I think there are times where diplomacy needs privacy in order to progress. This is a good example of that. Obviously, we have made clear and laid out a number of details in recent weeks about discussions and about a bilateral channel that fed into the P5+1 negotiations, and we've answered questions on it, we've confirmed details. We're happy to continue to do that, but clearly, this was an important component leading up to the agreement that was reached a week ago.

QUESTION: Since you, standing at that podium last week, did confirm that there were such talks, at least as far back as March of this year, I don't see what would prohibit you from addressing directly this question: Were there secret direct bilateral talks between the United States and Iranian officials in 2011?

MS. PSAKI: I don't have anything more for you today. We've long had ways to speak with the Iranians through a range of channels, some of which you talked - you mentioned, but I don't have any other specifics for you today.

QUESTION: One more on Iran?

QUESTION: The Los Angeles Times and Politico have reported that those talks were held as far back as 2011. Were those reports inaccurate?

MS. PSAKI: I'm not sure which reports you're talking about. Are you talking about visits that the Secretary and others made to Oman, or are you talking about other reports?

QUESTION: I'm talking about U.S. officials meeting directly and secretly with Iranian officials in Oman as far back as 2011. The Los Angeles Times and Politico have reported those meetings. Were those reports inaccurate?

MS. PSAKI: I have nothing more for you on it, James, today.

QUESTION: One more on Iran?

MS. PSAKI: On Iran? Let's just finish Iran and then we can go to China. Go ahead, Roz.

QUESTION: One of - one more on Iran. Foreign Minister Zarif said, directly contradicting the Obama Administration's contention that sanctions worked, he told our interviewer that when the sanctions were first imposed, Iran had 200 working centrifuges. Today, they have more than 19,000. What is this building's reaction to his comment that sanctions did not work and did not bring Iran to the negotiating table?

MS. PSAKI: Well, again, I would like to look more closely at the context of the comments. But, just as reminder, President Rouhani and others have talked about how the impact - how growing the economy and putting an end - doing - bringing an end to the sanctions is something that was a priority for them in order to help the economy and the Iranian people. There's no question, if you look just at the facts of the impact of oil revenues, the impact on their economic growth was large that there was a huge impact of - that there - the sanctions had an enormous impact, and that that was a driving factor in bringing the Iranians back to the negotiating table.

In terms of progress made on their efforts to develop a nuclear weapon, whether through centrifuges or at their various facilities, that to me sounds like a separate question. Obviously, there was concerns about steps they were taking and progress they were making, which was why it was so important to come to an acceptable agreement that would halt and roll back the progress of their program.

QUESTION: Just to follow up on that, though --

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: -- Secretary Kerry, when he did his round robin of interviews after the announcement of the deal in Geneva, more than once stated that when Iran had reached out to the Bush-Cheney Administration in 2003, Iran was only in possession of 164 centrifuges. Now, he would go on to say, they have 19,000, and this therefore represents the best possible deal that could be secured.

Isn't it a fact that since the Obama-Biden Administration took office, 70 percent of Iran's centrifuges have been installed?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I'd have to look at the statistics, James, but we have not questioned the fact that Iran has made progress on enrichment and on developing a nuclear weapon. We have not questioned that. That's one of the reasons why we stepped up sanctions over the past couple of years. The President and Secretary Kerry were big proponents of that. We worked with the international community to do just that to put that necessary pressure in place.

The point I was trying to make to Roz is that - what she's asking sounds to me like two separate questions, so that was --

QUESTION: Right. I'm pursuing the separate one part that she carved out, and that is to say - and if this is untrue, I'd be grateful to be disabused of the notion - but the great bulk of Iran's progress in the development of its enrichment program has taken place under President Obama's watch, correct?

MS. PSAKI: I'd have to check on the specific numbers. The --

QUESTION: You're not prepared to dispute that statement, as --

MS. PSAKI: Well, James, I think what we're focused on at this point is the fact that we're now at a point where we are halting and rolling back the progress of their program and we're working towards a comprehensive agreement to bring an end to it. I can't speculate for you what would happen without - what would have happened without sanctions. I would venture to guess --

QUESTION: (Inaudible) sanctions.

MS. PSAKI: But they were being paired together, so that's why I'm bringing it into the conversation.

QUESTION: But the context of the question was exactly: "The Obama Administration says we showed up because our economy is falling apart. I'm here to tell you that's not the case. We have our own reasons for coming."

MS. PSAKI: Well, we will take a close look at his comments and we'll have more to say about them once we do.

QUESTION: Can I just go back to the Geneva meeting and --

MS. PSAKI: Sure.

QUESTION: -- December 20th with Wendy Sherman?

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: This is --

MS. PSAKI: It's that level - in terms of specific attendance, I'll have to just double-check that for you.

QUESTION: Oh, okay.

MS. PSAKI: Yeah.

QUESTION: This is going to be the first of the political meetings towards the next - the comprehensive agreement --

MS. PSAKI: Well, they also --

QUESTION: -- or this is the technical discussions?

MS. PSAKI: No, no, no.

QUESTION: No, this is Syria.

MS. PSAKI: This is - sorry, this is Syria.

QUESTION: Oh, I'm sorry.

MS. PSAKI: This is Syria.

QUESTION: Excuse me. I'm sorry.

MS. PSAKI: So this is the pre-Geneva. No, it's okay. It's confusing. Lots of Genevas.

QUESTION: Okay. But I did have an Iran question, actually.

QUESTION: But is there any new - I mean --

QUESTION: Yeah.

QUESTION: -- when is it that you're going to start to negotiate the comprehensive deal with Iran?

MS. PSAKI: Well, right now, what we're focused on is the technical discussions leading up to the start of the six-month --

QUESTION: Right.

QUESTION: So do you have a date for those?

MS. PSAKI: I don't yet have a date on those.

QUESTION: Or a place?

MS. PSAKI: I don't yet have a place. It's being worked through. Hopefully we'll have an update for you all in the coming days.

QUESTION: And can I ask - I don't know if you had seen the reports that the new British envoy to Iran is actually going to visit Tehran tomorrow. I wondered what the --

MS. PSAKI: I haven't seen that.

QUESTION: Well, I wanted a U.S. reaction to this following on to the question I asked last week about how far along the line you are prepared to go with your new diplomatic relations or not with Iran.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm. I still don't have any prediction of any step beyond what step we've already taken, which is being a part of the P5+1 agreement on the first step here with Iran. Obviously, different countries are going to make their own decisions, and as with most issues, we certainly support that.

QUESTION: Would it be helpful, though? Do you believe it's helpful that the British envoy could be going to Tehran?

MS. PSAKI: I don't know that I have that level of analysis on it. I don't have all the details on what the purpose of the trip is or what they hope to accomplish. And obviously, every country will make their own decisions about diplomatic relationships.

QUESTION: Jen, one more on the --

QUESTION: East China Sea?

QUESTION: -- secret negotiations with Iran.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: I apologize if you've already addressed this, but there have been reports that the secret negotiations that the U.S. was engaging in with Iran created a feeling of resentment among P5+1 allies such as France, and then that contributed to a rift among the P5+1 and made it difficult to reach consensus within that group. Do you have a reaction to that or a comment on that?

MS. PSAKI: I don't want to speak to anonymous reports about what may or may not be the feelings by other countries, but I will reiterate for you that this was - these discussions were fed into the P5+1 process. That is the process that we ultimately all worked through to achieve a first-step agreement here. The P5+1 members, as well as our friends in Israel, were briefed early this fall.

As to the discussions, we have always been clear we've been open to bilateral discussions with Iran; that there are a range of channels to do that through; that if anything got serious, that we would certainly be briefing our important partners on that; and that's exactly what we did in this case.

QUESTION: Jen --

QUESTION: And when did the talks begin?

MS. PSAKI: James, you're so tricky over there. (Laughter.)

QUESTION: Can I ask about China?

MS. PSAKI: Let me just say one thing, though, for James. It's important here too - and then I promise we'll go to China - it's important here also to note, though, that these really picked up after President Rouhani's election, that in terms of the discussion of specific pieces about how to move forward, what kind of - what an agreement could look like, that's when it picked up. So I understand that's not answering your question, but I felt it was important to --

QUESTION: But just on the basis of methodology and removing the specifics of Iran and who's president or who's Secretary of State, if you were able to stand there at the podium last week and say, "Yes, I'm confirming a certain set of talks that occurred in March," explain to me what is it that prohibits you from saying, yes or no, that a certain set of talks occurred two years ago?

MS. PSAKI: If I have more details for you, James, I will - happy to share them.

QUESTION: I didn't ask you - I'm asking for your thinking about why you're not addressing the question, not the specifics of the meetings. What is it that prohibits you from addressing a question about meetings that are two years old?

MS. PSAKI: I'm not going to do a psychiatrist chair today.

Go ahead. On China?

QUESTION: What about the couch? (Laughter.)

QUESTION: Thank you, Jen. So as we know, the U.S. Government has already told U.S. carriers to comply with China's requirements before any flights pass through the new air defense zone established by the Chinese Government. So does that mean the U.S. Government has recognized this new air defense zone established by the Chinese Government?

MS. PSAKI: So let me be absolutely as clear as I can be here because I know there's been a range of reporting. It has been - some of it has been inaccurate, to no fault of - perhaps it's our fault for not explaining it well enough. So we are not - the State Department is not the point of contact with airlines. The FAA is the point of contact with airlines. There has not been any information that has been put out or confirmed that I am aware of that has conveyed what has or has not been communicated in that capacity to airlines.

There is - for safety and security of passengers, U.S. carriers operate internationally - operate consistently as a process with the notices to airmen issued by foreign countries, as is the case in this case. Their concerns are about the safety and security of passengers. That is different from what the U.S. Government policy is. It is not - this in no way indicates U.S. Government acceptance of China's requirements in the newly declared ADIZ and has absolutely no bearing on the firm and consistent U.S. Government position that we do not accept the legitimacy of China's requirements.

This is a case where China announced this in an uncoordinated fashion. It's inconsistent with standard practice. And their requirements for operating exceed internationally accepted practice in this capacity. So I don't know how much more clear that it is, but it does contradict a bit your question, so I wanted -

QUESTION: It looks like we received the statement or the Q&A from the State Department, so it looks like it's from the U.S. Government. And also, you are saying --

MS. PSAKI: Well, in that statement, which I certainly was well aware of, what was conveyed in there is that for safety and - for the safety and security of passengers, U.S. carriers operate consistently internationally with the notices to airmen issued by foreign governments. It did not convey that - anything specific about what had been communicated to airlines. It did not convey that the U.S. Government supported this effort. So I'm very familiar with the statement you're referring to, and there were a lot of - there were some assumptions made.

QUESTION: So (inaudible) --

QUESTION: Okay. It looks like --

QUESTION: -- that the FAA did not instruct airlines to comply with the Chinese regulations?

MS. PSAKI: I would point you to the FAA for what they did or did not communicate to commercial airlines.

QUESTION: Okay. Well, the FAA is part of the U.S. Government, is it not?

MS. PSAKI: They are. They --

QUESTION: Yes.

MS. PSAKI: Certainly, they are not housed in the State Department, however. (Laughter.)

QUESTION: So - I understand that, but the State Department does have a representative - you're familiar with the ICAO?

MS. PSAKI: I am not.

QUESTION: Okay. It's in Montreal.

MS. PSAKI: Okay.

QUESTION: It's a good excuse to get to Montreal --

MS. PSAKI: Good.

QUESTION: -- if you ever want to go up there.

MS. PSAKI: I will take that advice.

QUESTION: It's the International Civilian - it's the civilian airline - the UN agency for airlines. Do you know if the United States is going to use its membership in the ICAO to oppose this Chinese decision?

MS. PSAKI: I don't.

QUESTION: And if you don't know, could you ask?

MS. PSAKI: Yeah, I'm happy to check on that for you, Matt. Absolutely.

QUESTION: And when you say that the U.S. Government does not accept the legitimacy of the Chinese requirements --

MS. PSAKI: Well, it doesn't accept -- yeah, the Chinese requirements, right.

QUESTION: Right. That's what you said.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: Doesn't that -- if the FAA has been telling airlines that they have to comply with this, or that they should comply with it, how is that not accepting -- the government accepting the legitimacy?

MS. PSAKI: Well, there's a whole field of regulations and regulatory policy that I am certainly far from an aviation expert, as it evidenced by your Montreal question. So I would point you to them on that.

Evidence of the fact that the U.S. Government does not accept China's requirement is by the fact that the announcement will not change how the United States conducts military operations in the region, which is something DOD announced last week. And that is certainly a U.S. Government decision to make.

QUESTION: So does that mean that U.S. Government planes will not obey the -- or will not follow the Chinese requirements if they're flying through this airspace?

MS. PSAKI: Military planes?

QUESTION: Say the Secretary of State flying on an Air Force plane to Seoul or to Tokyo will not notify the --

MS. PSAKI: I am not aware of any upcoming Seoul trip coming up.

QUESTION: Well, the Vice President is there right now, or in Tokyo, at least. Are you saying that his plane, an Air Force plane, will not follow the requirements of the Chinese?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I am saying military planes would not, and that level of specificity I'd certainly have to check and see where that falls in.

QUESTION: What is this episode -- what impact is this episode having on U.S.-Sino relations?

MS. PSAKI: There are times when we agree and there are times when we disagree, as you know. We've made clear our concerns about not only what was announced but how this was announced, the fact that there was no prior notice. As you also know, Vice President Biden is in the region now on a prior planned trip. He will, of course, be meeting with key leaders to discuss a range of issues. Certainly, this could be a topic of discussion, but there are a number of other issues that we discuss both with China and other partners in the region.

QUESTION: And has the pivot to Asia worked? Is this evidence of the pivot working?

MS. PSAKI: I wouldn't categorize this into -- I wouldn't put this in the evaluation category of whether or not it worked. Our pivot to Asia, or rebalance to Asia, means focusing on Asia and the important partnership we have with Asia, with countries in the region, the economic and strategic partners. And nothing is further evidence of that than the Vice

President's trip there, the fact that, as you know, the Secretary will be going back to Asia soon, that he was just there a couple of months ago with Secretary Hagel. So that is evidence of our commitment to the region. And we work with them on a - countries in the region on a broad range of issues.

QUESTION: But as we survey the last five years of this Administration, would you say that China is less aggressive in its serial commission of human rights abuses, currency manipulation, cyber warfare against U.S. businesses and government, territorial aggression, or is it better than it used to be?

MS. PSAKI: I'm not going to do an evaluation of that. Obviously, we work with them on economic issues, we work with them on strategic issues. There are still issues, including human rights, including this issue we're talking about now, that we express concerns about when warranted, and we'll continue to do that. But we know that the relationship is a vital one and one that we need to keep plugging away at even when we disagree.

QUESTION: Jen, could I (inaudible) for a second?

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: Is it fair to characterize the U.S. position as being that aside from the official policy, for the purposes of safety and avoiding some kind of unfortunate incident, that commercial carriers should abide by the Chinese ADIZ requirements?

MS. PSAKI: I don't have - I'd point you again to the FAA on more specifics than what I just conveyed. There are a range of regulations and policies that, of course, they oversee or are in place, but our general position as a U.S. Government is that we don't accept China's requirements. And obviously, the military - actions of military exercises is evidence of that.

QUESTION: Jen, this comes from --

QUESTION: Sorry, sorry. Just a quick follow-up on that.

MS. PSAKI: Go ahead.

QUESTION: It looks like the two main U.S. airlines are complying with - are taking steps to comply. Delta and United are the two that have flight routes through the area, which seems to have kind of created a little bit of confusion/consternation in Japan over a perceived rift with Japanese policy, which is to not allow U.S. commercial airliners to file their flight plans with China. Do you have a - do you have any kind of reassurance or any kind of response to that?

MS. PSAKI: We coordinate closely with Japan and with South Korea and all of the countries in the region about a range of issues. And certainly on this issue, we have been in touch with Japan and will continue to be. This is - for specific actions of individual commercial airliners, I would point you to them or the FAA on any regulations.

QUESTION: But - so you're not - but you're not afraid for the safety or concerned about the safety of U.S. citizens on flights that are flying through the area?

MS. PSAKI: Well, certainly safety and security of citizens should be of concern to everyone. Obviously, there are policies in place and regulations in place because of that. But we don't oversee airline regulations. The FAA does, so I would point you to them.

QUESTION: (Inaudible.) Did the United States Government - the position has changed toward this ADIZ, or not changed? What is the position to ADIZ now?

MS. PSAKI: It has not changed. We - China announced the ADIZ without prior consultations even though the newly-announced ADIZ overlaps with parts of longstanding ADIZs of Japan, the Republic of Korea, and Taiwan, and includes

territory administered by Japan. As I mentioned, we - the fact that China's announcement has caused confusion and increased the risk of accidents only further underscores the validity of concerns and the need for China to rescind the procedures. It's consistently been our position and one we have communicated both publicly and privately. I know there was some confusion over the weekend about airlines and specifically.

QUESTION: Jen, you said that you are not still - not accepting China's new air defense zone. But I wonder, like, Japan has its own air defense zone, and also part of it covers Taiwan. But it looks like the U.S. doesn't say anything about it. So do you think there is sort of a double standard? Why do you react so strongly to China's air defense zone?

MS. PSAKI: Well, one of the reasons is that they announced this without prior consultations. It was inconsistent with longstanding procedure and process. And obviously, it overlaps with a number of other longstanding air defense zones of some other neighboring countries.

QUESTION: Jen --

QUESTION: Jen, you do not contest the ability of China to declare such a identification zone; it's just the manner in which they did it, or the extent?

MS. PSAKI: No. I think I have - I've just consistently said that we believe they should rescind the procedures. I've just - I've also stated a couple of times that we don't accept China's requirements. So I think I've made that pretty clear.

QUESTION: (Inaudible.)

QUESTION: Is the first --

QUESTION: In response to the - China's declaration of its own ADIZ, the South Korean Government is poised to expand its own ADIZ, so-called KADIZ, to the South China Sea. What is the position of the United States? Would you encourage it or discourage it?

MS. PSAKI: I haven't seen those reports, or I don't even know if they're reports or if there's been an announcement. I haven't seen any announcement, I guess I should say. So let me check into that, and --

QUESTION: They say they have already started consultations with the United States.

MS. PSAKI: I'd have to check into it and see if we have more to say on that.

QUESTION: Is this the first time the U.S. has called --

QUESTION: Jennifer, you talk about safety --

QUESTION: -- for the zone to be rescinded?

MS. PSAKI: I'd have to check on that for you, Roz.

QUESTION: Can we change topic?

QUESTION: No.

QUESTION: You talk about safety. Are you really concerned that the Chinese may down an airliner or something?

MS. PSAKI: I'm not predicting that, but certainly there is - they created these Air Defense Identification Zones, they've asked for prior flight plans. So of course, the security and safety is part of the regulatory process, and - but I don't have any predictions. It's just the question of abiding by it.

QUESTION: Is it a real concern, downing an airliner?

MS. PSAKI: I don't think I have any more for you on that question.

QUESTION: Jen, when you're taking that question that Roz had --

MS. PSAKI: Sure.

QUESTION: -- could you also check whether the United States actually is directly asking the Chinese to rescind it?

MS. PSAKI: Happy to. Sure.

QUESTION: Thank you.

QUESTION: Well, at least --

QUESTION: Apart from the specific concerns about how this was announced without any prior notice, its excessiveness, at least in terms of other regulations, and the safety risks that you say it cause, do you have any - are there broader concerns about this area being identified as essentially the entire East China Sea? Is the U.S. concerned that the Chinese are looking at anything on a map that has the word "China" in it as all their own?

MS. PSAKI: Well, part of the concern is certainly that it overlaps with parts of other --

QUESTION: Right. But in terms of territorial claims --

MS. PSAKI: As well as territory administered by Japan, sure.

QUESTION: Right, right. But in terms of China's territorial claims, are you concerned that this is the first step or could be a first step towards actually moving in some kind of forceful way to take control of areas of territory and ocean maritime space that it says that it owns?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I don't want to make a prediction of that.

QUESTION: No, but I'm asking if you were concerned --

MS. PSAKI: But --

QUESTION: -- that this is a step in that direction, apart from the specific problems with the no prior notice and all that other - the safety concerns.

MS. PSAKI: But one of the specific problems is also that this includes area - territory administered by Japan, it includes overlapping area with other countries in the region. So certainly, that does touch on what your question is here. In terms of a prediction of what it will mean in the future, I certainly wouldn't venture to make that at this point.

QUESTION: Right. Well, the Chinese say that they would be well within their rights also to declare one of these zones over the entire - over the South China Sea. Are you concerned about the possibility of that?

MS. PSAKI: Well, you're familiar with what our position is on that, and we've long --

QUESTION: Well, that's over the territorial disputes over the - it's a question of sovereignty for these little atolls and bits of rock.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: Would you be as opposed as you are to this if the Chinese did it for the South China Sea, or is that a hypothetical question that you will wait to bash the Chinese over the head for once they - if and when they do it?

MS. PSAKI: It is a hypothetical question at this stage in time.

QUESTION: All right.

QUESTION: One more thing. Just one more thing on that. China at the same time has announced they sent a fighter jet against United States and Japanese aircraft last week. Did you comment on that?

MS. PSAKI: I am not familiar with that specific report. In - where, exactly?

QUESTION: If it's true, are you concerned about these Chinese announcement?

MS. PSAKI: I'd have to look at the specific report, and that may be a DOD question.

James.

QUESTION: Given that China makes this declaration --

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: -- and we regard it as thoroughly problematic, if not illegal, and therefore we have on our hands a dispute with the Chinese --

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: -- which is to be adjudicated somehow in a nonviolent way, wasn't it a kind of a provocative act for the United States to fly B-52s through that very zone in a short time thereafter?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I would point you to DOD on that, but I would reiterate the fact that we have made clear that this action, this announcement, is not going to change our military exercises. And that is an example of that.

QUESTION: So other than taking - other than the Vice President, are you aware - or has there been at this point any conversations that you're aware of in this - from this building with the Chinese directly? It's kind of on Jill's question. And if not, do you expect them or is this going to be left up to the Vice President when he goes to --

MS. PSAKI: Let me check. I know we have expressed concerns. I mentioned this last week, Matt, so let me just make sure you have it.

QUESTION: Jen, the - Secretary Kerry did meet on Wednesday with a senior Chinese official?

MS. PSAKI: I'd have to --

QUESTION: On Wednesday, the vice premier.

QUESTION: Lu.

QUESTION: Yeah.

MS. PSAKI: I'd have to look back at that. It seems like a long time ago.

QUESTION: I know it does. And it was happening on Wednesday.

MS. PSAKI: Deputy Secretary Burns met last week with a Chinese official where this was a topic of discussion. Also, Assistant Secretary Russel spoke with the ambassador about a week ago, and Ambassador Locke has also been in touch, of course, on the ground. In terms of specific contacts over the last couple of days, I'm happy to check and see what else we can read out for all of you.

QUESTION: Are you taking this to the UN in any forum there?

MS. PSAKI: I don't have any prediction of that, James, at this point in time.

QUESTION: New topic?

QUESTION: So it's strictly a bilateral or a multilateral thing, but outside the auspices of the UN is how you're going to seek to resolve it?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I don't have anything for you on it at this point. We're taking this day by day. I conveyed for you what we've done and what we've communicated. But obviously, we're taking steps day by day.

QUESTION: But is that a kind of - is that a consideration?

MS. PSAKI: Not that I'm aware of, Elise. But obviously, we're taking this day by day.

QUESTION: Can we change --

QUESTION: New subject?

MS. PSAKI: Sure, Jill. Go ahead.

QUESTION: I'm still on China. Can you actually clarify this? China's argument is that we institute the ADIZ that other countries have already instituted. If you're saying that China does not have a right to do that, they can say, well, what's good for the goose is good for the gander. And it doesn't seem like you have a legal foot to stand on. If you're opposed to the way in which they did it or the extent of it, these can be a subject of debate. And China has said we can get rid of our ADIZ if the Japanese get rid of theirs. I mean, something like that could happen. But somehow - are you really saying that you do not accept - you do not give China the right to declare a defense identification zone?

MS. PSAKI: I think I've thoroughly outlined what our concerns are, so I'm not sure I have much more to add to your question.

QUESTION: Just on another topic, Jen - sorry.

MS. PSAKI: Well, we were going to go to Jill next, and then I'm happy to go to you.

QUESTION: North Korea?

MS. PSAKI: Sure.

QUESTION: Merrill Newman.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: You've seen probably, or read at least, his so-called confession. Do you have any comments about that, any reaction? And what is the latest on his status?

MS. PSAKI: Well, the latest is - and let me do this first and then I'll do the second part. On November 30th, North Korea permitted the Embassy of Sweden, our protecting power, to consular access to Merrill Newman. It - and given his advanced age and health conditions, we continue to urge North Korea to release him so he may return home and reunite with his family.

We, of course, have seen the Korean Central News Agency report regarding Mr. Newman's detention. According to the report, he apologized for the misunderstanding that led him - led to his detention. We don't have any other further information regarding the reason for his detention. But again, given his age and health, we continue to call for North Korea to release him as quickly as possible.

QUESTION: Do you believe that the North Korean - that that apology was - that he wrote and that was released by the North Koreans - do you believe that he wrote that of his own volition and that he - and do you have reason to believe that all of those things in that apology are true?

MS. PSAKI: We just don't have any other further analysis. We've seen the same reports all of you have seen, of course, about his interview and the publication of that, but I don't have any other further analysis on it.

QUESTION: Are you aware if that - the subject of his quote, unquote "confession" came up in the meeting with the Swedes?

MS. PSAKI: I don't have anything more on it, but I'm happy to check and see if there's more detail we can outline for all of you.

QUESTION: Did the Swedes as for and did Mr. Newman sign a PAW?

MS. PSAKI: A Privacy Act waiver?

QUESTION: Correct.

MS. PSAKI: Yes, he did. That is why I am able to talk about him now.

QUESTION: Okay. So then if - since he has signed the waiver, would you take it back to your - whoever it is that liaises with the Swedes on this --

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: I assume it's EAP, but I guess it could also be EUR - and find out if Mr. Newman, in his discussions with the Swedes, talked at all about or said that he had freely made this alleged confession and when it was that he recorded this or when it --

MS. PSAKI: I am happy to take that and see if there's more we can share.

Go ahead, Lesley.

QUESTION: Also, did the Swedes report back in what condition he is in? Has he been tortured? Anything today? And how long did they meet with him, and was it in a jail? Was it in a --

QUESTION: Guest house.

QUESTION: -- government - a guest house?

QUESTION: A jailhouse guest house.

MS. PSAKI: A guest house. I don't have many specifics on that. I'm happy to also check with Matt's questions and to see if there's more we can share on that as well.

QUESTION: But didn't it include a --

QUESTION: But they did say - the Swedes did say that he --

QUESTION: -- physical examination of him?

QUESTION: The Swedes did, I think, say that he was --

MS. PSAKI: I believe they've spoken publicly about it.

QUESTION: -- that he was treated - that's he's being treated (inaudible), right?

MS. PSAKI: Right. I've seen those comments as well. So I don't have any other specifics on it, but if there's more we share beyond what they've said publicly, I'm happy --

QUESTION: Including whether or not there was a physical examination of him during this consular access?

QUESTION: I just want to get back to his confession. I mean, it is kind of written in language that kind of fits the narrative that North Korea has been saying, and I'm just wondering if you think that he wrote this. Are you - I mean, there's often times that you would say, like, oh this person seemed under duress --

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: -- or something like that. So I mean, I'm just - about this particular confession, do you have any reason to believe that he did not confess to all of those things?

MS. PSAKI: I don't - I certainly understand why you're asking. I don't have any particular analysis on it at this stage. I will see if this is something that our team is looking into, and if there's more we can say about it specifically.

QUESTION: And what is this building doing to secure his release beyond calling for his release from imprisonment? I mean, Ambassador King had tried months ago to go --

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: -- for the other American under detention, Kenneth Bae. What's actually being done to get them out?

MS. PSAKI: Well, our Swedish protecting power just visited with him two days ago, and obviously that's an important component of reaching out to citizens who are detained in North Korea. We certainly do continue to call for his release. I don't have any other predictions or announcements on travel or visits of other officials at this point to tell you about.

QUESTION: But beyond those consular visits, I mean, is there any outreach to the Chinese specially on behalf of Mr. Newman?

MS. PSAKI: I don't have more I can outline for all of you, but I can check and see if there is any more to tell.

QUESTION: Have they been helpful the past with Kenneth Bae or with others? The Chinese (inaudible)?

MS. PSAKI: They have been helpful, but there's not more specifics I can outline.

QUESTION: Through the Swedes are elsewhere, has North Korea communicated any demands or requests of the United States that have to do with Newman or - as a prelude to his possible release?

MS. PSAKI: I don't have any more specifics on the contact with the Swedes and kind of what the discussion entailed beyond confirming --

QUESTION: Well, any - in any forum, have they asked for anything from the United States?

MS. PSAKI: I don't have any details on it. I am happy to check if there's any more to share with all of you.

QUESTION: But you guys are in touch with the North Koreans directly, just to confirm?

MS. PSAKI: Well, we - as you know, we've long had a channel, but we've been working in this case through our Swedish protective - protecting power.

QUESTION: But you have been in touch with the North Koreans specifically on his matter?

MS. PSAKI: On this specific case, not that I'm aware of, but I'm happy to check if there's anything more on that.

QUESTION: Are you in touch with Mr. Newman's family?

MS. PSAKI: We are. We have been. Let me see if I have the detail of when we last spoke with him - with his family. I don't have that detail for you. I'm happy to put that in the pocket of things I'm going to check on.

QUESTION: And have they asked for you to help facilitate any kind of visit by them to North Korea, given that this gentleman's actually - I mean, he's quite elderly --

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: -- so you would imagine that if - there would be concern enough to try and travel to visit him.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm. I'm not aware of a request that they've made about that specifically, but we can see.

QUESTION: So all the attention, really, is on this Mr. Newman. But as we've said, Kenneth Bae has been held for quite a long time.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm. You're right.

QUESTION: So in your efforts working with the Swedes or working to try and get the release, I mean, are you emphasizing because of Mr. Newman's age and health that you need to get him out right away, or are they part of a package that you think that they --

MS. PSAKI: I mean, we'd certainly like to see them both released as quickly as possible. In terms of that level of detail, I just don't have that.

QUESTION: These American citizens being held against their will in a rogue state, they're hostages, right?

MS. PSAKI: I mean, they're being held by the governments. The governments have confirmed that, so I don't know that I need to categorize it further, James.

QUESTION: You don't regard them as hostages?

MS. PSAKI: Do we have another topic?

QUESTION: Yes. Could I move onto the --

QUESTION: (Off-mike.) (Laughter.)

QUESTION: -- the Secretary's trip.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: Okay. The portion to the West Bank and to Israel.

MS. PSAKI: Yeah.

QUESTION: Yes. If you have more to share with us - today or yesterday, President Abbas, the president of the Palestinian Authority, was so impressed with the Geneva success, now he's suggesting a format, perhaps another Geneva, where the Palestinian-Israeli issue could be resolved. Would you look kindly at this suggestion?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I haven't seen those comments from him specifically. I know this has been an idea floated out there. Our focus remains on the direct negotiations between the Israelis and the Palestinians. We're a facilitator in that effort. There are certainly a number of countries who have a great investment and great interest in the success - in a successful outcome here, including the Arab League, including many other countries that want to contribute to growing the Palestinian economy. But that's our focus, not on planning yet another conference.

QUESTION: And a Palestinian member of the Israeli Knesset, Mr. Ahmed Tibi, claims that the 20,000 housing that the Israelis announced and they put on hold were actually not put on hold, that there is - construction is ongoing. Do you have any information on that?

MS. PSAKI: I don't have anything new on that. I'd have to look into that for you.

Scott?

QUESTION: (Inaudible.)

MS. PSAKI: Oh.

QUESTION: Can we stay on stay on that?

MS. PSAKI: Yeah.

QUESTION: Just on this idea of not necessarily a Geneva-type conference for the peace process, but just the idea of internationalizing the process, would the United States - would the Administration object to an internationalization of the peace process?

MS. PSAKI: Well, it's hard to know exactly what that means. Obviously, as you all are well aware, there's direct negotiations between the Israelis and the Palestinians now. That's what our focus is on, so certainly that's not a path we're pursuing.

QUESTION: Well, I think that the point that - right, it's not a path that you're pursuing --

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: -- but the point that people who are suggesting that this might be a way to go, the point that they make is that the United States has been the sole and unique arbiter, mediator, facilitator, whatever you want to call it, of Israeli-Palestinian peace talks going back decades.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: And you haven't gotten anything out of it. There's been no success. It's been one failure after another. Is it perhaps not time to try something new, is the argument that these people would make.

MS. PSAKI: Well, Matt, obviously, many people are going to make different arguments about how it should proceed. We're less than halfway through the nine-month timeline here. There are a number of countries that are engaged and invested, including, of course, the Arab League, who, as you know, are in very close contact with the Palestinians and engaged in this effort. There are many who are engaged with the Israelis in this effort. So our focus remains on the direct negotiations, and I don't think we're at this point speculating on a different alternative forum.

QUESTION: Well, let me - okay. Well, let me put it this way: Is it still the position of the Administration that the United States has unique leverage and influence with both sides that makes it the only logical or capable, competent, credible mediator for peace between Israel and the Palestinians?

MS. PSAKI: I don't know that we've ever stated it exactly like that. We're playing a facilitator role which both sides are comfortable with. There are other countries engaged with this effort and certainly in touch with the Israelis and the Palestinians. I expect that will continue. But in the meantime, we'll continue to play the facilitator role as long as it's productive.

QUESTION: Do you believe, does the Administration believe that the United States still has leverage and influence with Israel or the Palestinians? I mean, you say, in reference to other questions about, say, Mr. Newman or Mr. Bae in North Korea --

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: -- that the Chinese have influence with the North Koreans and you would like to go through them, maybe after you're done yelling at them about their air defense zone. But do you still think that the United States - does the Administration believe that it has influence and leverage with either Israel or the Palestinians?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I think we have a close relationship with both. And obviously, we're at this point because both sides decided to come to the table. I don't think it's about leverage. There's - it's in the interest of both sides to come to an agreement on the final status issues, and that's what they're working to do at this point.

QUESTION: Jen, could I just ask - there was an agreement --

MS. PSAKI: Sure.

QUESTION: -- reached last week between the EU and Israel which will allow Israel to actually touch some funding for scientific research. There have been some problems because the EU wanted to bar all research in areas of - in the West Bank --

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: -- settlement areas in the West Bank. Is there an - I mean, does the American - do America - does America believe that this is a good agreement for the EU and Israel, given that Secretary Kerry has always mentioned that he fears an increasing isolation of Israel on the international stage?

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm. I haven't talked to our team about it, so I'd have to talk to them and see if we have any particular view on the agreement last week.

QUESTION: And is - what is the message that Secretary Kerry's going to be bringing with him when he visits Israel later on this week?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I think he'll be talking to both sides about the importance of staying firm with the timeline and working through the tough and difficult issues that they're doing at the negotiating table, and reiterating the importance of coming to a peaceful end to the final negotiations. And of course, when he's meeting with Prime Minister Netanyahu, they'll certainly be discussing the recent P5+1 agreement with Iran and having an ongoing dialogue about that as well.

QUESTION: And have there been any meetings, direct talks between the Israelis and Palestinians, since the resignation of the Palestinian team?

MS. PSAKI: I don't have any updates on meetings at this point. I'll see if there's any more we want to provide to all of you in terms of specific meetings and timing of that.

QUESTION: But I mean, since the last time the Secretary's been there, there's been another announcement of new settlement construction.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: There's been the resignation of the Palestinian - it just seems that without him actually physically there holding their hand for hours at a time, that they're not able to sustain it on their own.

MS. PSAKI: Well, they've had many meetings when he has not been there. So obviously, we didn't expect this to be easy. We certainly are aware of some bumps in the road of late, but both sides have also reaffirmed their commitment to seeing this through.

QUESTION: Would you really call those bumps in the road, though? I mean, particularly on the - actually, on either side, whether it's the Israelis continuing to announce settlement construction or the Palestinians' full negotiating team just giving up, it just doesn't seem as if --

MS. PSAKI: Well, when the negotiating - and that's a good example. The negotiating team - President Abbas reaffirmed his own commitment to seeing this through --

QUESTION: But it just --

MS. PSAKI: -- whether it was them or whether it was other officials in their place. So they're continuing to move forward.

QUESTION: It just doesn't seem like they have the - while they may have the desire and the dream that there'll be a peace deal. The motivation to actually do the hard work day in and day out doesn't seem to be there. And so it does seem as if Secretary Kerry is the one holding this together personally, and isn't there, like, a limit to how much he can do?

MS. PSAKI: Sure. That's why he has a team to help work through it every day.

QUESTION: Well, I meant more the parties themselves.

MS. PSAKI: You're right, but there also is a long timeframe we still have left. One of the reasons committing to the nine-month timeframe was so important is because we knew there would be challenging periods throughout the process. But both sides remain committed to that, and so we'll continue to work through it.

QUESTION: But it doesn't sound like - unless you could disabuse us of the notion, it doesn't sound like since Secretary Kerry's last trip in early November that there have actually been any direct talks.

MS. PSAKI: I wouldn't jump to that conclusion. We just have always said we wouldn't confirm every meeting.

QUESTION: Sure.

MS. PSAKI: So let me see if I can confirm any meetings since that point for all of you.

QUESTION: Jen, could you tell us if Ambassador Indyk is there now? Is he there? Is he in the region? Is he - Ambassador Indyk, where --

MS. PSAKI: He's here. I saw him this morning.

QUESTION: He's here. Okay.

MS. PSAKI: Okay. Let's just do one or two more here.

Scott.

QUESTION: What is the U.S. view of what's going on in Thailand right now?

MS. PSAKI: Well, we certainly deeply regret the loss of life in Bangkok due to politically motivated violence. We condemn violence as a means to achieve political objectives and urge all sides to exercise restraint and respect the rule of law. We are concerned about the continuing political tension in Thailand, and we are following the situation closely.

Peaceful protest and freedom of expression are important aspects of democracy, of course. Violence and seizure of public or private property, however, are not acceptable means of resolving political differences. We firmly believe all parties should work together to resolve differences through peaceful dialogue in ways that strengthen democracy and rule of law.

Ambassador Kenney spoke with the prime minister and - has spoken with the prime minister and opposition leaders to also encourage restraint and peaceful dialogue. You may have also seen that the U.S. Embassy in Bangkok issued a security message for U.S. citizens in Thailand explaining that large political demonstrations may continue in coming days - in the coming days, including at government facilities, in and outside of central Bangkok, and is advising them to avoid areas of demonstration and to exercise caution.

QUESTION: Following his talk with the prime minister, one of the main opposition leaders said that he would accept nothing short of her resignation. Is that a responsible position in the eyes of the United States?

MS. PSAKI: We just continue to encourage all parties to work together to resolve their differences. We, of course, have seen his comments, but I don't think we're going to weigh in further at this point, aside from encouraging restraint on the ground.

QUESTION: Would you weigh in on the general amnesty bill that the ruling party failed to get through parliament, which was one of the instigations for this?

MS. PSAKI: I know - I don't know if I've spoken to that in the past, Scott. I'd have to - I don't have anything for you on it at this particular moment, but I'm happy to follow up post-briefing.

Okay, let's do two more here. In the back, you've been very patient.

QUESTION: Thank you. Michael Vincent from the Australian Broadcasting Corporation. What's the U.S. response to the Australian Government's rejection of the U.S. company Archer Daniels Midland's bid for GrainCorp?

MS. PSAKI: Well, we are disappointed by the Government of Australia's decision to reject Archer Daniels Midland's proposed acquisition of GrainCorp. We do not - we do note that the Australian Treasurer Joe Hockey has expressed openness to approving an increase in ADM's current share in GrainCorp. The United States is the largest foreign investor - foreign direct investor in Australia, with 132 billion in investment projects to date, and we look forward to working closely with Australia's government to build stronger ties and investment - stronger trade and investment ties.

QUESTION: Just a quick follow-up.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: Did - unrelated matter, but has the U.S. Government accepted private medical, legal, or religious information on Australian citizens as offered by Australian Intelligence agencies?

MS. PSAKI: I don't have anything further or anything for you on a range of reports. I'm certainly not going to comment on any of them. As you know, we're undergoing our own review of these processes, which we expect to conclude by the end of the year.

QUESTION: Jen, back to ADM for a second.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: Did - was this issue, this proposed sale, bid by ADM raised at the AUSMIN ministerial meetings?

MS. PSAKI: It's a good question, Matt. I'd have to check. It wasn't one raised while I was there, but let me check and see if it was.

QUESTION: And if it was, did - was - were you given any indication that this is the way your closest antipodal ally was going to go?

MS. PSAKI: I will check and see if it was even raised.

Okay, let's do one more. Go ahead, Samir.

QUESTION: Do you have a reaction to the draft constitution in Egypt today?

MS. PSAKI: Sure.

QUESTION: Can I throw a Bahrain question at the end of that?

MS. PSAKI: Sure. Why not?

Well, we continue to track the constitutional process with interest, and we'll examine the document carefully once it is finalized and sent to President Mansour, which we understand will occur tomorrow. The Egyptian people, of course, will decide the fate of the draft constitution in a referendum. We will continue to support a transition process that leads to an inclusive civilian government selected through free, fair, and transparent elections, and civilian government based on the rule of law, fundamental freedoms, accountability, and an open and competitive economy. So we will see when it is transferred, and we will take a close look at it.

Bahrain.

QUESTION: Yeah. Do you have any view on the government --

QUESTION: A quick one on Egypt. Hold on. I'm sorry, Matt. You don't have any comment on the prohibition of religious parties in Egypt?

MS. PSAKI: Again, we'll wait to comment on it until it's been officially transferred. Obviously, there are steps in there we may be complimentary of and others we may not be.

QUESTION: Yes, please.

QUESTION: Does the decision of the - not to release this human rights campaigner when he was eligible to be released? It was yesterday or today.

MS. PSAKI: Let me see. I think I have something on this. One moment, Matt.

QUESTION: Mm-hmm. You can get it - if you just want to make it a TQ, that's fine.

MS. PSAKI: Yeah, that's fine. I believe I have something on it for you. Let's see. We continue to encourage Bahrain to take the necessary steps to promote reconciliation among Bahrainis, including permitting all sectors of society to voice their political views in a peaceful manner. We have seen reports that the head of the Bahrain Center for Human Rights Nabeel Rajab - is that who you're talking about - okay --

QUESTION: (Inaudible.)

MS. PSAKI: -- was denied early release today in Bahrain. We understand that he has served 18 months of his two-year prison sentence and is scheduled to be released in May of next year. We remain deeply concerned about the three-year prison sentence for leading illegal gatherings. We urge the Government of Bahrain to protect the universal rights of freedom of expression and assembly, just as we urge all elements of Bahraini society to engage in peaceful expressions of political opinion.

QUESTION: Do you think that he should've been released as was - as he could've been today?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I believe we are concerned about his - we were concerned about his three-year prison sentence, I believe. Let me check and see, but I believe that's what we're implying here.

QUESTION: I mean, this is not the first. I mean, there have been several other opposition activists and so forth that have been detained. I mean, does this cast doubt on your encouraging words earlier in the year about Bahrain's commitment to political reforms?

MS. PSAKI: Well, we certainly are encouraging them to take some step - to take necessary steps to promote reconciliation. And obviously, each time that there is a case like this, we have expressed concern. So I don't have any analysis as to what that will mean longer-term or about the overall relationship, but each time there has been an incident, we have certainly expressed our concern.

QUESTION: Well, but each time - you say each time that there's been an incident. I mean, there's a pattern of incidents. I mean, does that say something about their actual commitment to reforms?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I don't have any more analysis on it for you.

Thanks, everyone.

QUESTION: Thank you.

(The briefing was concluded at 3:18 p.m.)

DPB # 196

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From: Tiantawach, Dew D. EOP/NSC [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, May 10, 2016 10:53 AM
To: Norris, Emily Y
Cc: Werberg, Samuel (Cairo)
Subject: RE: URGENT Please clear: Iran State PG

B6

RELEASE IN PART
B5, B6

Clear - thanks.

-----Original Message-----

From: Norris, Emily Y [http://redirect.state.sbu/?url=mailto:NorrisEY@state.gov]
Sent: Tuesday, May 10, 2016 10:45 AM
To: Tiantawach, Dew D. EOP/NSC [REDACTED]
Cc: Werberg, Samuel <WerbergS@state.gov>
Subject: URGENT Please clear: Iran State PG

Hi Dew,

Could you please clear on the Iran PG attached [REDACTED]
input much appreciated.

Your B5

(side note -I've been trying to send this email since 9:30 and it is getting stuck in the outbox so you might get three)

Thanks,

Emily

Emily Yasmin Norris

Office of Iranian Affairs

U.S. Department of State

norrisey@state.gov

(202) 647-3719

[REDACTED]

This email is UNCLASSIFIED.

From: Tiantawach, Dew D. EOP/NSC [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, May 10, 2016 12:50 PM
To: Norris, Emily Y
Cc: Werberg, Samuel (Cairo)
Subject: Re: URGENT Please clear: Iran State PG

RELEASE IN PART
B5, B6

B6

[REDACTED]

From: Norris, Emily Y
Sent: Tuesday, May 10, 2016 12:42
To: Tiantawach, Dew D. EOP/NSC
Cc: Werberg, Samuel
Subject: RE: URGENT Please clear: Iran State PG

B5

B5

-----Original Message-----

From: Tiantawach, Dew D. EOP/NSC [[http://redirect.state.sbu/?url=mailto:\[REDACTED\]](http://redirect.state.sbu/?url=mailto:[REDACTED])]
Sent: Tuesday, May 10, 2016 12:35 PM
To: Norris, Emily Y
Cc: Werberg, Samuel
Subject: Re: URGENT Please clear: Iran State PG

B6

I'm in prep with Josh then heading to a 1:00 meeting [REDACTED]

B5

Thanks!

From: Norris, Emily Y
Sent: Tuesday, May 10, 2016 12:19
To: Tiantawach, Dew D. EOP/NSC
Cc: Werberg, Samuel
Subject: RE: URGENT Please clear: Iran State PG

Hi Dew,

B5

Emily

-----Original Message-----

From: Tiantawach, Dew D. EOP/NSC

[>[http://redirect.state.sbu/?url=http://redirect.state.sbu/?url=http://redirect.state.sbu/?url=mailto:\[REDACTED\]](http://redirect.state.sbu/?url=http://redirect.state.sbu/?url=http://redirect.state.sbu/?url=mailto:[REDACTED])

B6

B6

Sent: Tuesday, May 10, 2016 10:53 AM

To: Norris, Emily Y

Cc: Werberg, Samuel

Subject: RE: URGENT Please clear: Iran State PG

Clear - thanks.

-----Original Message-----

From: Norris, Emily Y

[>>[http://redirect.state.sbu/?url=http://redirect.state.sbu/?url=http://redirect.state.sbu/?url=http://redirect.state.sbu/?url=http://redirect.state.sbu/?url=mailto:NorrisEY@state.gov](http://redirect.state.sbu/?url=http://redirect.state.sbu/?url=http://redirect.state.sbu/?url=http://redirect.state.sbu/?url=http://redirect.state.sbu/?url=http://redirect.state.sbu/?url=mailto:NorrisEY@state.gov)<<]

Sent: Tuesday, May 10, 2016 10:45 AM

To: Tiantawach, Dew D. EOP/NSC [REDACTED]

B6

Cc: Werberg, Samuel <WerbergS@state.gov>

Subject: URGENT Please clear: Iran State PG

Hi Dew,

Could you please clear on the Iran PG attached [REDACTED]
Input much appreciated.

You B5

(side note -I've been trying to send this email since 9:30 and it is getting stuck in the outbox so you might get three)

Thanks,

Emily

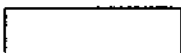
Emily Yasmin Norris

Office of Iranian Affairs

U.S. Department of State

norrisey@state.gov

(202) 647-3719



B6

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RELEASE IN PART B5, B6

From: Tiantawach, Dew D. EOP/NSC [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, May 09, 2016 5:48 PM
To: Norris, Emily Y; Beechem, Stephanie; Werberg, Samuel (Cairo)
Subject: RE: Urgent

B6

Great! [REDACTED]

B5

-----Original Message-----

From: Norris, Emily Y [http://redirect.state.sbu/?url=mailto:NorrisEY@state.gov]
Sent: Monday, May 9, 2016 5:41 PM
To: Tiantawach, Dew D. EOP/NSC [REDACTED] Beechem, Stephanie
 <BeechemS@state.gov>; Werberg, Samuel <WerbergS@state.gov>
Subject: RE: Urgent

Got it sorted, forwarding you final chain now

This email is UNCLASSIFIED.

From: Tiantawach, Dew D. EOP/NSC [http://redirect.state.sbu/?url=mailto:[REDACTED]]
Sent: Monday, May 09, 2016 5:39 PM
To: Norris, Emily Y; Beechem, Stephanie; Werberg, Samuel
Subject: RE: Urgent

B6

I was there but have no idea what he is talking about. [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

B5

From: Norris, Emily Y
 [>http://redirect.state.sbu/?url=http://redirect.state.sbu/?url=http://redirect.state.sbu/?url=mailto:NorrisEY@state.gov
]<
Sent: Monday, May 9, 2016 5:28 PM
To: Beechem, Stephanie <BeechemS@state.gov <http://redirect.state.sbu/?url=mailto:BeechemS@state.gov> >;
 Werberg, Samuel <WerbergS@state.gov <http://redirect.state.sbu/?url=mailto:WerbergS@state.gov> >; Tiantawach,
 Dew D. EOP/NSC [REDACTED]
 [REDACTED]
Subject: RE: Urgent

Looping in Dew who was in NEA/IR at the time and may have background info on this issue.

This email is UNCLASSIFIED.

From: Beechem, Stephanie
Sent: Monday, May 09, 2016 5:24 PM
To: Werberg, Samuel; Norris, Emily Y
Subject: FW: Urgent

Do you know anything about this??

This email is UNCLASSIFIED.

From: Rosen, James
[>[http://redirect.state.sbu/?url=http://redirect.state.sbu/?url=http://redirect.state.sbu/?url=mailto:\[REDACTED\]](http://redirect.state.sbu/?url=http://redirect.state.sbu/?url=http://redirect.state.sbu/?url=mailto:[REDACTED])] B6
[REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, May 09, 2016 5:21 PM
To: Trudeau, Elizabeth K; Kirby, John
Cc: Toner, Mark C; Beechem, Stephanie; Hickey, Lauren A
Subject: RE: Urgent

At the 12/2/13 briefing, I confronted Jen Psaki with the false statement made to me by Toria Nuland at the 2/6/13 briefing. That earlier exchange went like this:

ROSEN: There have been reports that intermittently, and outside of the formal P-5+1 mechanisms the Obama Administration, or members of it, have conducted direct, secret, bilateral talks with Iran. Is that true or false?

NULAND: We have made clear, as the Vice President did at Munich, that in the context of the larger P-5+1 framework, we would be prepared to talk to Iran bilaterally. But with regard to the kind of thing that you're talking about on a government-to-government level, no.

Of course, the secret Iran talks had begun eight months before that exchange.

Not sure I understand Q.

B6

Subject: Urgent

UNCLASSIFIED U.S. Department of State Case No. F-2016-11026 Doc No. C06219552 Date: 04/12/2017

v/en/video/2886914568001<) ends with Psaki responding to Roz's question saying "....and so that has not changed that." White flash on screen at 26:58 and then it picks up with Roz talking again.

TRANSCRIPT:

1:54 p.m. EST

MS. PSAKI: Hi, everyone. Happy --

QUESTION: Happy belated birthday.

MS. PSAKI: Thank you. Thank you very much. Twenty-two. It's glorious. (Laughter.)

QUESTION: And you will be 22 for the next --

MS. PSAKI: I will be.

QUESTION: What, 10, 15 years?

MS. PSAKI: At least, at least. Well, I have nothing at the top, so Matt, let's go to what's on your mind.

QUESTION: Let's see. I have a lot --

MS. PSAKI: Okay.

QUESTION: -- but nothing is really worth starting with, so let's just start with the Secretary's trip.

MS. PSAKI: Okay.

QUESTION: Both - excluding the middle stop in Moldova, at the beginning, how much of the NAC do you expect is going to be concentrated on Afghanistan and then talking about the BSA? Will there be any Afghan officials there to talk with? And then - well, that'll be that one question for --

MS. PSAKI: Okay. Well, we'll clearly, as we typically do, be doing a briefing en route about the trip and about our visit to the NATO Ministerial tomorrow, where we will venture to have more specific details about who will be attending. Obviously, Afghanistan and the ongoing presence there post-2014 of the United States and of NATO will certainly be a big topic of discussion. But I will let our briefers outline more specifics en route to Brussels.

QUESTION: All right. Well, I was going to ask about the Middle East but - as well, the stop in Israel and the PA. But if you're just - are you going to give me the same answer, wait for the briefing on the plane?

MS. PSAKI: I likely will, yes.

QUESTION: Okay. Well, then never mind.

MS. PSAKI: Okay.

QUESTION: And then quickly on Afghanistan --

MS. PSAKI: Sure, Lesley.

QUESTION: Is - what further is happening as far as trying to resolve this issue with Afghanistan?

MS. PSAKI: Well --

QUESTION: As far as - is it true that --

MS. PSAKI: The BSA.

QUESTION: The - exactly.

MS. PSAKI: The signing, I assume.

QUESTION: Is it true that Special Envoy Dobbins has gone - is on his way to Afghanistan?

MS. PSAKI: I don't have any announcements at this point on travel for him or anyone else. Obviously, our team on the ground, Ambassador Cunningham and others, have been in close contact. At this point, we've made our position clear, and so have the Afghan people. Signing the BSA soon is the path forward, as we've said many times, to sustaining a partnership between the United States and Afghanistan to support Afghans in achieving lasting peace, security, and development. That's the message that we're conveying at every level. And as we've said before but important to reiterate here, given it's a week later now: We - deferring the signature of the agreement until after next year's election is not viable. It would not provide Afghans with the certainty that they deserve regarding their future in the critical months leading to the elections, nor would it provide the United States and NATO allies the clarity necessary for a potential post-2014 military presence.

So we're continuing to convey that. Our team on the ground is certainly hard at work. I don't have any travel announcements. If that changes, we'll certainly let all of you know.

QUESTION: Has Secretary spoken to President Karzai in the last couple of days on BSA?

MS. PSAKI: He has not spoken with him in the last couple of days.

QUESTION: And the Pentagon today said that this is not the end of it; after BSA is signed, the U.S. and Afghanistan have to negotiate and sign their agreement called SOFA, and that would be done by the State Department. Has any process started on SOFA, signing of SOFA with Afghanistan?

MS. PSAKI: I'd have to look more specifically at what they said. Maybe you're referring to the NATO SOFA that they may have to negotiate and sign, I believe, as a step? But for our purposes, there's the signing; it goes through parliament, then it would have to be signed again. Obviously, as you all are very familiar with, this doesn't outline a specific number for a troop presence, so there would be a great deal of planning in regards to that that DOD would certainly be very engaged with. But in terms of that, I'd have to look at specifically what they said. I'm not familiar with that --

QUESTION: Is December 21st the redline, the deadline for signing of BSA, after which you will begin preparing for all troops pull out from Afghanistan post 2014.

MS. PSAKI: I am not going to get into new redlines or deadlines today, I will say. But on the trip question, well, as you all know, a decision hasn't been made. You would know if it had been. It's not our preference, but no troops is certainly a potential outcome for Afghanistan if there is no BSA. So that is, again, not our preference, but natural that planning would have to take place for all different options.

QUESTION: Have you tried to understand why President Karzai is doing what he's doing or conducting himself the way he has? Do you have a clearer picture than we do, for instance?

MS. PSAKI: I don't know that I have any further insight than you do. Obviously, the Secretary spoke with him last week, as you all well know. We continue to press our case for why this should be signed as quickly as possible, but I don't have any analysis of particular actions or comments in Afghanistan.

QUESTION: So you think that he's perhaps more concerned about his personal safety post the elections?

MS. PSAKI: I will let you, Said, do your own analysis. I don't have any other analysis on it.

Do we have any more on Afghanistan?

QUESTION: Just the trip?

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: For those of us who are interested in Moldova --

MS. PSAKI: Yes.

QUESTION: -- could you just tell us why stop in Moldova? What's the importance? We see the winery, et cetera.

MS. PSAKI: Sure. Moldova is a country that has taken a number of important reform steps in recent years. They have - they're taking steps to help grow their economy, and wine is obviously a significant export. But they have a number of exports they also work with. And given the steps they've taken, the Secretary felt it would be an important opportunity to pay a visit. You'd have to check my history and facts here, but I believe he may be, if not the first, one of the first Secretaries to pay a bilateral visit to Moldova.

QUESTION: And also it comes, obviously, right after Ukraine decided not to sign the agreement with the EU.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: Moldova did. So you could read into this that the Secretary wants to buck them up or give them something, a sign of support.

MS. PSAKI: Well, we had planned this trip - this trip was in the works before that decision was made. But certainly, they have put a number of reforms in place and they're working hard on their economy and the - if - the Secretary felt it was important to highlight that.

QUESTION: Following on that --

QUESTION: Okay. Can I go over just to Afghanistan for one very briefly?

MS. PSAKI: Sure. Okay, and then we'll go to Anne.

QUESTION: I was gone last week so I'm - most of last week, so what - did the Secretary speak with Karzai before or after Ambassador Rice was there?

MS. PSAKI: Let's see. He spoke with Karzai - President Karzai - I'd have to look back. I believe it was prior to her visit. Let me double check that for you to make sure.

QUESTION: So the last senior official to speak with Karzai, as far as you know, was Ambassador Rice.

MS. PSAKI: I believe that's correct, yes.

QUESTION: Just following on the Moldova for Ukraine substitution, in saying that Secretary Kerry would not, as had been widely expected, attend the OSCE - when you said that, I don't know, about 10 days ago or so --

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: -- we were just at the very beginning of this whole episode.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: And at that point you said it was scheduling issues that had - it would force his cancellation. Are you sticking with that? Is that still the case? Or might there be some policy implications to his decision not to go to the OSCE?

MS. PSAKI: I am sticking with that. I'm just looking at Lesley here in my - corner of my eye. I am sticking with that. I don't have any new guidance for you on that front. Assistant Secretary Nuland is still planning to attend and travel there after joining us for the first part of the visit.

QUESTION: On Syria?

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: Is it --

QUESTION: Can you tell us the -- oh, sorry.

QUESTION: Sorry. Just on this charade - charade, for Lesley - of scheduling reasons, is it not the case that not doing - not going on this trip - not going to Kyiv is a sign of displeasure?

MS. PSAKI: I will let you do your own reporting, Matt. I don't have any more analysis or comments on it from here.

QUESTION: But there was --

QUESTION: And one more quick one on Ukraine.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: Obviously, we're seeing the demonstrations, violent crackdown.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: What's the response from the State Department?

MS. PSAKI: Well, we're of course, naturally, closely monitoring the ongoing demonstrations, not only in Kyiv but in cities around Ukraine. As you know, since the demonstrations began on November 21st, there have been an increasing number of violent incidents, including against journalists. We stress there is no room, and we continue to stress there is no room for violence in a country that aspires to a democratic future. We continue to call on all sides to maintain calm, and on Ukrainian authorities to ensure that members of the public and the press are able to safely and peacefully exercise their rights of speech and assembly.

As I mentioned a little bit before, we still have - Assistant Secretary Nuland is still planning to travel there. The Ukrainian foreign ministry announced that the ministerial is proceeding as planned.

QUESTION: But there was -

QUESTION: Are you sure that Ukraine is a country that aspires to a democratic future?

MS. PSAKI: Any country that may aspire, certainly, these are important values to follow through on.

QUESTION: Right. But are you still convinced that Ukraine aspires to a westward-looking, democratic future?

MS. PSAKI: Well, we will see, Matt. Time will tell. Actions speak louder than words.

QUESTION: Do you - does this --

QUESTION: Do you still stand by the comments made by Ambassador Nuland in her speech to the Atlantic Council a couple of weeks ago and also comments from this podium that it is your belief that Ukraine should be following the path towards joining some kind of association agreement with the EU?

MS. PSAKI: Sure. Our view has not changed on that. Obviously, there have been a lot of events that have happened since then, but --

QUESTION: And do you believe that the demonstrations on the streets are actually - that's what they want? I mean, it seems to be that they're demonstrating because they're angry that the government hasn't taken this path that's been laid out for them.

MS. PSAKI: I would point you to the comments of the demonstrators, of which there have been many. I don't want to speak on their behalf, but our position hasn't changed on what steps they could take. Obviously, it's up to Ukraine to take those steps.

QUESTION: So - but, I mean, the United States is - if you don't want to give your backing to them - at least sympathetic to what the demonstrators are asking for.

MS. PSAKI: Again, the demonstrators are saying a range of things, so I don't - beyond what we've stated publicly many times, I don't have any other further public statements on our position, which has been stated by Assistant Secretary Nuland and by other officials in the past several weeks.

QUESTION: Given the estimates of some 300,000 people who were demonstrating across the country on Sunday, and given that they all seem, to a person, to be saying that the government is ignoring their wish to be more closely aligned with Europe, isn't it a bit disingenuous for this building to suggest that they need to show any restraint? They're not the ones who are bludgeoning people with battering rams and turning rubber bullets on the police. It seems they're taking the brunt of everything that's been happening.

MS. PSAKI: I don't think I took sides. I think I said that it's important for all sides to maintain calm, that there's no place for violence in a country that aspires to a democratic future. So I don't - I would disagree with the premise of your claims.

QUESTION: What does this building think of the prime minister's - call for his security forces to show restraint and seemingly to be missing in action when on Sunday there was more violence heaped upon the demonstrators, particularly in Kyiv?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I think I just expressed what our view is of violence against demonstrators, so that's what our view is.

QUESTION: Can I - has the Secretary spoken to somebody in Ukraine, his counterpart?

MS. PSAKI: He has not in the last several days. I can check if there's been any other calls I'm not aware of.

QUESTION: Because one of the big issues for Ukraine is tearing itself away from Russia and looking towards Western Europe for economic support. And one of the big things is that the president of Ukraine is heading to China to look for that. And if - I was wondering if the U.S. had offered them kind of - some kind of assurance or reassurance economically that they could be better off by signing these deals and with the support - and the U.S. would support any kind of reform through the International Monetary Fund.

MS. PSAKI: Well, aside from public statements we've made, which, as Jo referenced, is - that our belief is that European integration is the surest course to economic growth and strengthening Ukraine's democracy. That's still our belief. That's been consistently our belief. But beyond that, I'm not aware of any other discussions. Obviously, there's a lot of - that's going on with the EU and with Russia, and beyond that we have made our position clear.

QUESTION: And what is the building's position on the detention of Yulia Tymoshenko?

MS. PSAKI: Well, we have consistently spoken about this in the past and expressed our concern about her detention. I know this was also a component that was potentially being worked through as an element of Ukraine getting into the EU. So we've consistently expressed concern, encouraged them to take steps forward. Obviously, there hasn't been progress on that on the ground.

QUESTION: I'm sorry, what did you say was the surest way to economic growth?

MS. PSAKI: I said European integration is the surest course to economic growth and strengthening --

QUESTION: Did you give the same advice to the Greeks?

(Laughter.)

MS. PSAKI: Matt. Behave.

Do we have any more on Ukraine or Afghanistan, since we touched on that too?

QUESTION: Still on Ukraine.

MS. PSAKI: Okay.

QUESTION: The Russians have proposed that the EU, Ukraine, and Russia get together to discuss some of these problems. Would the United States be in favor of that, some kind of a trilateral discussion to discuss the economic situation and political differences?

MS. PSAKI: It wouldn't involve the United States, so I don't have a particular position. I'm happy to talk to our team and see if we have a view on that.

Ukraine or Afghanistan? Okay, should we move on to Syria? Let's go to Margaret.

QUESTION: Thank you. Jen, the OPCW said over the past few days that the U.S. has stepped up, that they're going to give operational support, offering up financing. Can you give us some more detail on that?

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm. Well, I don't know if it will be satisfying, but let me try. (Laughter.) Well, as you know, the United States is committed to supporting the international community's efforts to destroy Syria's chemical weapons in the safest, most efficient and effective means possible. We have offered and are currently outfitting a U.S. vessel with field-deployable hydrolysis system technology to support the OPCW's efforts. We are in close contact with the OPCW and our international partners and remain confident that we can meet the milestones for destruction set out by the OPCW. Of course, the OPCW remains - and the UN - remain the lead coordinators on reaching out to countries and coordinating steps forward and any timeline, et cetera.

QUESTION: But on the financing, what is it exactly that we're offering? Is that a chunk of change? Is that financing and loans, or --

MS. PSAKI: Well, we've offered - we've offered in the - prior to this, we have offered - we have given 6 million to the OPCW and the UN Trust Fund, both in financial contributions and in kind, so I think we gave some materials as well. But this, of course, would be a DOD vessel. So I would point you to them on the specific costs. This, at this point, is an offer. So I think that's still being worked through.

QUESTION: So - but beyond the vessel, the OPCW says the cost is going to be between 35 to 40 million euros for the private contractors who would actually be --

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: -- be doing the disposal themselves. So is any of that money coming through the State Department, or is the State Department topped out at \$6 million?

MS. PSAKI: Well, we've said we'd be open to exploring additional ways to provide assistance. I don't have any announcements today of additional assistance we're planning to provide, but that certainly is something we're in discussions with the OPCW about.

QUESTION: So we can understand correctly, it is a commercial vessel, correct, that they are trying --

MS. PSAKI: It is a --

QUESTION: -- (inaudible) --

MS. PSAKI: -- U.S. Government vessel, not a commercial vessel.

QUESTION: Right.

MS. PSAKI: But there is a part of this - and this may be what you're asking about - which is the OPCW reaching out to commercial companies about the destruction capabilities.

QUESTION: Okay.

QUESTION: So what - so DOD is outfitting its own boat, which will be staffed with DOD personnel who will do this?

MS. PSAKI: I'd have to check on the specifics of that. I think some of it may still be work - be going through the process of being worked out, Matt, because they've offered - but obviously, how it would be staffed and the materials and the money - I mean, all of those are pieces that are still being discussed.

QUESTION: Do you actually have a timeline and the location for where this would happen?

MS. PSAKI: I don't have a location. That's still being discussed. The timeline, as you know, is - the next deadline is - not deadline, it's a target - is December 31st. And that is to get all of the chemical weapons out. But in terms of when the next step would be, I don't have a timeline of that.

Anne.

QUESTION: I realize part of this is kind of DOD-flavored, but you might know the answer.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: So is it proper to call this a warship, or is it a military-owned, but not non-warship ship?

(Laughter.)

MS. PSAKI: That is a very specific ship question. I would hesitate to answer incorrectly. I'd have to check on specifically how we categorize it. I don't believe it is a warship, but let me see if we can get more specification on how we - what we call it exactly.

QUESTION: Okay. And on the policy side, I mean, is there any disappointment here that after casting about to - for a friend here, it ends up being the U.S. having to essentially do this on its own?

MS. PSAKI: I wouldn't categorize it that way. I mean, certainly this is a priority for the U.S., as it is for the international community, to destroy and eliminate the chemical weapons. The OPCW is still talking to countries. There are countries that have made public comments about their willingness to help, so we'll see how that all shakes out. And certainly, we'd welcome the support or contribution of other countries.

QUESTION: Well, I'd imagine from your perspective, it should be a shared priority among many nations who would also share the same goal of the ultimate destruction, right? I mean, everybody was waving a flag when that - when the thing was signed.

MS. PSAKI: Certainly, and there are countries, as you know, throughout that have been open to contributing that couldn't for a variety of reasons, whether it's regulations or capacity or resources. But they're still talking to countries about contributing and being a part of this, and certainly we're hopeful of that as well.

QUESTION: So if the question is: "Are you surprised that you've been left holding the bag on this, once again," --

MS. PSAKI: We're not holding the bag yet, Matt.

QUESTION: -- the answer would be no, you're not surprised. You expected your friends in Europe to wimp out.

MS. PSAKI: Well, we made clear we were open to contributing from the beginning, Matt. There are other countries that have expressed an openness to contributing in some capacity. They're all going to make their decisions about what that will - what will - that will entail, and we'll let the OPCW decide how all of it will work together.

QUESTION: What about Russia, who you made this deal with and has been instrumental, as you say, in helping move this towards a resolution? Why can't Russia contribute in a significant way like you can?

MS. PSAKI: I'm not familiar with what they have contributed or what they've committed to contribute or what they have not. Obviously, there are financial ways - there are a number of ways to contribute. We certainly welcome any country's contribution. There are different ways that each country can do that.

QUESTION: Are you in touch with the Russians specifically about making an - a contribution?

MS. PSAKI: I'm not sure. I'd have to check on that and see if it's a discussion that's been a part of the regular discussions with Foreign Minister Lavrov.

QUESTION: Jen, still on Syria.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: Yesterday, Mike Rogers, the chair of the Intelligence Committee, warned that there are many jihadis that are Americans and Europeans and Westerners and so on, that they go back and forth and so on. Are you concerned about these jihadis being trained in Syria and now they come back to the United States and perhaps organize terrorist acts?

MS. PSAKI: I haven't seen his comments specifically. I know - I believe he may have been on a Sunday show yesterday. I haven't read them fully. We've - we're naturally concerned, as you know, about extremists whether they're going in and certainly and if they're coming out. I talked a little bit, I think it was a week or two ago, about ways that we coordinate with our international partners in the region to kind of track this and efforts we undertake to make sure we're watching, but of course we're concerned. I don't have any other specifics for you.

QUESTION: Are you pressing your partners in this case, like the Saudis and the Gulf Cooperation Council countries, that have been supplying arms and money in the past for these extremist groups - are you pressing them not to do so?

MS. PSAKI: We have consistently, and all the countries, as you know, have agreed repeatedly to contribute assistance through the SMC.

QUESTION: Finally, yesterday there was a report in the Telegraph, The London Telegraph, that says basically the Free Syrian Army now is becoming a group of warlords and accumulating money and gangs and so on and have no interest, really, in reaching a settlement. Is that your assessment, or are you still working very closely with General Idris?

MS. PSAKI: We are still working very closely with General Idris, we're still working towards a Geneva conference in January, and we still believe there's no military solution, as you know.

More on Syria?

QUESTION: Still on Syria.

MS. PSAKI: Or - go ahead, Roz.

QUESTION: Still on Syria, the Iranian Foreign Minister Zarif did an interview with Al Jazeera this morning. And when it came to Geneva II, he said that while Iran is, quote: not begging to attend the talks in January, it would attend if invited. My first question: Would the U.S. be willing to invite Iran to take part in these talks? And if so, what does the U.S. believe that Iran could bring to this situation to try to end the civil war?

MS. PSAKI: Well, no decisions have been made about participation yet. There's another trilateral meeting on December 20th coming up that we'll be participating in with the UN and the Russians. Our position hasn't changed on Iran's participation or whether we believe they should be invited. They have not endorsed the Geneva communique. That's a condition we feel is necessary, but obviously this will continue to be discussed at the next trilateral meeting.

QUESTION: But given the - that the UN is now estimating that upwards of 120-25,000 people may have been killed in the civil war to date --

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: -- is there some sort of leverage that Tehran could bring to the table to try to induce the Assad regime to, if nothing else, stop the killing and try to at least put in some sort of ceasefire?

MS. PSAKI: Well, this goes back to the premise that attendees should be endorsing the Geneva communique, because that is what the purpose and the goal of the conference is. So, I don't have any speculation on what leverage they may or may not have, but the conversations we have had with them in recent weeks have been about their nuclear program and moving towards a first-step agreement on that. They've not been focused on Syria. And our position on whether or not they should attend the Geneva conference in January hasn't changed.

QUESTION: But you do feel that if they do endorse Geneva I, there's a great deal of value for Iran's participation --

MS. PSAKI: Well, we'd have to --

QUESTION: -- considering that it is --

MS. PSAKI: We'd have to evaluate it, Said. I don't want to get ahead of --

QUESTION: But it's a very ally of the regime. It supports other elements that help the regime in its fight, like Hezbollah so on.

MS. PSAKI: If that is a step they take, we can have a robust discussion in here about it.

QUESTION: Jen, are there any contacts currently between the United States Government and the Syrian regime? I mean, I know Secretary Kerry spoke months and months ago --

MS. PSAKI: Sure.

QUESTION: -- to Foreign Minister Muallem. Is there anything going on at the moment?

MS. PSAKI: And we have for some time, as you know, have had different channels, but I don't have anything specific for you. I can check if there have been any recent contacts on any level.

QUESTION: So there were reports over the weekend that some European countries are quietly beginning to --

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: -- reopen diplomatic conversations or channels with the Syrian regime because, I think, the fear is that this is just so blocked at the moment that they're --

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: -- it's not going anywhere.

MS. PSAKI: Well, let me see if there have been any contacts at any level of the regime. We've - they have happened in the past, as you mentioned, so I will see if there's more to report on that.

QUESTION: Can I go back to the Iranians and taking part in Geneva? I mean, I think over the last week or so, when there's been, like, various bouts of violence in Syria, that the Iranian Government has said that there needs to be a political solution to the situation in Syria. So don't you think that Iran is making more positive comments? I mean, I don't think the Russians have gone far beyond saying that there needs to be a political solution. They haven't said anything about President Assad leaving (inaudible).

MS. PSAKI: Well, the whole premise - I mean the whole goal is to create a transitional governing body. That's the goal of a Geneva conference. So, certainly, they haven't embraced that as the focus of the Geneva communique, and --

QUESTION: Well, even though the Russians have agreed to a political transition, your definition of a transition is far different from the - than the Russians' definition of a transition. So if the Iranians were to say, like, okay, we accept a political transition, I mean, does that really mean that they --

MS. PSAKI: It's not just about a political transition. It's about embracing the Geneva communique, which they have not done. If they do that, we will evaluate whether or not we'd support their - an invitation to them to attend the conference.

QUESTION: Zarif also told us that his country is not interested in aggravating any sectarian tensions between Shiite and Sunni, between Alawite and other major Islamic communities; that they're trying to, in their efforts, promote more harmony, more peace. Does that add any - does that change the complexion at all, particularly in Syria?

MS. PSAKI: I don't want to speak too specifically to an interview I haven't yet seen yet, and neither has anyone on our team. Broadly speaking, obviously we took a significant step forward with the first-step agreement on their nuclear program, but there are remaining concerns that we have, as you all are familiar with, whether it's their involvement in support of the regime in Syria or humanitarian issues, and so that has not changed that. I can take a closer look once we see the transcript of the interview and see if we have more comments on Foreign Minister Zarif's comments.

QUESTION: You're saying your team does not watch Al Jazeera?

MS. PSAKI: Well, that is not true; we do. However, I believe there's only been a very short clip that has played of this interview that I'm sure will get lots of attention once it all plays.

QUESTION: Beyond the interview, he's freely reaching out. He visited Kuwait. He's reaching out to the other Gulf countries. He wants to visit Saudi Arabia. I mean, there is an effort underway to alleviate their fears and actually encourage them towards participating in Geneva II to make it a success. You must have some sort of a reading of this effort.

MS. PSAKI: I don't have any particular reading of it for you, Said. Our position, I think, has been pretty clear on whether or not they attend the Geneva conference.

QUESTION: I have another really quick logistics thing. On the December 20th meeting, that's Wendy Sherman and that - it's the same iteration?

MS. PSAKI: It is that level. Exactly, yes. Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: Is that new or was that announced last week or something --

MS. PSAKI: I believe we talked about it last week as being the next meeting.

QUESTION: On China - (inaudible).

QUESTION: Please, Jen, can we stay on Iran, please?

MS. PSAKI: Sure. Let's stay on Iran and then we can go to China.

QUESTION: On the 6th of February in this room, I had a very brief exchange with your predecessor, Victoria Nuland --

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: -- about Iran. And with your indulgence, I will read it in its entirety for the purpose of the record and so you can respond to it.

"Rosen: There have been reports that intermittently, and outside of the formal P5+1 mechanisms, the Obama Administration, or members of it, have conducted direct secret bilateral talks with Iran. Is that true or false?"

"Nuland: We have made clear, as the Vice President did at Munich, that in the context of the larger P5+1 framework, we would be prepared to talk to Iran bilaterally. But with regard to the kind of thing that you're talking about on a government-to-government level, no."

That's the entirety of the exchange.

As we now know, senior state department officials had, in fact, been conducting direct, secret bilateral talks with senior officials of the Iranian Government in Oman, perhaps dating back to 2011 by that point.

So the question today is a simple one: When the briefer was asked about those talks and flatly denied them from the podium, that was untrue, correct?

MS. PSAKI: I mean, James, I - that - you're talking about a February briefing, so 10 months ago. I don't think we've outlined or confirmed contacts or specifics beyond a March meeting. I'm not going to confirm others beyond that at this point. So I don't know that I have any more for you.

QUESTION: Do you stand by the accuracy of what Ms. Nuland told me, that there had been no government-to-government contacts, no secret direct bilateral talks with Iran as of the date of that briefing, February 6th? Do you stand by the accuracy of that?

MS. PSAKI: James, I have no new information for you today on the timing of when there were any discussions with any Iranian officials.

QUESTION: Let me try it one last way, Jen --

MS. PSAKI: Okay.

QUESTION: -- and I appreciate your indulgence.

MS. PSAKI: Sure.

QUESTION: Is it the policy of the State Department, where the preservation or the secrecy of secret negotiations is concerned, to lie in order to achieve that goal?

MS. PSAKI: James, I think there are times where diplomacy needs privacy in order to progress. This is a good example of that. Obviously, we have made clear and laid out a number of details in recent weeks about discussions and about a bilateral channel that fed into the P5+1 negotiations, and we've answered questions on it, we've confirmed details. We're happy to continue to do that, but clearly, this was an important component leading up to the agreement that was reached a week ago.

QUESTION: Since you, standing at that podium last week, did confirm that there were such talks, at least as far back as March of this year, I don't see what would prohibit you from addressing directly this question: Were there secret direct bilateral talks between the United States and Iranian officials in 2011?

MS. PSAKI: I don't have anything more for you today. We've long had ways to speak with the Iranians through a range of channels, some of which you talked - you mentioned, but I don't have any other specifics for you today.

QUESTION: One more on Iran?

QUESTION: The Los Angeles Times and Politico have reported that those talks were held as far back as 2011. Were those reports inaccurate?

MS. PSAKI: I'm not sure which reports you're talking about. Are you talking about visits that the Secretary and others made to Oman, or are you talking about other reports?

QUESTION: I'm talking about U.S. officials meeting directly and secretly with Iranian officials in Oman as far back as 2011. The Los Angeles Times and Politico have reported those meetings. Were those reports inaccurate?

MS. PSAKI: I have nothing more for you on it, James, today.

QUESTION: One more on Iran?

MS. PSAKI: On Iran? Let's just finish Iran and then we can go to China. Go ahead, Roz.

QUESTION: One of - one more on Iran. Foreign Minister Zarif said, directly contradicting the Obama Administration's contention that sanctions worked, he told our interviewer that when the sanctions were first imposed, Iran had 200 working centrifuges. Today, they have more than 19,000. What is this building's reaction to his comment that sanctions did not work and did not bring Iran to the negotiating table?

MS. PSAKI: Well, again, I would like to look more closely at the context of the comments. But, just as a reminder, President Rouhani and others have talked about how the impact - how growing the economy and putting an end - doing - bringing an end to the sanctions is something that was a priority for them in order to help the economy and the Iranian people. There's no question, if you look just at the facts of the impact of oil revenues, the impact on their economic growth was large that there was a huge impact of - that there - the sanctions had an enormous impact, and that that was a driving factor in bringing the Iranians back to the negotiating table.

In terms of progress made on their efforts to develop a nuclear weapon, whether through centrifuges or at their various facilities, that to me sounds like a separate question. Obviously, there were concerns about steps they were taking and progress they were making, which was why it was so important to come to an acceptable agreement that would halt and roll back the progress of their program.

QUESTION: Just to follow up on that, though --

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: -- Secretary Kerry, when he did his round robin of interviews after the announcement of the deal in Geneva, more than once stated that when Iran had reached out to the Bush-Cheney Administration in 2003, Iran was only in possession of 164 centrifuges. Now, he would go on to say, they have 19,000, and this therefore represents the best possible deal that could be secured.

Isn't it a fact that since the Obama-Biden Administration took office, 70 percent of Iran's centrifuges have been installed?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I'd have to look at the statistics, James, but we have not questioned the fact that Iran has made progress on enrichment and on developing a nuclear weapon. We have not questioned that. That's one of the reasons why we stepped up sanctions over the past couple of years. The President and Secretary Kerry were big proponents of that. We worked with the international community to do just that to put that necessary pressure in place.

The point I was trying to make to Roz is that - what she's asking sounds to me like two separate questions, so that was --

QUESTION: Right. I'm pursuing the separate one part that she carved out, and that is to say - and if this is untrue, I'd be grateful to be disabused of the notion - but the great bulk of Iran's progress in the development of its enrichment program has taken place under President Obama's watch, correct?

MS. PSAKI: I'd have to check on the specific numbers. The --

QUESTION: You're not prepared to dispute that statement, as --

MS. PSAKI: Well, James, I think what we're focused on at this point is the fact that we're now at a point where we are halting and rolling back the progress of their program and we're working towards a comprehensive agreement to bring

an end to it. I can't speculate for you what would happen without - what would have happened without sanctions. I would venture to guess --

QUESTION: (Inaudible) sanctions.

MS. PSAKI: But they were being paired together, so that's why I'm bringing it into the conversation.

QUESTION: But the context of the question was exactly: "The Obama Administration says we showed up because our economy is falling apart. I'm here to tell you that's not the case. We have our own reasons for coming."

MS. PSAKI: Well, we will take a close look at his comments and we'll have more to say about them once we do.

QUESTION: Can I just go back to the Geneva meeting and --

MS. PSAKI: Sure.

QUESTION: -- December 20th with Wendy Sherman?

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: This is --

MS. PSAKI: It's that level - in terms of specific attendance, I'll have to just double-check that for you.

QUESTION: Oh, okay.

MS. PSAKI: Yeah.

QUESTION: This is going to be the first of the political meetings towards the next - the comprehensive agreement --

MS. PSAKI: Well, they also --

QUESTION: -- or this is the technical discussions?

MS. PSAKI: No, no, no.

QUESTION: No, this is Syria.

MS. PSAKI: This is - sorry, this is Syria.

QUESTION: Oh, I'm sorry.

MS. PSAKI: This is Syria.

QUESTION: Excuse me. I'm sorry.

MS. PSAKI: So this is the pre-Geneva. No, it's okay. It's confusing. Lots of Genevas.

QUESTION: Okay. But I did have an Iran question, actually.

QUESTION: But is there any new? - I mean --

QUESTION: Yeah.

QUESTION: -- when is it that you're going to start to negotiate the comprehensive deal with Iran?

MS. PSAKI: Well, right now, what we're focused on is the technical discussions leading up to the start of the six-month --

QUESTION: Right.

QUESTION: So do you have a date for those?

MS. PSAKI: I don't yet have a date on those.

QUESTION: Or a place?

MS. PSAKI: I don't yet have a place. It's being worked through. Hopefully we'll have an update for you all in the coming days.

QUESTION: And can I ask - I don't know if you had seen the reports that the new British envoy to Iran is actually going to visit Tehran tomorrow. I wondered what the --

MS. PSAKI: I haven't seen that.

QUESTION: Well, I wanted a U.S. reaction to this following on to the question I asked last week about how far along the line you are prepared to go with your new diplomatic relations or not with Iran.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm. I still don't have any prediction of any step beyond what step we've already taken, which is being a part of the P5+1 agreement on the first step here with Iran. Obviously, different countries are going to make their own decisions, and as with most issues, we certainly support that.

QUESTION: Would it be helpful, though? Do you believe it's helpful that the British envoy could be going to Tehran?

MS. PSAKI: I don't know that I have that level of analysis on it. I don't have all the details on what the purpose of the trip is or what they hope to accomplish. And obviously, every country will make their own decisions about diplomatic relationships.

QUESTION: Jen, one more on the --

QUESTION: East China Sea?

QUESTION: -- secret negotiations with Iran.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: I apologize if you've already addressed this, but there have been reports that the secret negotiations that the U.S. was engaging in with Iran created a feeling of resentment among P5+1 allies such as France, and then that contributed to a rift among the P5+1 and made it difficult to reach consensus within that group. Do you have a reaction to that or a comment on that?

MS. PSAKI: I don't want to speak to anonymous reports about what may or may not be the feelings by other countries, but I will reiterate for you that this was - these discussions were fed into the P5+1 process. That is the process that we ultimately all worked through to achieve a first-step agreement here. The P5+1 members, as well as our friends in Israel, were briefed early this fall.

As to the discussions, we have always been clear we've been open to bilateral discussions with Iran; that there are a range of channels to do that through; that if anything got serious, that we would certainly be briefing our important partners on that; and that's exactly what we did in this case.

QUESTION: Jen --

QUESTION: And when did the talks begin?

MS. PSAKI: James, you're so tricky over there. (Laughter.)

QUESTION: Can I ask about China?

MS. PSAKI: Let me just say one thing, though, for James. It's important here too - and then I promise we'll go to China - it's important here also to note, though, that these really picked up after President Rouhani's election, that in terms of the discussion of specific pieces about how to move forward, what kind of - what an agreement could look like, that's when it picked up. So I understand that's not answering your question, but I felt it was important to --

QUESTION: But just on the basis of methodology and removing the specifics of Iran and who's president or who's Secretary of State, if you were able to stand there at the podium last week and say, "Yes, I'm confirming a certain set of talks that occurred in March," explain to me what is it that prohibits you from saying, yes or no, that a certain set of talks occurred two years ago?

MS. PSAKI: If I have more details for you, James, I will - happy to share them.

QUESTION: I didn't ask you - I'm asking for your thinking about why you're not addressing the question, not the specifics of the meetings. What is it that prohibits you from addressing a question about meetings that are two years old?

MS. PSAKI: I'm not going to do a psychiatrist chair today.

Go ahead. On China?

QUESTION: What about the couch? (Laughter.)

QUESTION: Thank you, Jen. So as we know, the U.S. Government has already told U.S. carriers to comply with China's requirements before any flights pass through the new air defense zone established by the Chinese Government. So does that mean the U.S. Government has recognized this new air defense zone established by the Chinese Government?

MS. PSAKI: So let me be absolutely as clear as I can be here because I know there's been a range of reporting. It has been - some of it has been inaccurate, to no fault of - perhaps it's our fault for not explaining it well enough. So we are not - the State Department is not the point of contact with airlines. The FAA is the point of contact with airlines. There has not been any information that has been put out or confirmed that I am aware of that has conveyed what has or has not been communicated in that capacity to airlines.

There is - for safety and security of passengers, U.S. carriers operate internationally - operate consistently as a process with the notices to airmen issued by foreign countries, as is the case in this case. Their concerns are about the safety and security of passengers. That is different from what the U.S. Government policy is. It is not - this in no way indicates U.S. Government acceptance of China's requirements in the newly declared ADIZ and has absolutely no bearing on the firm and consistent U.S. Government position that we do not accept the legitimacy of China's requirements.

This is a case where China announced this in an uncoordinated fashion. It's inconsistent with standard practice. And their requirements for operating exceed internationally accepted practice in this capacity. So I don't know how much more clear that it is, but it does contradict a bit your question, so I wanted -

QUESTION: It looks like we received the statement or the Q&A from the State Department, so it looks like it's from the U.S. Government. And also, you are saying --

MS. PSAKI: Well, in that statement, which I certainly was well aware of, what was conveyed in there is that for safety and - for the safety and security of passengers, U.S. carriers operate consistently internationally with the notices to airmen issued by foreign governments. It did not convey that - anything specific about what had been communicated to airlines. It did not convey that the U.S. Government supported this effort. So I'm very familiar with the statement you're referring to, and there were a lot of - there were some assumptions made.

QUESTION: So (inaudible) --

QUESTION: Okay. It looks like --

QUESTION: -- that the FAA did not instruct airlines to comply with the Chinese regulations?

MS. PSAKI: I would point you to the FAA for what they did or did not communicate to commercial airlines.

QUESTION: Okay. Well, the FAA is part of the U.S. Government, is it not?

MS. PSAKI: They are. They --

QUESTION: Yes.

MS. PSAKI: Certainly, they are not housed in the State Department, however. (Laughter.)

QUESTION: So - I understand that, but the State Department does have a representative - you're familiar with the ICAO?

MS. PSAKI: I am not.

QUESTION: Okay. It's in Montreal.

MS. PSAKI: Okay.

QUESTION: It's a good excuse to get to Montreal --

MS. PSAKI: Good.

QUESTION: -- if you ever want to go up there.

MS. PSAKI: I will take that advice.

QUESTION: It's the International Civilian - it's the civilian airline - the UN agency for airlines. Do you know if the United States is going to use its membership in the ICAO to oppose this Chinese decision?

MS. PSAKI: I don't.

QUESTION: And if you don't know, could you ask?

MS. PSAKI: Yeah, I'm happy to check on that for you, Matt. Absolutely.

QUESTION: And when you say that the U.S. Government does not accept the legitimacy of the Chinese requirements --

MS. PSAKI: Well, it doesn't accept - yeah, the Chinese requirements, right.

QUESTION: Right. That's what you said.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: Doesn't that - if the FAA has been telling airlines that they have to comply with this, or that they should comply with it, how is that not accepting - the government accepting the legitimacy?

MS. PSAKI: Well, there's a whole field of regulations and regulatory policy that I am certainly far from an aviation expert, as it evidenced by your Montreal question. So I would point you to them on that.

Evidence of the fact that the U.S. Government does not accept China's requirement is by the fact that the announcement will not change how the United States conducts military operations in the region, which is something DOD announced last week. And that is certainly a U.S. Government decision to make.

QUESTION: So does that mean that U.S. Government planes will not obey the - or will not follow the Chinese requirements if they're flying through this airspace?

MS. PSAKI: Military planes?

QUESTION: Say the Secretary of State flying on an Air Force plane to Seoul or to Tokyo will not notify the --

MS. PSAKI: I am not aware of any upcoming Seoul trip coming up.

QUESTION: Well, the Vice President is there right now, or in Tokyo, at least. Are you saying that his plane, an Air Force plane, will not follow the requirements of the Chinese?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I am saying military planes would not, and that level of specificity I'd certainly have to check and see where that falls in.

QUESTION: What is this episode - what impact is this episode having on U.S.-Sino relations?

MS. PSAKI: There are times when we agree and there are times when we disagree, as you know. We've made clear our concerns about not only what was announced but how this was announced, the fact that there was no prior notice. As you also know, Vice President Biden is in the region now on a prior planned trip. He will, of course, be meeting with key leaders to discuss a range of issues. Certainly, this could be a topic of discussion, but there are a number of other issues that we discuss both with China and other partners in the region.

QUESTION: And has the pivot to Asia worked? Is this evidence of the pivot working?

MS. PSAKI: I wouldn't categorize this into - I wouldn't put this in the evaluation category of whether or not it worked. Our pivot to Asia, or rebalance to Asia, means focusing on Asia and the important partnership we have with Asia, with countries in the region, the economic and strategic partners. And nothing is further evidence of that than the Vice President's trip there, the fact that, as you know, the Secretary will be going back to Asia soon, that he was just there a couple of months ago with Secretary Hagel. So that is evidence of our commitment to the region. And we work with them on a - countries in the region on a broad range of issues.

QUESTION: But as we survey the last five years of this Administration, would you say that China is less aggressive in its serial commission of human rights abuses, currency manipulation, cyber warfare against U.S. businesses and government, territorial aggression, or is it better than it used to be?

MS. PSAKI: I'm not going to do an evaluation of that. Obviously, we work with them on economic issues, we work with them on strategic issues. There are still issues, including human rights, including this issue we're talking about now, that

we express concerns about when warranted, and we'll continue to do that. But we know that the relationship is a vital one and one that we need to keep plugging away at even when we disagree.

QUESTION: Jen, could I (inaudible) for a second?

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: Is it fair to characterize the U.S. position as being that aside from the official policy, for the purposes of safety and avoiding some kind of unfortunate incident, that commercial carriers should abide by the Chinese ADIZ requirements?

MS. PSAKI: I don't have - I'd point you again to the FAA on more specifics than what I just conveyed. There are a range of regulations and policies that, of course, they oversee or are in place, but our general position as a U.S. Government is that we don't accept China's requirements. And obviously, the military - actions of military exercises is evidence of that.

QUESTION: Jen, this comes from --

QUESTION: Sorry, sorry. Just a quick follow-up on that.

MS. PSAKI: Go ahead.

QUESTION: It looks like the two main U.S. airlines are complying with - are taking steps to comply. Delta and United are the two that have flight routes through the area, which seems to have kind of created a little bit of confusion/consternation in Japan over a perceived rift with Japanese policy, which is to not allow U.S. commercial airliners to file their flight plans with China. Do you have a - do you have any kind of reassurance or any kind of response to that?

MS. PSAKI: We coordinate closely with Japan and with South Korea and all of the countries in the region about a range of issues. And certainly on this issue, we have been in touch with Japan and will continue to be. This is - for specific actions of individual commercial airliners, I would point you to them or the FAA on any regulations.

QUESTION: But - so you're not - but you're not afraid for the safety or concerned about the safety of U.S. citizens on flights that are flying through the area?

MS. PSAKI: Well, certainly safety and security of citizens should be of concern to everyone. Obviously, there are policies in place and regulations in place because of that. But we don't oversee airline regulations. The FAA does, so I would point you to them.

QUESTION: (Inaudible.) Did the United States Government - the position has changed toward this ADIZ, or not changed? What is the position to ADIZ now?

MS. PSAKI: It has not changed. We - China announced the ADIZ without prior consultations even though the newly-announced ADIZ overlaps with parts of longstanding ADIZs of Japan, the Republic of Korea, and Taiwan, and includes territory administered by Japan. As I mentioned, we - the fact that China's announcement has caused confusion and increased the risk of accidents only further underscores the validity of concerns and the need for China to rescind the procedures. It's consistently been our position and one we have communicated both publicly and privately. I know there was some confusion over the weekend about airlines and specifically.

QUESTION: Jen, you said that you are not still - not accepting China's new air defense zone. But I wonder, like, Japan has its own air defense zone, and also part of it covers Taiwan. But it looks like the U.S. doesn't say anything about it. So do you think there is sort of a double standard? Why do you react so strongly to China's air defense zone?

MS. PSAKI: Well, one of the reasons is that they announced this without prior consultations. It was inconsistent with longstanding procedure and process. And obviously, it overlaps with a number of other longstanding air defense zones of some other neighboring countries.

QUESTION: Jen --

QUESTION: Jen, you do not contest the ability of China to declare such a identification zone; it's just the manner in which they did it, or the extent?

MS. PSAKI: No. I think I have - I've just consistently said that we believe they should rescind the procedures. I've just - I've also stated a couple of times that we don't accept China's requirements. So I think I've made that pretty clear.

QUESTION: (Inaudible.)

QUESTION: Is the first --

QUESTION: In response to the - China's declaration of its own ADIZ, the South Korean Government is poised to expand its own ADIZ, so-called KADIZ, to the South China Sea. What is the position of the United States? Would you encourage it or discourage it?

MS. PSAKI: I haven't seen those reports, or I don't even know if they're reports or if there's been an announcement. I haven't seen any announcement, I guess I should say. So let me check into that, and --

QUESTION: They say they have already started consultations with the United States.

MS. PSAKI: I'd have to check into it and see if we have more to say on that.

QUESTION: Is this the first time the U.S. has called --

QUESTION: Jennifer, you talk about safety --

QUESTION: -- for the zone to be rescinded?

MS. PSAKI: I'd have to check on that for you, Roz.

QUESTION: Can we change topic?

QUESTION: No.

QUESTION: You talk about safety. Are you really concerned that the Chinese may down an airliner or something?

MS. PSAKI: I'm not predicting that, but certainly there is - they created these Air Defense Identification Zones, they've asked for prior flight plans. So of course, the security and safety is part of the regulatory process, and - but I don't have any predictions. It's just the question of abiding by it.

QUESTION: Is it a real concern, downing an airliner?

MS. PSAKI: I don't think I have any more for you on that question.

QUESTION: Jen, when you're taking that question that Roz had --

MS. PSAKI: Sure.

QUESTION: -- could you also check whether the United States actually is directly asking the Chinese to rescind it?

MS. PSAKI: Happy to. Sure.

QUESTION: Thank you.

QUESTION: Well, at least --

QUESTION: Apart from the specific concerns about how this was announced without any prior notice, its excessiveness, at least in terms of other regulations, and the safety risks that you say it cause, do you have any - are there broader concerns about this area being identified as essentially the entire East China Sea? Is the U.S. concerned that the Chinese are looking at anything on a map that has the word "China" in it as all their own?

MS. PSAKI: Well, part of the concern is certainly that it overlaps with parts of other --

QUESTION: Right. But in terms of territorial claims --

MS. PSAKI: As well as territory administered by Japan, sure.

QUESTION: Right, right. But in terms of China's territorial claims, are you concerned that this is the first step or could be a first step towards actually moving in some kind of forceful way to take control of areas of territory and ocean maritime space that it says that it owns?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I don't want to make a prediction of that.

QUESTION: No, but I'm asking if you were concerned --

MS. PSAKI: But --

QUESTION: -- that this is a step in that direction, apart from the specific problems with the no prior notice and all that other - the safety concerns.

MS. PSAKI: But one of the specific problems is also that this includes area - territory administered by Japan, it includes overlapping area with other countries in the region. So certainly, that does touch on what your question is here. In terms of a prediction of what it will mean in the future, I certainly wouldn't venture to make that at this point.

QUESTION: Right. Well, the Chinese say that they would be well within their rights also to declare one of these zones over the entire - over the South China Sea. Are you concerned about the possibility of that?

MS. PSAKI: Well, you're familiar with what our position is on that, and we've long --

QUESTION: Well, that's over the territorial disputes over the - it's a question of sovereignty for these little atolls and bits of rock.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: Would you be as opposed as you are to this if the Chinese did it for the South China Sea, or is that a hypothetical question that you will wait to bash the Chinese over the head for once they - if and when they do it?

MS. PSAKI: It is a hypothetical question at this stage in time.

QUESTION: All right.

QUESTION: One more thing. Just one more thing on that. China at the same time has announced they sent a fighter jet against United States and Japanese aircraft last week. Did you comment on that?

MS. PSAKI: I am not familiar with that specific report. In - where, exactly?

QUESTION: If it's true, are you concerned about these Chinese announcement?

MS. PSAKI: I'd have to look at the specific report, and that may be a DOD question.

James.

QUESTION: Given that China makes this declaration --

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: -- and we regard it as thoroughly problematic, if not illegal, and therefore we have on our hands a dispute with the Chinese --

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: -- which is to be adjudicated somehow in a nonviolent way, wasn't it a kind of a provocative act for the United States to fly B-52s through that very zone in a short time thereafter?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I would point you to DOD on that, but I would reiterate the fact that we have made clear that this action, this announcement, is not going to change our military exercises. And that is an example of that.

QUESTION: So other than taking - other than the Vice President, are you aware - or has there been at this point any conversations that you're aware of in this - from this building with the Chinese directly? It's kind of on Jill's question. And if not, do you expect them or is this going to be left up to the Vice President when he goes to --

MS. PSAKI: Let me check. I know we have expressed concerns. I mentioned this last week, Matt, so let me just make sure you have it.

QUESTION: Jen, the - Secretary Kerry did meet on Wednesday with a senior Chinese official?

MS. PSAKI: I'd have to --

QUESTION: On Wednesday, the vice premier.

QUESTION: Lu.

QUESTION: Yeah.

MS. PSAKI: I'd have to look back at that. It seems like a long time ago.

QUESTION: I know it does. And it was happening on Wednesday.

MS. PSAKI: Deputy Secretary Burns met last week with a Chinese official where this was a topic of discussion. Also, Assistant Secretary Russel spoke with the ambassador about a week ago, and Ambassador Locke has also been in touch, of course, on the ground. In terms of specific contacts over the last couple of days, I'm happy to check and see what else we can read out for all of you.

QUESTION: Are you taking this to the UN in any forum there?

MS. PSAKI: I don't have any prediction of that, James, at this point in time.

QUESTION: New topic?

QUESTION: So it's strictly a bilateral or a multilateral thing, but outside the auspices of the UN is how you're going to seek to resolve it?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I don't have anything for you on it at this point. We're taking this day by day. I conveyed for you what we've done and what we've communicated. But obviously, we're taking steps day by day.

QUESTION: But is that a kind of - is that a consideration?

MS. PSAKI: Not that I'm aware of, Elise. But obviously, we're taking this day by day.

QUESTION: Can we change --

QUESTION: New subject?

MS. PSAKI: Sure, Jill. Go ahead.

QUESTION: I'm still on China. Can you actually clarify this? China's argument is that we institute the ADIZ that other countries have already instituted. If you're saying that China does not have a right to do that, they can say, well, what's good for the goose is good for the gander. And it doesn't seem like you have a legal foot to stand on. If you're opposed to the way in which they did it or the extent of it, these can be a subject of debate. And China has said we can get rid of our ADIZ if the Japanese get rid of theirs. I mean, something like that could happen. But somehow - are you really saying that you do not accept - you do not give China the right to declare a defense identification zone?

MS. PSAKI: I think I've thoroughly outlined what our concerns are, so I'm not sure I have much more to add to your question.

QUESTION: Just on another topic, Jen - sorry.

MS. PSAKI: Well, we were going to go to Jill next, and then I'm happy to go to you.

QUESTION: North Korea?

MS. PSAKI: Sure.

QUESTION: Merrill Newman.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: You've seen probably, or read at least, his so-called confession. Do you have any comments about that, any reaction? And what is the latest on his status?

MS. PSAKI: Well, the latest is - and let me do this first and then I'll do the second part. On November 30th, North Korea permitted the Embassy of Sweden, our protecting power, to consular access to Merrill Newman. It - and given his advanced age and health conditions, we continue to urge North Korea to release him so he may return home and reunite with his family.

We, of course, have seen the Korean Central News Agency report regarding Mr. Newman's detention. According to the report, he apologized for the misunderstanding that led him - led to his detention. We don't have any other further

information regarding the reason for his detention. But again, given his age and health, we continue to call for North Korea to release him as quickly as possible.

QUESTION: Do you believe that the North Korean - that that apology was - that he wrote and that was released by the North Koreans - do you believe that he wrote that of his own volition and that he - and do you have reason to believe that all of those things in that apology are true?

MS. PSAKI: We just don't have any other further analysis. We've seen the same reports all of you have seen, of course, about his interview and the publication of that, but I don't have any other further analysis on it.

QUESTION: Are you aware if that - the subject of his quote, unquote "confession" came up in the meeting with the Swedes?

MS. PSAKI: I don't have anything more on it, but I'm happy to check and see if there's more detail we can outline for all of you.

QUESTION: Did the Swedes as for and did Mr. Newman sign a PAW?

MS. PSAKI: A Privacy Act waiver?

QUESTION: Correct.

MS. PSAKI: Yes, he did. That is why I am able to talk about him now.

QUESTION: Okay. So then if - since he has signed the waiver, would you take it back to your - whoever it is that liaises with the Swedes on this --

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: I assume it's EAP, but I guess it could also be EUR - and find out if Mr. Newman, in his discussions with the Swedes, talked at all about or said that he had freely made this alleged confession and when it was that he recorded this or when it --

MS. PSAKI: I am happy to take that and see if there's more we can share.

Go ahead, Lesley.

QUESTION: Also, did the Swedes report back in what condition he is in? Has he been tortured? Anything today? And how long did they meet with him, and was it in a jail? Was it in a --

QUESTION: Guest house.

QUESTION: -- government - a guest house?

QUESTION: A jailhouse guest house.

MS. PSAKI: A guest house. I don't have many specifics on that. I'm happy to also check with Matt's questions and to see if there's more we can share on that as well.

QUESTION: But didn't it include a --

QUESTION: But they did say - the Swedes did say that he --

QUESTION: -- physical examination of him?

QUESTION: The Swedes did, I think, say that he was --

MS. PSAKI: I believe they've spoken publicly about it.

QUESTION: -- that he was treated - that's he's being treated (inaudible), right?

MS. PSAKI: Right. I've seen those comments as well. So I don't have any other specifics on it, but if there's more we share beyond what they've said publicly, I'm happy --

QUESTION: Including whether or not there was a physical examination of him during this consular access?

QUESTION: I just want to get back to his confession. I mean, it is kind of written in language that kind of fits the narrative that North Korea has been saying, and I'm just wondering if you think that he wrote this. Are you - I mean, there's often times that you would say, like, oh this person seemed under duress --

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: -- or something like that. So I mean, I'm just - about this particular confession, do you have any reason to believe that he did not confess to all of those things?

MS. PSAKI: I don't - I certainly understand why you're asking. I don't have any particular analysis on it at this stage. I will see if this is something that our team is looking into, and if there's more we can say about it specifically.

QUESTION: And what is this building doing to secure his release beyond calling for his release from imprisonment? I mean, Ambassador King had tried months ago to go --

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: -- for the other American under detention, Kenneth Bae. What's actually being done to get them out?

MS. PSAKI: Well, our Swedish protecting power just visited with him two days ago, and obviously that's an important component of reaching out to citizens who are detained in North Korea. We certainly do continue to call for his release. I don't have any other predictions or announcements on travel or visits of other officials at this point to tell you about.

QUESTION: But beyond those consular visits, I mean, is there any outreach to the Chinese specially on behalf of Mr. Newman?

MS. PSAKI: I don't have more I can outline for all of you, but I can check and see if there is any more to tell.

QUESTION: Have they been helpful the past with Kenneth Bae or with others? The Chinese (inaudible)?

MS. PSAKI: They have been helpful, but there's not more specifics I can outline.

QUESTION: Through the Swedes are elsewhere, has North Korea communicated any demands or requests of the United States that have to do with Newman or - as a prelude to his possible release?

MS. PSAKI: I don't have any more specifics on the contact with the Swedes and kind of what the discussion entailed beyond confirming --

QUESTION: Well, any - in any forum, have they asked for anything from the United States?

MS. PSAKI: I don't have any details on it. I am happy to check if there's any more to share with all of you.

QUESTION: But you guys are in touch with the North Koreans directly, just to confirm?

MS. PSAKI: Well, we - as you know, we've long had a channel, but we've been working in this case through our Swedish protective - protecting power.

QUESTION: But you have been in touch with the North Koreans specifically on his matter?

MS. PSAKI: On this specific case, not that I'm aware of, but I'm happy to check if there's anything more on that.

QUESTION: Are you in touch with Mr. Newman's family?

MS. PSAKI: We are. We have been. Let me see if I have the detail of when we last spoke with him - with his family. I don't have that detail for you. I'm happy to put that in the pocket of things I'm going to check on.

QUESTION: And have they asked for you to help facilitate any kind of visit by them to North Korea, given that this gentleman's actually - I mean, he's quite elderly --

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: -- so you would imagine that if - there would be concern enough to try and travel to visit him.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm. I'm not aware of a request that they've made about that specifically, but we can see.

QUESTION: So all the attention, really, is on this Mr. Newman. But as we've said, Kenneth Bae has been held for quite a long time.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm. You're right.

QUESTION: So in your efforts working with the Swedes or working to try and get the release, I mean, are you emphasizing because of Mr. Newman's age and health that you need to get him out right away, or are they part of a package that you think that they --

MS. PSAKI: I mean, we'd certainly like to see them both released as quickly as possible. In terms of that level of detail, I just don't have that.

QUESTION: These American citizens being held against their will in a rogue state, they're hostages, right?

MS. PSAKI: I mean, they're being held by the governments. The governments have confirmed that, so I don't know that I need to categorize it further, James.

QUESTION: You don't regard them as hostages?

MS. PSAKI: Do we have another topic?

QUESTION: Yes. Could I move onto the --

QUESTION: (Off-mike.) (Laughter.)

QUESTION: -- the Secretary's trip.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: Okay. The portion to the West Bank and to Israel.

MS. PSAKI: Yeah.

QUESTION: Yes. If you have more to share with us - today or yesterday, President Abbas, the president of the Palestinian Authority, was so impressed with the Geneva success, now he's suggesting a format, perhaps another Geneva, where the Palestinian-Israeli issue could be resolved. Would you look kindly at this suggestion?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I haven't seen those comments from him specifically. I know this has been an idea floated out there. Our focus remains on the direct negotiations between the Israelis and the Palestinians. We're a facilitator in that effort. There are certainly a number of countries who have a great investment and great interest in the success - in a successful outcome here, including the Arab League, including many other countries that want to contribute to growing the Palestinian economy. But that's our focus, not on planning yet another conference.

QUESTION: And a Palestinian member of the Israeli Knesset, Mr. Ahmed Tibi, claims that the 20,000 housing that the Israelis announced and they put on hold were actually not put on hold, that there is - construction is ongoing. Do you have any information on that?

MS. PSAKI: I don't have anything new on that. I'd have to look into that for you.

Scott?

QUESTION: (Inaudible.)

MS. PSAKI: Oh.

QUESTION: Can we stay on stay on that?

MS. PSAKI: Yeah.

QUESTION: Just on this idea of not necessarily a Geneva-type conference for the peace process, but just the idea of internationalizing the process, would the United States - would the Administration object to an internationalization of the peace process?

MS. PSAKI: Well, it's hard to know exactly what that means. Obviously, as you all are well aware, there's direct negotiations between the Israelis and the Palestinians now. That's what our focus is on, so certainly that's not a path we're pursuing.

QUESTION: Well, I think that the point that - right, it's not a path that you're pursuing --

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: -- but the point that people who are suggesting that this might be a way to go, the point that they make is that the United States has been the sole and unique arbiter, mediator, facilitator, whatever you want to call it, of Israeli-Palestinian peace talks going back decades.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: And you haven't gotten anything out of it. There's been no success. It's been one failure after another. Is it perhaps not time to try something new, is the argument that these people would make.

MS. PSAKI: Well, Matt, obviously, many people are going to make different arguments about how it should proceed. We're less than halfway through the nine-month timeline here. There are a number of countries that are engaged and invested, including, of course, the Arab League, who, as you know, are in very close contact with the Palestinians and engaged in this effort. There are many who are engaged with the Israelis in this effort. So our focus remains on the direct negotiations, and I don't think we're at this point speculating on a different alternative forum.

QUESTION: Well, let me - okay. Well, let me put it this way: Is it still the position of the Administration that the United States has unique leverage and influence with both sides that makes it the only logical or capable, competent, credible mediator for peace between Israel and the Palestinians?

MS. PSAKI: I don't know that we've ever stated it exactly like that. We're playing a facilitator role which both sides are comfortable with. There are other countries engaged with this effort and certainly in touch with the Israelis and the Palestinians. I expect that will continue. But in the meantime, we'll continue to play the facilitator role as long as it's productive.

QUESTION: Do you believe, does the Administration believe that the United States still has leverage and influence with Israel or the Palestinians? I mean, you say, in reference to other questions about, say, Mr. Newman or Mr. Bae in North Korea --

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: -- that the Chinese have influence with the North Koreans and you would like to go through them, maybe after you're done yelling at them about their air defense zone. But do you still think that the United States - does the Administration believe that it has influence and leverage with either Israel or the Palestinians?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I think we have a close relationship with both. And obviously, we're at this point because both sides decided to come to the table. I don't think it's about leverage. There's - it's in the interest of both sides to come to an agreement on the final status issues, and that's what they're working to do at this point.

QUESTION: Jen, could I just ask - there was an agreement --

MS. PSAKI: Sure.

QUESTION: -- reached last week between the EU and Israel which will allow Israel to actually touch some funding for scientific research. There have been some problems because the EU wanted to bar all research in areas of - in the West Bank --

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: -- settlement areas in the West Bank. Is there an - I mean, does the American - do America - does America believe that this is a good agreement for the EU and Israel, given that Secretary Kerry has always mentioned that he fears an increasing isolation of Israel on the international stage?

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm. I haven't talked to our team about it, so I'd have to talk to them and see if we have any particular view on the agreement last week.

QUESTION: And is - what is the message that Secretary Kerry's going to be bringing with him when he visits Israel later on this week?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I think he'll be talking to both sides about the importance of staying firm with the timeline and working through the tough and difficult issues that they're doing at the negotiating table, and reiterating the importance of coming to a peaceful end to the final negotiations. And of course, when he's meeting with Prime Minister Netanyahu, they'll certainly be discussing the recent P5+1 agreement with Iran and having an ongoing dialogue about that as well.

QUESTION: And have there been any meetings, direct talks between the Israelis and Palestinians, since the resignation of the Palestinian team?

MS. PSAKI: I don't have any updates on meetings at this point. I'll see if there's any more we want to provide to all of you in terms of specific meetings and timing of that.

QUESTION: But I mean, since the last time the Secretary's been there, there's been another announcement of new settlement construction.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: There's been the resignation of the Palestinian - it just seems that without him actually physically there holding their hand for hours at a time, that they're not able to sustain it on their own.

MS. PSAKI: Well, they've had many meetings when he has not been there. So obviously, we didn't expect this to be easy. We certainly are aware of some bumps in the road of late, but both sides have also reaffirmed their commitment to seeing this through.

QUESTION: Would you really call those bumps in the road, though? I mean, particularly on the - actually, on either side, whether it's the Israelis continuing to announce settlement construction or the Palestinians' full negotiating team just giving up, it just doesn't seem as if --

MS. PSAKI: Well, when the negotiating - and that's a good example. The negotiating team - President Abbas reaffirmed his own commitment to seeing this through --

QUESTION: But it just --

MS. PSAKI: -- whether it was them or whether it was other officials in their place. So they're continuing to move forward.

QUESTION: It just doesn't seem like they have the - while they may have the desire and the dream that there'll be a peace deal. The motivation to actually do the hard work day in and day out doesn't seem to be there. And so it does seem as if Secretary Kerry is the one holding this together personally, and isn't there, like, a limit to how much he can do?

MS. PSAKI: Sure. That's why he has a team to help work through it every day.

QUESTION: Well, I meant more the parties themselves.

MS. PSAKI: You're right, but there also is a long timeframe we still have left. One of the reasons committing to the nine-month timeframe was so important is because we knew there would be challenging periods throughout the process. But both sides remain committed to that, and so we'll continue to work through it.

QUESTION: But it doesn't sound like - unless you could disabuse us of the notion, it doesn't sound like since Secretary Kerry's last trip in early November that there have actually been any direct talks.

MS. PSAKI: I wouldn't jump to that conclusion. We just have always said we wouldn't confirm every meeting.

QUESTION: Sure.

MS. PSAKI: So let me see if I can confirm any meetings since that point for all of you.

QUESTION: Jen, could you tell us if Ambassador Indyk is there now? Is he there? Is he in the region? Is he - Ambassador Indyk, where --

MS. PSAKI: He's here. I saw him this morning.

QUESTION: He's here. Okay.

MS. PSAKI: Okay. Let's just do one or two more here.

Scott.

QUESTION: What is the U.S. view of what's going on in Thailand right now?

MS. PSAKI: Well, we certainly deeply regret the loss of life in Bangkok due to politically motivated violence. We condemn violence as a means to achieve political objectives and urge all sides to exercise restraint and respect the rule of law. We are concerned about the continuing political tension in Thailand, and we are following the situation closely.

Peaceful protest and freedom of expression are important aspects of democracy, of course. Violence and seizure of public or private property, however, are not acceptable means of resolving political differences. We firmly believe all parties should work together to resolve differences through peaceful dialogue in ways that strengthen democracy and rule of law.

Ambassador Kenney spoke with the prime minister and - has spoken with the prime minister and opposition leaders to also encourage restraint and peaceful dialogue. You may have also seen that the U.S. Embassy in Bangkok issued a security message for U.S. citizens in Thailand explaining that large political demonstrations may continue in coming days - in the coming days, including at government facilities, in and outside of central Bangkok, and is advising them to avoid areas of demonstration and to exercise caution.

QUESTION: Following his talk with the prime minister, one of the main opposition leaders said that he would accept nothing short of her resignation. Is that a responsible position in the eyes of the United States?

MS. PSAKI: We just continue to encourage all parties to work together to resolve their differences. We, of course, have seen his comments, but I don't think we're going to weigh in further at this point, aside from encouraging restraint on the ground.

QUESTION: Would you weigh in on the general amnesty bill that the ruling party failed to get through parliament, which was one of the instigations for this?

MS. PSAKI: I know - I don't know if I've spoken to that in the past, Scott. I'd have to - I don't have anything for you on it at this particular moment, but I'm happy to follow up post-briefing.

Okay, let's do two more here. In the back, you've been very patient.

QUESTION: Thank you. Michael Vincent from the Australian Broadcasting Corporation. What's the U.S. response to the Australian Government's rejection of the U.S. company Archer Daniels Midland's bid for GrainCorp?

MS. PSAKI: Well, we are disappointed by the Government of Australia's decision to reject Archer Daniels Midland's proposed acquisition of GrainCorp. We do not - we do note that the Australian Treasurer Joe Hockey has expressed openness to approving an increase in ADM's current share in GrainCorp. The United States is the largest foreign investor - foreign direct investor in Australia, with 132 billion in investment projects to date, and we look forward to working closely with Australia's government to build stronger ties and investment - stronger trade and investment ties.

QUESTION: Just a quick follow-up.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: Did - unrelated matter, but has the U.S. Government accepted private medical, legal, or religious information on Australian citizens as offered by Australian intelligence agencies?

MS. PSAKI: I don't have anything further or anything for you on a range of reports. I'm certainly not going to comment on any of them. As you know, we're undergoing our own review of these processes, which we expect to conclude by the end of the year.

QUESTION: Jen, back to ADM for a second.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: Did - was this issue, this proposed sale, bid by ADM raised at the AUSMIN ministerial meetings?

MS. PSAKI: It's a good question, Matt. I'd have to check. It wasn't one raised while I was there, but let me check and see if it was.

QUESTION: And if it was, did - was - were you given any indication that this is the way your closest antipodal ally was going to go?

MS. PSAKI: I will check and see if it was even raised.

Okay, let's do one more. Go ahead, Samir.

QUESTION: Do you have a reaction to the draft constitution in Egypt today?

MS. PSAKI: Sure.

QUESTION: Can I throw a Bahrain question at the end of that?

MS. PSAKI: Sure. Why not?

Well, we continue to track the constitutional process with interest, and we'll examine the document carefully once it is finalized and sent to President Mansour, which we understand will occur tomorrow. The Egyptian people, of course, will decide the fate of the draft constitution in a referendum. We will continue to support a transition process that leads to an inclusive civilian government selected through free, fair, and transparent elections, and civilian government based on the rule of law, fundamental freedoms, accountability, and an open and competitive economy. So we will see when it is transferred, and we will take a close look at it.

Bahrain.

QUESTION: Yeah. Do you have any view on the government --

QUESTION: A quick one on Egypt. Hold on. I'm sorry, Matt. You don't have any comment on the prohibition of religious parties in Egypt?

MS. PSAKI: Again, we'll wait to comment on it until it's been officially transferred. Obviously, there are steps in there we may be complimentary of and others we may not be.

QUESTION: Yes, please.

QUESTION: Does the decision of the - not to release this human rights campaigner when he was eligible to be released? It was yesterday or today.

MS. PSAKI: Let me see. I think I have something on this. One moment, Matt.

QUESTION: Mm-hmm. You can get it - if you just want to make it a TQ, that's fine.

MS. PSAKI: Yeah, that's fine. I believe I have something on it for you. Let's see. We continue to encourage Bahrain to take the necessary steps to promote reconciliation among Bahrainis, including permitting all sectors of society to voice their political views in a peaceful manner. We have seen reports that the head of the Bahrain Center for Human Rights Nabeel Rajab - is that who you're talking about - okay --

QUESTION: (Inaudible.)

MS. PSAKI: -- was denied early release today in Bahrain. We understand that he has served 18 months of his two-year prison sentence and is scheduled to be released in May of next year. We remain deeply concerned about the three-year prison sentence for leading illegal gatherings. We urge the Government of Bahrain to protect the universal rights of freedom of expression and assembly, just as we urge all elements of Bahraini society to engage in peaceful expressions of political opinion.

QUESTION: Do you think that he should've been released as was - as he could've been today?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I believe we are concerned about his - we were concerned about his three-year prison sentence, I believe. Let me check and see, but I believe that's what we're implying here.

QUESTION: I mean, this is not the first. I mean, there have been several other opposition activists and so forth that have been detained. I mean, does this cast doubt on your encouraging words earlier in the year about Bahrain's commitment to political reforms?

MS. PSAKI: Well, we certainly are encouraging them to take some step - to take necessary steps to promote reconciliation. And obviously, each time that there is a case like this, we have expressed concern. So I don't have any analysis as to what that will mean longer-term or about the overall relationship, but each time there has been an incident, we have certainly expressed our concern.

QUESTION: Well, but each time - you say each time that there's been an incident. I mean, there's a pattern of incidents. I mean, does that say something about their actual commitment to reforms?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I don't have any more analysis on it for you.

Thanks, everyone.

QUESTION: Thank you.

(The briefing was concluded at 3:18 p.m.)

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Unclassified E-mail: PA Press

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Daily Schedule
DPB**RELEASE IN PART B5**

Voluntary Guidance: Please notify us of any Voluntary Guidance you plan to submit during Guidance Collection that is not on the Tasking List. Please let us know by 10:30am.

Pending Releases (Please Notify Us ASAP)

NOTE: Please notify us as early in the morning as possible of statements, media notes and fact sheets so we can work them into our news flow. Please aim to have all statements, fact sheets and media notes completely cleared and ready for the Daily Press Briefing.

Meeting Readouts: Please provide no later than 10:30am readouts of key meetings of your principals that can be used as distributed press readouts. These may be used as toppers, if appropriate. If meetings occur after the DPB, please send points same day or by 10:30 next day. In some instances, we may want to release it as a Media Note.

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