

# Press Briefing by Press Secretary Josh Earnest and Deputy National Security Advisor for Strategic Communications Ben Rhodes

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MR. EARNEST: I actually have a little topper to do here on some business that we're taking care of back home. And then we'll open it up to your questions and any topic that may be on your mind. So it's a little lengthy -- I'll just warn you in advance. But hang with me, there's a little news at the end.

While climate has, of course, been the focus of today's proceedings, we're cognizant that our global campaign to degrade and ultimately destroy ISIL has a special resonance in this city, just over two weeks after the horrific Paris attacks. So let me start by outlining three steps the administration has taken over the weekend to sharpen our strategy and strengthen our defenses at home.

First, as you probably have seen, the Secretary of Homeland Security earlier today -- just an hour ago, in fact -- announced a handful of measures that he's taken to strengthen what's known as the Visa Waiver Program. These changes will, among other measures, improve our ability to identify individuals who may have traveled to conflict zones, enhance our ability to thwart terrorist attempts to travel on lost or stolen passports, and will facilitate increased information-sharing with our European partners -- that theme you heard during President Hollande's visit to the White House just last week.

So we've got a factsheet on this that just went around in the last hour and I'd commend it to your attention.

Second, when it comes to refugees -- this is the group of individuals that is the most rigorously screened class of travelers to the United States -- the administration, in consultation with governors in both parties, will provide more frequent updates on refugees resettled in their states and increase information-sharing on our extensive security precautions.

Third, at the White House, we've taken a series of steps to ensure that our campaign against ISIL is properly resourced, coordinated and executed. The President recently elevated Rob Malley, the NSC Coordinator for the Middle East and North Africa, to serve now as the Senior Advisor to the President for the Counter-ISIL Campaign in Iraq and Syria. In this new role, Rob will focus on ensuring full interagency coordination across all lines of effort. His role will be complementary to and in partnership with Brett McGurk, who is the President's Special Envoy to the Counter-ISIL Campaign.

Both men are charged in particular with ensuring our coalition is vibrant and strong as we work collectively to tackle this challenge. Rob and Brett will work closely with the President's full national security team to ensure constant synchronization of our efforts against ISIL within the interagency and globally. The President has also directed them to ensure daily focus from across the interagency within the coalition on measures to strengthen our partnership with Iraq and to support our reinvigorated diplomatic track toward a political transition in Syria, and an end to its civil war, which continues to fuel ISIL.

So these are steps that we've taken in the last few days, and these steps are consistent with the counter-ISIL approach that the President has directed since last year. When we identify additional opportunities to make meaningful enhancements we will not hesitate to do so, because we're clear-eyed about the stakes.

Now it's time for Congress to do the same. For too long, Capitol Hill has been a source of politically motivated posturing but few, if any, tangible improvements to our national security. That's wrong, it's dangerous, and falls far short of what the American people deserve. So, to that end, let me outline for you four steps that Congress should take to strengthen our national security before members of Congress leave Washington for the holidays. That leaves them three weeks to act. In this busy holiday season, we know that Americans across the country are making preparations to get a lot done in the next three weeks. So should their Congress. So let me go through those four steps now.

First, the administration has been talking to senators from both parties for two weeks now about technical improvements to our visa waiver program that would enhance our national security without undermining the international connections that are critical to the strength of our economy. Congress should pass that legislation before they leave.

Again, we saw Congress a couple weeks ago pass legislation related to refugees that would not actually do anything to enhance our national security. They were able to take those steps in three or four days. Surely, over the course of the next three weeks they should be able to do something that actually would strengthen our national security.

Second, Congress should fully fund the President's budget proposal for aviation security. Let me give you an example of exactly how they can do that. While finalizing the omnibus, Congress should authorize the expansion of DHS's preclearance program, which screens U.S.-bound passengers before they even arrive on U.S. soil. This is a common-sense proposal that has obvious national security benefits. And Congress should take these steps before they leave for the holidays.

Third, Congress should confirm Adam Szubin's nomination as Under Secretary for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence at the Treasury Department. To be clear, for a year Republicans in Congress have been blocking the nomination of a man who is responsible for shutting down ISIL's financing. Mr. Szubin is a financial expert with impeccable credentials, including his service to the country in the Bush administration. Republican obstruction of Mr. Szubin's nomination is inexcusable and should come to an end, and Congress should confirm him before they leave for the holidays.

Fourth -- and you've heard this before -- Congress must pass a law that prevents individuals who are on the no-fly list from buying a gun. The issue is simple. If the U.S. government has determined that it is too dangerous for you to board a plane, then you shouldn't be able to buy a gun. It's as simple as that. And only in Washington would this be a source of controversy. So Congress should pass this law before leaving for the holidays.

Now, finally, for more than a year, Congress has been AWOL on their responsibility to pass an Authorization to Use Military Force, which would demonstrate to our allies and to our enemies that the United States is united behind the effort to degrade and ultimately destroy ISIL. More than 3,000 American servicemen and women will be away from their families this holiday season because they are in Iraq implementing our counter-ISIL strategy. They're fulfilling their commitment to keep the country safe. It's time for Congress to fulfill their commitment to keep the country safe, too.

This effort is serious and should be the subject of serious debate. It will obviously take more than three weeks to pass an AUMF, but Congress in each of these cases must stop using the fact that these issues are difficult as an excuse for doing nothing.

So over the course of the next three weeks, we'll have an opportunity to do briefings like this; you'll have a couple opportunities to ask questions of the President. And I think you can expect renewed attention on the part of the White House about these specific, tangible steps that Congress can take in the next three weeks that will actually enhance our national security.

And so, thank you for bearing with me on the long topper. Let's go to your questions. Before we take questions in the room, I know the pool has dialed in, so if there are questions from the pool, we'll take those questions first before we start taking questions from the room. So I don't know if the pool can hear me right now.

Q Josh, thanks. I wonder if you could talk a little bit to the nuances and tone between the President and the Prime Minister and President Xi -- whose responsibility it is to address climate change, and Mr. Modi's message that it's not their fault.

MR. EARNEST: The pool can't see that Ben is standing here next to me. He sat in on the India bilat, so I'm going to turn it over to him to answer this question.

MR. RHODES: Well, first of all, the reason why this effort in Paris is different from previous efforts is, for the first time, we have nearly 200 countries, nearly every country in the world coming here to Paris with a target for reducing their emissions, with the

prospect of reaching an agreement that both moves forward with those emissions reductions but also ensures that we have the type of transparency in reporting that provides follow-through and has the type of financing in place that can deal with the adaptation and mitigation of climate change effects going forward.

So you have a truly global effort that the U.S. has helped to mobilize over the course of the last seven years. At the center of that effort by the United States has been a recognition that this could not just simply be an agreement that brings together the most advanced economies or the group of countries who were involved in the Kyoto process. We needed to bring together the entire world, including major emerging economies like China and India. Given the fact that they are more and more the source of carbon emissions, clearly we have felt throughout the course of this administration that China and India need to be a part of the solution. And part of the reason why we believe you have all of the countries here at the table with ambitious targets is because the U.S. and China led by example last year when President Obama and President Xi were able to announce together their ambitions for Paris and their respective targets.

Now, today, very deliberately, President Obama wanted to send a signal with his meetings that we were going to work with China and work with India to pursue an ambitious agreement here in Paris. I think he had a very constructive meeting with both leaders.

With President Xi, I think the two of them renewed their belief that climate change can be a source of U.S.-China cooperation, and they pledged to work together and with respective countries that they have influence over to try to pursue an ambitious agreement.

And again, I think there's much that can be done to achieve the type of agreement over the next two weeks that we're seeking -- one that has ambitious targets; one that has clear transparency in reporting so that there's a real follow-through; one that has the right approach to finance; and one that recognizes that while, as the President himself acknowledged today, advanced economies have important responsibilities, that the whole world has to be a part of this. And you can't have a bifurcation of our commitments in these various areas that prevents consensus.

With Prime Minister Modi, I think you heard Prime Minister Modi reiterate with the President his commitment to pursuing an ambitious agreement. India has put forward its own targets. And the President said in the meeting with Prime Minister Modi that he certainly understands that whether it's India or another developing country, there has to be a focus on making sure that countries can continue to lift people out of poverty. We have a recognition, of course, that you have hundreds of millions of Indians who don't even have access to electricity.

At the same time, however, we can pursue an ambitious climate agreement even while India pursues an ambitious development policy. And, in fact, we can pursue the types of solutions that can meet both climate and development challenges. So, for instance, the fact that right after their meeting, Prime Minister Modi joined President Obama at our Mission Innovation event I think demonstrates a recognition on the part of India and other countries that if we are making investments in basic research, if we are financing

both from the public sector but also from the private sector renewable sources of energy, that has the ability to help us raise our ambitions in terms of reducing our emissions, but also can, frankly, be a source of development for countries like India and other countries around the world.

So I think, with Prime Minister Modi, there was a recognition and a commitment to pursuing an ambitious agreement here in Paris. And I think very clearly in both meetings, President Obama made the point that he's made throughout his presidency that addressing the challenge of climate change and pursuing sustainable economic development that lifts people out of poverty around the world are not competitive goals.

In fact, they can be mutually reinforcing. And I think U.S. leadership in working with our traditional allies but also working with China and India is going to be essential to getting a good deal here in Paris.

MR. EARNEST: Other questions from the pool. (Laughter.) Justin, we're laughing because we can't understand you. Do you want to take another run at it?

Q Justin, they can't hear you. Can't understand you.

Q Is this better?

MR. EARNEST: Yes, that's better, Justin. Try it again.

Q Can you hear me now?

MR. EARNEST: Yes, much better. Fire away.

Q All right. Sorry, we're loading into vans. So the first one was on the Putin pull-side, if there were any assurances that you got from him about changing the direction of Russia's campaign in Syria and if the President made any asks about Russia's threat of sanctions against Turkey.

The second was about Congress -- what your current concern is about a confrontation that might lead to a shutdown, and if the President's saying to them back in October that he wouldn't sign another short-term spending bill is still operative. Leader McCarthy seemed to indicate today that they might need another week to sort it all out.

MR. EARNEST: Ben, why don't you take the Putin one first? And I'll do the budget.

MR. RHODES: So the President spoke with President Putin on the margins of the summit today. On your specific questions, first of all, they did discuss the shoot-down of the Russian aircraft. The President was able to express his regret over the Russian loss of life, while at the same time reiterating his belief that Russia and Turkey need to deescalate the situation and avoid steps that risk further difficulties between the two countries, and, frankly, further impediments to the type of progress that we need to make together to resolve the situation in Syria.

President Obama will be meeting in a bilateral meeting tomorrow with President Erdogan of Turkey. I don't know that that was on the initial schedule that we released, but he'll be able to have this discussion with President Erdogan of Turkey, as well.

I think a lot of the focus with President Putin today dealt with the political process that has been underway in Vienna. And the President reiterated his strong belief that we need to work together -- the United States, Russia, Turkey, our Arab friends and partners, our European allies, Iran -- all at the table to pursue the type of political resolution that can bring an end to the civil war in Syria.

There has been progress made over the course of the last several weeks in setting forward a timeline for a transition. There are discussions around the pursuit of a cease-fire. The President reiterated that this is an area where we all need to work together, and that making progress with respect to a political dialogue and ceasefires inside of Syria will also enable us, together, as an international community, to focus on ISIL. That has been the focus of the U.S.-led coalition in Syria. We think that should be the focus of the Russian military action in Syria.

And there's a connection here between the political process and the counter-ISIL campaign, because you need to preserve moderate elements of the opposition who can participate in a negotiation and participate in a transition. And insofar as you have a political framework in place, it would allow the type of robust focus on ISIL that we believe should be the objective of Russia's efforts inside of Syria.

So the two of them had a discussion. Obviously, we continue to insist that as a part of this transition, Bashar al-Assad will have to leave power. The two of them tasked their respective foreign ministers -- Foreign Minister Lavrov and Secretary Kerry -- to continue to work to make progress through the Vienna process that's been set up.

MR. EARNEST: Justin, on the question of a potential government shutdown, let me make a couple of observations. The first is that Senate Majority Leader has, on a number of occasions, assured the American public that there won't be a shutdown this year. Obviously, the Senate Majority Leader will have a lot to say about that outcome, so his steadfast commitment to ensuring that doesn't happen is certainly something that we take some solace in.

Secondly, I say with some confidence that the newly elected Speaker of the House doesn't want to preside over a government shutdown six weeks into his tenure. And to the credit of both of those gentlemen, they did work earlier this fall in an effective bipartisan fashion in reaching a bipartisan agreement about the budget top lines. As budget experts will tell you, that often is the most difficult step. And what the President did in conjunction with that agreement was to ensure that that agreement could be reached in such time that appropriators on Capitol Hill would be able to work through the details.

And that is why the President stands by the statement that he issued earlier that he does not envision a scenario where he is going to sign a continuing resolution to give Congress more time to negotiate. We've done that once, and that actually did yield some important

bipartisan fruit, and there's no value to doing that again.

Now, is there a scenario where Congress may need -- has reached an agreement and they may need a day or two to pass it through the Congress to go through the mechanics?

That's an option that would still be on the table to prevent a government shutdown. But the President, earlier this fall, signed a continuing resolution to give Congress more time to hammer out a budget agreement. Congress has now had ample time to reach that agreement, and it's time for them to work together in bipartisan fashion to reach a budget agreement that will fully fund the government on time, without drama, and not subject our economy to the unnecessary risk of a second government shutdown initiated by Republicans in two years.

If the members of the pool are still on the phone, is there anybody else there that has a question? Otherwise we'll go to questions in the room.

All right, hearing nothing, let's go to questions in the room.

Gardiner.

Q Josh, can you -- the people who did the attack in Paris were all European citizens.

They all could have hopped a plane without a visa, come to the United States. There has been great concern in the United States about Syrian refugees, despite the fact that none of the attackers were actually Syrian refugees. Is that the reason for these changes? And also, can you tell me what a foreign fighter search team is that you mentioned in your visa waiver factsheet? So, first, can you talk about sort of the concerns that the attack revealed in the United States and its Visa Waiver Program, and then secondly, describe a little bit more about some of the efforts that you are doing now in your Visa Waiver Program to ensure that this sort of scenario of these jihadists coming from Europe to the United States to mount an attack can be prevented?

MR. EARNEST: Let me take a crack at this and then, Ben, you may have something you'd like to add.

Gardiner, as you point out, the first thing that is relevant is the significant screening to which potential refugees are subjected before they're able to enter the United States. The process of applying through the U.N. Refugee Program and eventually gaining admission to the United States on average can take upwards of two years to complete. So if you are an extremist hell-bent on carrying out an act of violence on American soil, it doesn't make a lot of sense that you're going to apply for a program that will take you two years before you can enter the United States. And in that intervening period, you're going to be subjected to extensive questioning by national security officials.

So that is why we have often pointed out the flaw, frankly, in the Republican prescription for improving our homeland security by making changes to the refugee program. What could benefit from some reforms is the Visa Waiver Program.

I will point out the Department of Homeland Security deserves some credit that they have, both in November of 2014 and in August of 2015, just a couple a months ago, instituted some measures on their own that made some changes to beef up screening of individuals who come to the United States from visa waiver countries. So there are some significant steps the Department of Homeland Security has already taken. There are some additional steps that they are proposing to take and that they're working to implement as of today. The first is to capture more information related to previous travel. And this would include people who have recently traveled to areas where we know there is significant risk of terrorism. So that's one thing -- to collect more information about an individual's travel history.

We know that the FBI is engaging in work with our Visa Waiver Program countries -- there are 38 of them -- to work through some best practices to see if there are opportunities to improve information-sharing between the United States and these countries with whom we have these visa waiver agreements. And if there are steps that we can take that will improve information-sharing, that would obviously be an important part of more carefully vetting individuals who enter the United States from visa waiver countries.

The thing that's important for people to understand about the Visa Waiver Program is that it is something that facilitates important international travel. There are about 20 million visitors to the United States that come from 38 different countries through the Visa Waiver Program, and it does facilitate the kind of travel that has a positive impact on our economy. What it also means is it means individuals are subjected to some scrutiny and to some background checks prior to boarding an airplane.

So there are some significant security gains derived from this program. The question is, are there some things that we can do to strengthen that screening prior to individuals boarding an airplane?

You want to add to that?

MR. RHODES: Just very quickly, Gardner, we've been focused on this issue of foreign fighters for the last -- certainly for the last year and a half in which we've been engaged in the counter-ISIL military campaign. A lot of that focused on the initial U.N. Security Council session that the President chaired on information-sharing among the members of the coalition, cooperation among our intelligence agencies, and with international law enforcement, so we're better able to track the flow of fighters into and out of places like Syria and Iraq. You've seen convictions in European countries and arrests and convictions in the United States related to individuals who had aspirations to act on behalf of ISIL.

However, we've always been concerned about the fact that there is a significant higher flow of foreign fighters into and out of Europe than the United States. We benefit in some respects from geography, and in some respects, frankly, from simply having a population that has not had the same desire to join the effort in Syria under ISIL. So we see a much more significant threat of foreign fighters coming into Europe than the numbers of foreign fighters coming into the United States.

Therefore, clearly, as ISIL has demonstrated a focus on external operations, as we've seen most tragically recently here in Paris, it's incumbent upon us that we're doing everything we can to ensure that the threat of foreign fighters or individuals who have been radicalized does not make its way to our homeland.

Now, one important way that we do that is through better information-sharing and intelligence-sharing with our European allies so that we're able to disrupt plots, break up cells. But another is making sure that we have the appropriate scrutiny in place so that an individual who might have traveled to join the fight in Syria and then come back to a country that is a participant in a Visa Waiver Program cannot seek to exploit that to make its way to the United States.

And so we want to ensure that we have tighter scrutiny in place, better information-sharing, and that even as we aim to stop the flow of fighters into and out of Syria, we also have additional layers of security to prevent individuals who have been to Syria and have been exposed to ISIL's leadership, or individuals who have been radicalized from making their way to the United States.

Q I have two totally different questions. The first one on climate change and the deal here. Ben, do you see the fact that this agreement, if one is reached in the next two weeks -- is not going to be treaty, it's not going to be legally binding -- as jeopardizing the bigger picture of what President Obama sees as important to his legacy in really crafting something that's going to work in helping to protect the environment? How do you do that if you have no legal enforcement or guarantee?

MR. RHODES: Well, absolutely not. And the fact of the matter is, we did not seek a legally binding treaty for a number of reasons, most importantly because we believe that the only effective way to combat the threat of climate change is to have a truly global effort in which countries like China and India and Brazil and Indonesia and others are doing their part, as well as the countries that were signatories to Kyoto -- some of our more traditional allies. And the fact of the matter is if we had set a certain legally binding treaty upon the commitments made by individual nations, I think we would have lost the capacity to have that truly global effort.

What we've been able to do over the course of the last six years since Copenhagen is broaden the scope of the countries that are participating to the fight against climate change so that you have here over 190 countries who are coming forward with targets, so that you have, again, a country like China that is pledging to dramatically change its own energy picture so it can contribute to the effort against climate change.

So the first point I'd make is that we've been able to build a much broader coalition of countries, all of whom need to do their part, and the only way this works is if the emerging economies who are more and more the source of emissions are at the table. And that would not have been the case had there been a Kyoto-like treaty envisioned here in Paris.

At the same time, we want to make sure that there is transparency so that we know that countries are standing behind their commitments. There is reporting requirements so that there's an ability to evaluate whether countries are following through. And again, some of those I think will have requirements attached to them. And that's one of the key issues that will be discussed over the next two weeks, because we want to make sure that there are ambitious targets and we want to make sure that the world can see that countries are following through on their commitments and can take a look at the data.

At the same time, what Paris does, if it works, is establish a framework for action that has as a beginning point, the targets that have been laid out here. We would like to see the ability for those targets to be reviewed on a periodic basis going forward -- because, as we've already seen, advances in technology and increased financing could open the door to more ambitious targets -- for instance, in five years and in 10 years -- so that if you have a process set up whereby everybody is at the table, everybody has skin in the game, everybody has committed to their targets, everybody is going to be transparent about how they're going to follow through so that we know that countries are standing behind those targets, and we have the ability to raise our ambition within the framework of Paris going forward -- that is what is going to allow us to deal with this global challenge.

It's also, of course, been very important to the developing countries, and important to us, that in order to make these goals achievable there needs to be mechanisms for financing of climate mitigation and adaptation to cleaner sources of energy. And that's where we've been working since Copenhagen to mobilize the \$100 billion in financing that needs to be in place by 2020.

We've made significant progress in pursuit of that goal, both through the Green Climate Fund, but also through substantial bilateral commitments, multilateral commitments, commitments from multilateral development banks, and, increasingly, the leveraging of private resources in pursuit of renewable energy solutions.

So all that is to say that this is the framework that we wanted to set up because it gets everybody at the table, gets everybody's commitments laid out, has transparency so that those countries can stand behind them, and has the ability to raise our ambitions going forward. And had we used the Kyoto model, I think we saw in Copenhagen where that ends, which is you would have lost the capacity to bring China, India and others into the mix.

Q But how do you tell other countries here that the next President, perhaps Republican one, won't walk away from this, since there's no legally binding tie here?

MR. RHODES: Look, clearly, these are national commitments. Again, we do believe that there should be a process by which, through transparency and reporting, there is some requirement on countries to stand behind those commitments. At the same time, clearly, the case we would make is to the American people, which is that it's going to be increasingly in the interest of whoever is President and whoever is in Congress to deal

with the threat of climate change. The effects are only going to get worse in the absence of action, and if we can bring the whole world together behind clear commitments and ambitious targets, we have even less of an interest in walking away from that.

Because I can tell you that if we get an agreement here with almost 200 countries, including China and India -- if the United States were to walk away from its own targets, we would lose that type of ambition from China and India and others who would say, well, the United States has walked out on the agreement, why should we follow through?

So if people want to come to the table and say the only way we're going to deal with these environmental problems, the only way we're going to deal with the threat of climate change -- which poses a risk to our national security, our economic security, and to some of our populations who are vulnerable -- if people want to say that the only way to deal with that is to have China and India do their part, and then we walk away from the agreement that China and India are a part of, we will have lost our global leadership. We will have lost our ability to make the case to the world that everybody needs to do their share if we're not willing to do it ourselves. And so I think that will create powerful incentives for whoever the next President is to follow through on what is going to be one of the defining challenges of our time.

MR. EARNEST: Let me add one other thing to that, Margaret, just briefly, which is that there also is an element of economic momentum to also factor in here; that what we're seeing a lot of these countries do is make some changes to their economy to be able to meet the goals that they have laid out. Once those changes have been made, the economy will be oriented to reinforce those incentives.

So this is also true to a certain extent inside the United States -- that there are a number of companies that have been formed and are making significant investments in things like wind, solar, energy efficiency; they're doing that because there are newly created incentives in place that make it economically profitable to do so. So to undo some of those policy proposals that had created this incentive in the first place is not going to be as politically popular as it once might have been because it's going to cause -- it's going to end up costing some people money and it's ultimately going to end up being bad for the economy.

That's an effect that we already see a little bit of inside the United States. That's going to be true in many other countries, too, as they begin to follow through on the commitments that they've made here in Paris.

Jon.

Q Josh, the President is here, obviously this is a huge priority for him. It's a big part of his second inaugural address, promising to address this issue. Assuming an agreement comes out of this summit, how does that fit in as a legacy achievement for the President?

Where do you kind of stack that? How big a deal is this? The President talked about each President tries to write their paragraph. Is this in the President's paragraph? Is this one of his -- classified as among his top achievements?

MR. EARNEST: I have a couple of thoughts. I'm sure Ben does here, too. I think the first thing that's worth pointing out -- and I think this is an important thing for us to keep in mind -- the only reason that we are here and in a place where we're talking about countries all around the world, nearly 200 of them, making significant commitments to reduce their carbon pollution is because of the leadership role the United States has played in mobilizing those commitments. That started with the commitment that the United States, that the President announced alongside President Xi in Beijing, in China, about a year ago. That agreement between the world's two largest emitters catalyzed the commitments that we're seeing from countries around the world. So I think that's the first thing.

I think the second thing that the President would also readily acknowledge is that even the most robust agreement that we envision right now coming to fruition in two weeks at the end of this process is not going to -- in the mind of the President, at least -- solve the problem of climate change. We recognize that Paris is a first step, but a critically important step, along the way to protecting the planet from the most harmful effects of climate change. The significance is, is that Paris is the most important step in that direct that the world has ever taken. And I think that's significant.

You want to add to that, Ben?

MR. RHODES: Yes. I mean, I'd just say, Jon, that this has been a priority of the President's from the very beginning. It got a lot of attention when he focused on the second inaugural, but I remember even in his first address to the U.N. General Assembly in 2009, when we laid out what our key international priorities would be, the threat of climate change was prominent on that list. And the reason why is because of the stakes involved.

What we're talking about is something that could fundamentally transform the planet we live in, in ways that pose enormous disruptions to our economy and enormous risks to our national security, and ultimately, could pose an irreversible risk to our life on this planet. And that requires action. That requires action that anticipates the effects of climate change and seeks, frankly, to catch up to a phenomenon that's been building for so many years.

So what I can tell you as somebody who's been with the President throughout his time in office is that this has always featured in his key bilateral engagements and his key engagements multilaterally. This has been on the agenda when he's met with the leaders of China and India and Europe and other developing countries in Africa and Latin America and Asia.

This has been on the agenda since Copenhagen when we set forward a framework towards being able to realize the promise of what we're pursuing here in Paris. This has been something that he's put a lot of muscle behind precisely because he knew that, absent American leadership, this was not going to get done -- because this requires nations doing hard things. Every country that is making commitments here in some ways is taking a hard step. Whether that's a step of contributing to climate finance, whether that's taking

the step of transitioning their economy to clean energy -- everybody has to be a part of the solution. And only American leadership can mobilize that breadth of collective action from this many countries.

In terms of how it fits in, obviously people will draw their own judgments. I would say this is the type of collective action that we want to see from the international community in the 21st century; that you've heard the President talk about the fact that many of the institutions and structures that were set up in the 20th century were meant to deal with 20th century threats, and we need to have the ability to deal as a world community with 21st century challenges, as well. That includes that threat of terrorism. That includes the enormous challenge of climate change. So this is the type of collective action that we'd like to apply to this challenge, and, frankly, to other global challenges going forward.

And given the stakes of climate change, clearly this has been near the top of his agenda throughout his presidency. And I think he will want Paris to be seen as the moment when the world came together and got serious about dealing with climate change, got serious about meaningful action, and, frankly, put real skin in the game to show their people that they're not going to stand idly by where the planet irreversibly changes before our eyes.

Q And just a quick follow-up. How does he prioritize this, or how does he see this in comparison with the challenge of fighting terrorism? Is it as great a challenge, as important a priority as the fight against terrorism? Or maybe greater because of ultimately the stakes at play? Where does he see it?

MR. RHODES: Well, they're both critically important. And we have to do both at the same time. And they pose different threats.

Obviously, there is an immediate threat from terrorism that has to be dealt with to protect the American people, to protect our allies and partners, and to root out the cancer of terrorist networks that we see not just in Iraq and Syria, but in different parts of the world.

I think over the long term, clearly we see the potential for climate change to pose severe risks to the entire world. And so it's a threat that has to be --

Q -- so a greater threat long term?

MR. RHODES: I'm not going to rank them because they're different, and you have to do - - again, you have to do several things at once.

Look, we have a threat of terrorism. We're dealing with it by going after ISIL in Iraq and Syria. We have a threat from nuclear proliferation, which is why we committed significant effort to getting the Iran deal in place so you wouldn't have the further spread of nuclear weapons. And you have the threat from climate change that, again, poses a national security challenge if you're talking about the mass displacements of people, the erosion of significant parts of territory, the instability that would come within countries because of the disruptions of climate change, and, frankly, the effects of extreme weather

events in the United States where we've seen NOAA estimate that there were eight events over the last year that cost a billion dollars in terms of extreme weather events. So these are all threats that need to be dealt with.

Again, I think what is distinct about climate change is the magnitude of threat over the long term and its impact on the entire world, which is why it takes a truly global response.

MR. EARNEST: Jim.

Q Josh or Ben, just to follow up on Jon's question, what about -- the President made this argument that this is a way to show the people in ISIS that the world can still come together to tackle these kinds of challenges. What about the argument that some Republicans are making back in Washington that ISIS doesn't really care about showing the world that you can do something about climate change?

MR. RHODES: So I'll start, and Josh may want to talk about the politics. But it is very clear what the objective of terrorist organizations like ISIL is. They want to kill as many people as they can. They also want to disrupt us from living our lives and doing our business.

If the entire world had planned to come to Paris, and you have leaders from over 190 countries who had planned to come here to Paris, and we had called that off because of something that terrorists did, clearly that would be demonstrating that ISIL can disrupt the activities of the entire world. That would send a terrible message. Imagine the conversation we would be having if over 190 countries had said, we won't come to Paris in the wake of this attack.

So, absolutely, it sends a message that we're going to continue doing the important work on behalf of our people. Part of that work is going after ISIL. And so the President began his time here in Paris by having a very moving experience at the site of one of the most horrific parts of that attack. He is having conversations on the sidelines here in Paris with some of our key partners and with someone like President Putin, who obviously we want to play a more constructive role in the counter-ISIL campaign.

At the same time, I think it's very important that we demonstrate that we're able to do more than one thing at once. We're able to take the fight to ISIL. We're able to confront the threat of climate change. We're able to do the people's business at home, as well.

And again, I think if you turn the argument inside-out, I think the question is, how is it not a victory for terrorists if the entire world cancels its plans to come to Paris and to deal with a severe threat of climate change because of the recent terrorist attack? And just as there will be discussions here about continuing to intensify the counter-ISIL campaign, I think the world leaders are demonstrating -- and you hear each of them say that they wanted to be here in part to show solidarity with the people of Paris.

Q I just wanted to follow up because you mentioned Putin -- and I know everybody is doing two questions and making it longer -- but it sounds like when you just said we want Putin to play a more constructive role, it sounds like you're still at odds over any kind of

alliance with Russia going after ISIS, still at odds at all these -- on all these issues.

Because of the shoot-down of the Russian warplane, is it one of those things where you had one step forward -- perhaps at the G20 in Turkey -- but then two steps back? Can you tell us where things stand right now?

MR. RHODES: Well, I think that what you do see is there has been progress over the last several weeks in the political process in Vienna. You have a road map and a timeline established for a transition. We're pursuing an effort to identify opposition who can participate in that process. We're pursuing an effort to achieve ceasefires within Syria that can enable the political process to go forward and enable a focus on ISIL. So that has been an ongoing process where we have seen, I think, progress.

At the same time -- and, frankly, it benefits from the President being able to have the ability to reinforce these points with President Putin, as well as with many other countries. At the same time what is not going to change is what we believe is necessary for there to be a political resolution. It is simply a fact, in our view, that there's no scenario in which Bashar al-Assad is able to regain control over his country. And, in fact, we've seen over the last several weeks that even as there has been intensified strikes on opposition elements, that you don't see significant progress into that opposition-held territory; that only a political process can bring about the lasting resolution we need.

I think the shoot-down points to the risks that are inherent in an ongoing conflict in Syria. It is in everybody's interest to bring about an end to this civil war and to have a shared focus on ISIL. I think that has become acutely clear in the last several months. And so we believe that the urgency should be on finding common ground behind that political solution so as to avoid any potential escalation going forward.

Isaac.

Q Given all the steps that are being taken on ISIL and what seems like it will be more of a conflict than we expected a couple weeks ago, does the President worry at all that this is going to take the foreign policy agenda that he had planned for his final year in office?

MR. RHODES: No, I mean, look, counterterrorism has been a focus throughout his presidency. The effort against al Qaeda and its affiliates has been a regular focus of the President's. ISIL has been a regular focus of the President's. And, absolutely, he's going to spend his time in office doing everything he can to both get the type of political framework in place that can resolve the situation in Syria but also have a relentless pressure that aims to degrade ISIL, deny it safe haven, and ultimately, again, put ISIL on the path towards destruction as we've been doing against al Qaeda.

Even as we're doing that, I think you've seen over the course of this year that we have a multifaceted agenda, because America has a lot of interests in the world. So we continue to pursue global economic growth through the G20. We've stopped the spread of nuclear weapons to the Middle East through the Iran deal. We've put in place a trade agreement with 40 percent of the global economy through the TPP that will be hugely beneficial to

our economy and to our strategic position in the Asia Pacific. And we're here also pursuing an ambitious climate agreement that can bring the world together to deal with this urgent challenge.

So, clearly, ISIL is front and center; terrorism is always front and center because of the threat it poses to American lives. But, clearly, America is able to lead the world on many issues at once because we have many interests in the world.

Q A possible intensification of conflict in Syria hasn't become a bigger concern or issue within the White House or the President?

MR. RHODES: I mean, again, this has been a significant area of focus for the last year and a half, but I do think that we believe that there can continue to be intensification of our efforts. We've taken I think a significant number of airstrikes throughout this campaign, but certainly over the course of the last several weeks, as we've seen these attacks take place, we -- the President has made the decision to insert Special Forces into Syria who will better allow us to facilitate support to the opposition fighting ISIL on the ground.

We're working with other partners to increase their contributions. France has accelerated its airstrikes. We would very much support the United Kingdom playing a more active role inside of Syria. That would send a message of shared resolve and certainly increase the coalition's capability to deal with the threat to Europe, the United States, and the entire world.

So, yes, I mean, there is obviously a very heightened sense of urgency and a significant focus on this in the White House. But again, the threat of terrorism has been a significant issue throughout our time in office. We had a relentless campaign against al Qaeda throughout our time in office that made significant headway in removing al Qaeda leadership. And I think we have the ability as a country to deal with the threat of terrorism and to deal with the broad agenda that would benefit the American people.

Q Sorry, last one. You laid out the theory that the collective action that the President has gotten together in Paris is similar to what he wants to have happen on ISIL and other issues. Do you feel like it's working already, the way that you want it to, in the ISIL -- what you need to do on ISIL, what the President wants to do on ISIL?

MR. RHODES: I think we certainly are pleased with the cooperation that we have in place, which has facilitated greater support to forces on the ground in both Iraq and Syria, facilitated greater intelligence-sharing, airstrikes against ISIL targets, disruption of ISIL plots. But, yes, we want countries to continue to step up to the plate and do more, which is why we'd welcome additional contributions to strike against ISIL targets. We'd welcome additional contributions to support forces that are fighting on the ground, including in Iraq, I think, where we have a good mechanism in place to support the Iraqi security forces and Kurds in the north who have made gains.

Also, very important is the enhanced intelligence cooperation that we're talking about. Ultimately, that is important to protecting the American people, and going to be critical along with our offensive efforts against ISIL.

So you've seen additional contributions from France in recent days, from Germany in recent days. Again, the United Kingdom is looking at making additional contributions.

But we certainly, for instance, will talk tomorrow with Turkey about our continued belief that more can be done to ensure that we're sealing that border.

So this is an ongoing process. And we certainly would like to see additional contributions, even as I think we're very pleased with the fact that we have 65 members of this coalition as we speak.

Q Josh, you mentioned four measures that you say Congress is overdue in taking in terms of the anti-terror effort. Are you saying that they bear some responsibility for setbacks or slow progress in the anti-ISIL campaign? And to ask Jon's question another way, does the President want to be the President who saved the planet?

MR. EARNEST: I think every President wants to have that moniker. Let me start with your first question, though.

The fact -- what we've seen from Congress is a lot of political posturing but not a lot of tangible progress in advancing our national security interests. And that's a problem. There are some specific things that Congress can do that would make the country safer, and we're hopeful that over the course of the next three weeks, they will at least consider taking action on those four items. There's certainly no good reason why they can't get that done in the next three weeks, particularly when you consider something like passing a law that would prevent somebody who's on the no-fly list from being able to purchase a firearm. I think it's pretty obvious how that would make the country safer. I think it is pretty obviously a step that we can take that would protect our communities without undermining the basic constitutional rights of law-abiding Americans. So why doesn't Congress take that action? I haven't heard a good explanation.

We do know that there's a lot of agitating from Congress, expressing concerns about what more can and should be done to protect our national security. We know that the administration, as I laid out at the beginning, has taken a number of steps even over the weekend to strengthen our homeland security. We know that there are 3,000 American servicemen and women serving in Iraq right now, implementing our strategy to degrade and ultimately destroy ISIL. They're doing their jobs. It's time for Congress to do theirs.

On your second question, look, as I acknowledged in my answer to Jon, even if we get the best possible outcome from these negotiations here in Paris, our work to cut carbon pollution and fight climate change will need to continue. And one of the things that we envision, as Ben noted, is a Paris agreement that sets a regular schedule whereby countries around the world review the commitments that they have made in the context of these negotiations to determine what additional steps can be taken.

And we do feel confident that innovation will open up new opportunities for cutting carbon pollution. We also believe that the economic momentum that is built up by instituting some of these changes and making some of these commitments will only serve as a greater incentive for countries to make more significant commitments moving forward.

So, in talking to the President tomorrow at a news conference that he'll do before we depart, maybe you'll have an opportunity to get a greater sense from him about how he sees how these actions are likely to be judged by history.

Want to add to that?

MR. RHODES: Just on the first question, just two quick things. Adam Szubin's responsibility is to go around the world and try to get cooperation from other countries to enforce sanctions and to take action to disrupt ISIL financing -- to take oil off the market or to go at front companies or banks that are transferring funds. Clearly, he is in a stronger position to do that if the countries he is dealing with know that he is confirmed by the United States Senate and is secure in that position.

We've been talking a lot about the President and the administration seeking additional contributions to the counter-ISIL campaign. Clearly, that would be easier to do if the world saw that the United States Congress had an authorization to use military force that showed that we were in this for the long haul and we were committed to this as a country, given that we're asking countries to, again, in some cases, do difficult things. So I think these items have very real consequences.

MR. EARNEST: Kelly.

Q Forgive me -- two questions. One, on the visa waiver, the countries that might be safe havens (inaudible) some would have greater scrutiny, can you give us an idea of which countries you're referring to? Obviously Syria, Iraq I'd imagine. Could it include Belgium with the recent events, or other countries -- could you give us a sense if someone is a traveler with that stamped on their passport, what should they expect?

MR. EARNEST: So this is actually -- Kelly, this is actually a determination that DHS will make. What they envision with this proposal are countries like Iraq and Syria -- that if you have a recent travel history to those countries, that that should subject the potential traveler to even greater scrutiny.

Q So Belgium, for example, would not then be under that, given recent events?

MR. EARNEST: That's not what's envisioned in this scenario, but again, that's a determination that would be made by DHS.

Q On a lighter note, there were some chimes of some sort during the President's remarks today that were curious to some people about whether he was getting the global sign for hurry up, Mr. President. Did he go over his allotted time? Was he aware of that? Was there any issue with the chimes that then somehow ceased before he concluded?

MR. RHODES: Well, I was going to say, when you have leaders of 193 countries, it's imperative that people speak their minds but do so in a timely fashion. So I think every leader has those requirements. I think, clearly, there is always a unique interest in what the President of the United States has to say about an issue of global importance. And frankly, the interactions he had with leaders after -- I think people were paying careful attention to the messages he was sending about the type of agreement we're trying to reach.

MR. EARNEST: Perhaps there might be some support in this room for instituting chimes in here. We'll take a couple more and then we'll let you guys go.

Mike.

Q Thanks, Josh. Hillary Clinton recently described a scene in Copenhagen in 2009 where, I think she put it, that she and the President were hunting the Chinese, trying to get a stronger deal there. You obviously have a very different scene today and it seems like an intentional move, and based on some of your comments, it seems like you're trying to argue that the President deserves a great deal of credit for helping bring China from the point it was there to here. Is that overstating it a bit, given that China has also had to face some of its own domestic political and economic pressures? And then I wonder if, more broadly beyond the U.S.-Chinese cooperation, if there's any other takeaways from Copenhagen that you see being applied here that have been useful towards producing a better result.

MR. RHODES: No, absolutely. So I was there in Copenhagen and that was a mess. And literally you had a situation where President Obama and Secretary Clinton essentially had to find and crash a meeting that was taking place among China, India, Brazil, South Africa. And the context there was that those countries were unsure about making robust commitments, given the fact that you had a legacy framework from Kyoto that did not ask them to do much at all and put the burden more on the advanced economies.

Now, I think part of this is, as you rightly point out, a symptom of the degree of development and economic growth and growth in emissions that you've seen since Kyoto. China has significant interests of its own in pursuing an ambitious effort to reduce emissions and to combat climate change, as does India, as do all those other countries around the table.

What we did in Copenhagen is, in the absence of being able to achieve a Kyoto follow-on agreement because there was such a divergence between I think what expectations were among some, for instance, European countries and what expectations were among the emerging economies, we had to construct a framework in which everybody could play a role. And that began with simply the principle that everybody is going to have to be at the table, everybody is going to have to do their part.

That led into a process pursuing these emission-reduction targets, but it was also very important to the developing world that there be finance for adaptation and mitigation. And you had, coming out of Copenhagen, the aspirational commitment to mobilizing

\$100 billion by 2020, but you didn't have any concrete way of demonstrating that that finance was going to be there. We now have that. And the OECD recently determined that we're well on our way towards reaching that objective.

So what we've done since Copenhagen is fill in the blanks of what a framework looks like - fill in the blanks in terms of individual country commitments, in terms of financing, and doing some hard work on thinking through how you could have transparency and reporting requirements.

And part of our effort in our diplomacy has been making a case to countries that it's in their self-interest. It's in China's self-interest to be aggressive in combatting the threat of climate change, given the threat it's going to pose to them. It's in India's self-interest. It's in the interest of all the countries here around the table.

So in many ways, the framework that we're seeking to achieve here in Paris, the outlines of that were drawn out of Copenhagen, where there was this recognition that we needed to start from a new premise, which is everybody has to be a part of the solution here. We have to figure out a way to bridge the divide between the more advanced economies in the developing world and we have to figure out how each country can play its own role. And that's been an exhaustive process over the last several years, for those of you who follow it. And I think we see, over the course of last year, since the U.S.-China joint announcement in Beijing, the fruits of that work.

Q One last question on Russia. French officials said today that they feel like Russia is mainly targeting the Islamic State at this point. And I know you've said there's been progress, but is that your assessment, too, that the Islamic State is now Russia's target?

MR. RHODES: No. We do see some intensification of Russian efforts against ISIL, so it is the case that in the last several weeks we've seen efforts by Russia to target ISIL, whereas there were very little at all before that.

However, we also continue to see Russian operations that target other elements of the opposition. So it's a mixed picture. Yes, there has been some focus on ISIL. At the same time, we continue to believe that there's too much military activity taking place against other elements of the opposition that have to be a part of the political resolution that we're pursuing in Vienna and that don't pose the threat to the people of the United States, Russia, or the world that ISIL does.

Q I just wanted to ask you if you can draw a metaphor for how there's the tie between the war on terror and climate change. For people who aren't in the Beltway, they're not surrounded by this, can you help them make sense of how they both pose risks, and how they're seen, collectively, by the President? And, Josh, if you could give me just a tiny bit more on the readout of the meeting with Putin today. Do you get the sense that there is any sort of cooperation building? Is there any momentum that you can report, especially given what's happen to the Russian people over the last month or so?

MR. RHODES: So on your second question, I think it remains to be seen. We need there to be follow-through. I do think that clearly the events of the last several weeks have put into stark terms the threat posed by ISIL. And Russia itself obviously has been a part of that with the tragic attack on an airliner filled with Russian citizens. So I think there's a global consensus about the urgency of going after ISIL. At the same time, I think that there's an acute understanding that there needs to be this political process in Vienna. That's where we've seen some modest progress in terms of setting a timeline and a clear road map for a transition in Syria that can bring the fighting to an end and lead to a new government.

However, there's very important roadblocks remaining, including the fact that it has to become clear that Assad is not going to be the leader of that government as a part of that transition process. He'll have to leave power. So if we can see continued progress in those Vienna discussions and a continued -- and increased Russian focus on ISIL, that will be the metric by which we judge whether or not they're moving in a new direction going forward.

On your first question, I'd just repeat a bit of what I said to Jon in the sense that these are different threats. The threat of terrorism obviously poses a very real and very immediate danger to the American people and to the people who live here in Paris, but also people around the world, including the many thousands of innocent people who have been targeted by ISIL in Iraq and Syria. So there is a very clear threat that needs to be dealt with in terms of removing terrorists from the battlefield, degrading and ultimately destroying ISIL as a terrorist organization, and ensuring that we have the homeland defenses in place to disrupt and prevent any attacks on our homeland and hopefully to work with allies and partners to prevent attacks on them. That is a very immediate threat that we're dealing with.

The danger of climate change we already see manifested in some respects -- in the fact that consistently we've hit the warmest year on record and you're seeing extreme weather events that can be very disruptive, both in the United States and around the world. But ultimately, this is a threat that is only going to build as time moves forward. And it has the potential to erode coastlines, to make certain places unlivable, to breed instability in other countries as there are mass disruptions in their countries and their economies increasing flows of migrants.

So I think if you look at from a national security perspective, the leaders who have looked at the danger of climate change, they see even the instability we're faced today significantly magnified by the effects of climate change over time given the disruptions that extreme weather will have on certain countries, given, again, the lives that will be put at stake and the economic disruptions that will take place with the continued effects of climate change.

And frankly, those places that are least equipped to deal with that threat are places that are already unstable. So if you take the instability that we see in parts of Africa and the Middle East that can be magnified by the effects of climate change and extreme drought and extreme disruption.

So they're very different threats, but they're both very serious. And we have to deal with both them. And I think the one common thread is the fact that we need the world with us in this effort. We will be much more effective in destroying ISIL the broader our coalition and the more coordinated our response, just as we will be more effective in combating the threat of climate change if it's not -- this is certainly not an American burden alone. For it to work, we need China, India, and the rest of the world working with us.

MR. EARNEST: Last question to this gentleman in the back.

Q Thanks. One on ISIL and one on climate change. Even after Paris, the President has not ramped up any efforts against ISIL in a direct way. So has the President made a calculation that direct engagement with ISIL is an unwinnable war? Is that why he has not done anything direct? And what would it take to do so? And also at what point would the priority to defeat ISIL surpass the priority or the need to get rid of Bashar al-Assad?

And on the question of climate change, in aligning the U.S. with India and China, or rather comparing the U.S. with India and China, is the President essentially sort of allowing the U.S. to cheat? Because the U.S. per capita obviously is a much larger polluter than India or China. And further, there's not much that the President is able to pass through Congress, so what really can he do to -- in terms of climate change, what really can he do to enforce the commitments made here?

MR. RHODES: So on ISIL, look, we have taken direct action. And I certainly think the people and materiel on the other end of our thousands of airstrikes are certainly aware of the fact that the U.S. is actively targeting ISIL in both Syria and Iraq.

I think you have seen an intensified focus in recent weeks to do everything that we can to get at the ISIL safe haven. I think you've seen significant disruptions in the oil infrastructure that they depend upon to finance their operations. And you do see intensified efforts from the United States in the form of both additional support in terms of equipment and training to Syrian forces fighting against ISIL on the ground and to Iraqi forces through the insertion that the President authorized of Special Forces who can help facilitate the operations of those forces that are fighting on the ground. So the United States is focused on doing what we -- everything that we can to put more pressure on ISIL to shrink its safe havens, to take out its leaders, to mobilize additional commitments from the international community.

What we do not believe will be effective is the United States believing that the insertion of our ground forces can impose stability in a part of the world where I think we've learned we need local forces to step forward and do their part. So what we're doing is working in partnership with them to go after ISIL, to root out its safe havens, and ultimately to be the mechanism by which there can be long-term stability and more effective governance in parts of the world where state control has completely broken down.

And that leads to the Assad question. Opposing Assad's rule and countering ISIL are not at all goals that are in competition with one another. On the contrary, Bashar al-Assad's presence is part of the dynamic that gave ISIL the space to establish a safe haven in Syria.

It was after he started bombing his own people and after he lost complete control over his country that you had al Qaeda in Iraq, that organization become increasingly prominent in eastern Syria and more ultimately into ISIL.

And so the fact of the matter is, so long as Bashar al-Assad is in power there is not going to be the capacity to reestablish stability in Syria because the vast majority of his people are rejecting his rule. And in the absence of some type of political settlement, there is going to be a continued civil war. And civil war provides the type of openings that extremists prey upon. Those are the places they go to in order to have training camps, in order to attract recruits, in order to stoke grievances. And that is why a critical part of our effort to destroy ISIL has to be resolving the political questions inside of Syria.

On the climate change issue, first of all, I think the President has been very clear that the United States and other advanced economies do have a unique set of responsibilities, which is why, again, we've pursued a common but differentiated approach whereby everybody is making commitments. But clearly the nature of our commitments and the nature of Japan's commitments and the nature of certain European commitments are going to be different than less-developed economies. So he was very clear about that in his remarks.

At the same time, however, China is the world's largest emitter so you're not going to be able to address the challenge of climate change without China, or without India, or without other nations in Asia and Africa and Latin America. It wouldn't make -- it just simply wouldn't make a difference if those countries weren't a part of the solution.

And, again, it's profoundly in their own interest to be a part of the solution. I think that the Chinese have stepped forward and made their commitment in part because they themselves recognize that they face significant environmental challenges, that this is a part of the world that they need to build and that this is an issue where China can exercise responsible global leadership, which is something that, again, we've encouraged.

So we do accept the principle that the precise nature of the commitments that countries are making is going to differ, but everybody does have to make commitments, and those commitments have to have real ambition, and there has to be a process by which people can stand by those commitments in a transparent fashion.

So this is -- obviously the U.S., China, and India are critical because of our status as three of the world's largest emitters. So is Europe. So is Brazil. So is Indonesia. So is South Africa. So are countries around the world. And that's why what we're pursuing here is a truly global effort.

And to the question of what the President would like to do, as Josh said, you don't solve the problem of climate change in any one meeting, but if this can be the moment where the world comes together behind a global framework that can put in place a plan of action, ambitious targets, and a process by which we are able to review progress and, in some cases, elevate our ambition and that we have mechanisms to finance those efforts, this can be a critical turning point.

On the Congress piece, you may want --

Q If I may, Ben, did I just hear you say that, indeed, a ground war is unwinnable?

MR. RHODES: We do not believe that you can impose a solution -- a military solution in Syria, or Iraq for that matter, through the invasion and occupation by foreign forces of Syria and Iraq. That has been a very consistent position.

We can, again, use our unique capabilities to go after ISIL. There are components of U.S. forces on the ground as a part of that campaign. We have thousands of troops who are doing training, advising and equipping inside of Iraq. We have Special Forces contingents that the President has authorized for Syria. But, absolutely, we do not believe that the way that these broken places are going to be put together is simply through a foreign occupation from U.S. or other ground forces.

The fact of the matter is, this is not simply a matter of extraordinary risk that that would do to our men and women in uniform who would be in harm's way. It's, frankly, learning the lessons of what we've seen in the Middle East over more than the last decade, which is ultimately you need forces on the ground who will step up to provide security, and you need political accommodations in these countries so that there can be a framework for stability.

Again, even as we had 150,000 troops in Iraq, you continued to see terrorism. You continued to see insurgency. We could reduce the levels of violence, but we couldn't eliminate it. Only the Iraqis, through a combination of pursuing political accommodations and taking ownership of their own security over the long term can ensure that there is lasting security and elimination of the terrorist threat.

MR. EARNEST: And just on the Congress question, we're well aware of the fact that there is an abiding hostility in the Republican conference to facts and science and evidence. But that has not prevented the administration from moving forward, using the President's executive authority to do things like double fuel efficiency standards on automobiles and increase fuel efficiency standards on large trucks inside the United States. We've also moved forward to implement the Clean Power Plan that the President has described -- all of which will have an impact in reducing carbon pollution in the United States.

I will point out that there actually is one important step that we were able to advance with Congress that was early on in the administration. The President worked with Congress to pass the Recovery Act that included in it the most significant investment in clean energy in American history. And that investment in renewable energy and in clean energy has significantly benefited what is a growing industry in the United States.

And in the years ahead, particularly as we see the world come together to renew their own commitment to a low-carbon economy in the future, that's only going to open up greater economic opportunity for American businesses that are succeeding today in doing things like manufacturing solar panels or manufacturing parts for wind turbines, or advancing technology when it comes to energy efficiency.

Agreements like the one that we're hoping to reach here in Paris will only expand economic opportunity for American businesses that are already doing important work and making money because of their business model.

So, thank you, everybody, for enduring with us tonight and have a good evening. No ding-ding-ding. Thank goodness.

END

8:35 P.M. CET