

Press Briefing by Press Secretary Jay Carney, 6/11/2013

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James S. Brady Press Briefing Room

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MR. CARNEY: Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. Thanks for being here. I have no announcements to make, so we'll go straight to your questions.

Julie.

Q Thank you. I wanted to see if you had anything to tell us today on the location of Edward Snowden. More generally, if he's in Hong Kong or some other country that has an extradition treaty with the United States, is it the White House's expectation that that country would send him back to the U.S.?

MR. CARNEY: As was the case yesterday, I am not going to discuss the subject of a recently opened investigation. So the whereabouts of this individual, his status, any details about the investigation I would refer to -- questions about those matters I would refer to the Department of Justice and the FBI.

Q On the broader question, though, if he is in a country, or if someone were to be in a country that had an extradition treaty with the United States, would it be the White House's expectation that that country would --

MR. CARNEY: Again, I think that goes to the case itself, and we're going to wait for the investigation to proceed before we weigh in with that kind of assessment.

Q I'll try this one then. Was the President aware that this was an individual that the U.S. was looking at, or his whereabouts, when he met with President Xi during the China summit over the weekend?

MR. CARNEY: I believe the answer to that is no.

Q So this didn't come up as part of those discussions?

MR. CARNEY: Not that I'm aware of.

Q Thank you. And then on a separate topic, can you explain a little bit of the administration's thinking on the decision to stop pushing for changes on the morning-after pill availability?

MR. CARNEY: Julie, if I could just say on the last one, I think I mentioned yesterday, the President was made aware of the revelations about the individual taking responsibility for these leaks by senior staff aboard Air Force One after departing California.

On the other question, on Plan B, could you ask me again and I'll --

Q I just wanted to know what the thinking behind the decision last night was.

MR. CARNEY: Well, twofold. You know what the President's personal views are. He expressed them here in this room. And he supported the decision by Secretary Sebelius with regards to the use of this medication by young girls, ages 10 and 11, and the lack of sufficient data, in his view. And so he supported Secretary Sebelius's decision, having not played a role in the making of the decision.

We have been through a legal process and the court has ruled against the administration - - an appeals court -- as you know, and that ruling means that -- or meant that Plan B would be immediately available to anyone of any age. And it was the decision given that court ruling to proceed with making the simpler version of Plan B available, because at the very least that addresses some of the concerns about the ability of younger girls to use that medication.

So the ruling came in against; the administration immediately made a form of Plan B available, and it was a decision that the President supports to proceed to making sure that the FDA approved the simpler version of Plan B.

Q What steps is the administration taking to ensure with defense contractors who work on intelligence issues that their employees -- that they have adequate safeguards against rogue insiders?

MR. CARNEY: Well, there are a couple of pieces to that question, some of which have been answered by the DNI, the Director of National Intelligence. So there are several. First of all, there's the damage assessment that's ongoing. Secondly, it is important to note that when it comes to contractors, they swear an oath to protect classified secrets just as government workers do. And that is important to remember.

In terms of procedures that are in place, I think I would refer you to the various agencies that have contractors that deal with classified information -- Department of Defense, NSA, CIA and the like -- in terms of the procedures that are in place or any procedures that they may be engaged in now in the wake of these leaks. But again, I think it's important to note that individuals who take an oath to protect classified information are bound by it, whether they are government employees or contracted employees.

Q So is there anything new that the administration is doing, then, in terms of seeking extra assurances from contractors in the wake of what's happened?

MR. CARNEY: Again, I think I would refer you to the agencies that employ contractors who have access to, once they have gone through all the rigorous background checks and other procedures to give them the security clearances that they have, and that they take the oath that they do, for any post-revelation measures they may be taking.

Q And if I could ask you about President Putin today -- he said he has no doubts about Iran's nuclear program. What do you make of those comments? What does the administration make of those comments and the importance of them, given Russia's place in the peace discussions and Iran's nuclear program?

MR. CARNEY: About Iran's -- I'm sorry, I haven't seen those comments so maybe you can characterize them for me further. No doubts in that Iran's pursuit is for non-peaceful means, military means?

Q Yes.

MR. CARNEY: Well, that's certainly our view and it's been our view that Iran needs to abide by its international obligations.

Q Sorry, no doubts that Iran is pursuing this for nefarious intentions. No doubts in terms of -- he said he has no doubts that Iran is pursuing a nuclear program for peaceful means.

MR. CARNEY: Oh, okay, so that's the opposite of what I thought you were saying. Our views haven't changed. I'm not aware of the comments by the Russian President that you just relayed to me, but I would say that Iran has failed to live up to its obligations under international law, to prove that its pursuit of nuclear technology is for peaceful means. There is ample evidence to the contrary.

And we are engaged in a process with our allies to try to bring about a change in behavior by the regime in Tehran. And as part of that process, we have instituted the most stringent and broad sanctions regime in the history of the world. And that is both unilaterally and with our allies, and through the United Nations and through different means.

We have said that there remains time for Iran to choose a path of engaging with the international community and abandoning its nuclear weapons ambitions, but that that time is not unlimited. And we obviously monitor the situation very closely with our allies.

Dan.

Q Thank you, Jay. Does the President believe that keeping America safe is more important than keeping the information of Americans secret?

MR. CARNEY: As you heard the President say on Friday, he believes that we must strike a balance between our security interests and our desire for privacy. He made clear that you can not have 100 percent security and 100 percent privacy, and thus we need to find

that balance. He believes as Commander-in-Chief, that the oversight structures that are in place to ensure that there is the proper review of the kinds of programs that we have in place, authorized by Congress through the Patriot Act, and FISA do strike that balance.

He also said that he understands and believe it is entirely legitimate that some may disagree. Some may believe that that balance ought to be shifted in one direction or the other from where it currently is, and he welcomes the debate about that.

He mentioned this very explicitly in his speech to the National Defense University several weeks ago on the broader topics of our counterterrorism programs, but he spoke specifically about surveillance and the balance that we need to strike between security and privacy, between security and inconvenience. And that is a worthy discussion to have in public and he welcomes that debate, because it's an important debate.

And I think it's important to note that we have had this debate every time the Patriot Act has come up for passage and reauthorization. And it has been a spirited debate with strongly held opinions expressed by people who are opposed to the structures that are in place that have been authorized by bipartisan majorities in Congress, that are overseen by the courts, as well as internally by the executive branch. So that's important and it's healthy and we should continue to have that debate.

Q But isn't it true, though, that security at times will have to take a backseat to -- or rather privacy will have to take a backseat to security?

MR. CARNEY: I think I've answered the question that we have to find a balance between those two and that we cannot have, if we hope to successfully protect ourselves, a hundred percent privacy; that there has to be some modest concession to the need for information as we pursue terrorists who mean to do harm to the country and to take the lives of Americans; but that we need to make sure that the programs we have in place are properly overseen, that they are legal, that they are authorized by Congress and they are authorized by the courts. And that is the case here and has been the case with the discussion that we've had in the wake of these revelations.

But again, I just want to emphasize that the fact that these systems are in place and the oversight exists and it is significant does not mean that the conversation has ended, in the President's view. It means that we need to continue to debate this. And as I said yesterday, this goes to sort of broader issues about our nation and the world, in terms of the nature of electronic communications and broader issues of privacy.

So this is an important debate for us as a nation. It's important, in the President's view, that we have the kinds of debates that we've had in Congress over the Patriot Act and its reauthorization, the improvements to the Patriot Act that ensure that there was oversight that had not existed prior to 2006 I believe, and then the measures that have been taken to ensure that there's judicial and executive branch and congressional oversight since.

So the President certainly does not welcome the way that this debate has earned greater attention the last week. The leak of classified information about sensitive programs that are important in our fight against terrorists who would do harm to Americans is a

problem and it is a great concern. But the debate itself is legitimate and should be engaged.

Q And about the congressional picnic that has been postponed -- what was behind that? Did sequester play into that decision at all?

MR. CARNEY: No, this was a -- I think had to do with the President's schedule and the fact that he is, as you know, taking several overseas trips in June, and that necessitated trying to postpone this.

Q The top Republican on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Senator Corker of Tennessee, is urging the President to arm Syrian rebels at the earliest possible time. What is your response? And is Senator Corker correct when he says the President is facing a critical policy decision on Syria this week?

MR. CARNEY: The President has been evaluating his policy options on Syria repeatedly for some time. There are a number of issues that we've discussed here that have to do with the use, potentially, of chemical weapons by the Assad regime and the need to build on the evidence that we have already accumulated, that that in fact has taken place.

Then there is the issue of how best to achieve our policy goal, which is a negotiated political settlement to an authority in Syria that can provide security and stability; that can protect the rights of all Syrians; and that can secure unconventional and advanced conventional weapons; that can counter terrorist activity; and that can keep the state and its institutions preserved to the extent possible. So that's the policy goal that we have as a nation, a policy goal we have with our allies and partners on this issue, and then we evaluate the options available to us in a very challenging situation based on whether or not they will bring us closer or inadvertently move us further away from achievement of that policy goal.

The President is, as you know and as he has said, reassessing those options. One of the options that he has not taken off the table and that we continue to assess is the potential of providing arms to the opposition. We already have provided an enormous amount of assistance to both the Syrian people, through humanitarian assistance, as well as to the opposition. But we evaluate every other option. The one exception to that, although all options remain on the table, is the President has made clear that he does not foresee a circumstance where we would have American boots on the ground in Syria.

Q And what about the timing? What about this week? Is there a policy decision we should be expecting?

MR. CARNEY: I don't have any policy announcements to preview for you or forecast, except to say that the situation in Syria is obviously serious and it continues to deteriorate. And that is of great concern to the President and to everyone with an interest in Syria and the region. And we continue to discuss this with our allies and partners.

Q So has the President or his administration sent any messages to Nelson Mandela or his family this week?

MR. CARNEY: I am not aware of any communications from the White House, where obviously he is and the First Lady is. And we all are concerned about Nelson Mandela's health and wish him and his family well and hope that he recovers.

Q Can I follow on that, please?

MR. CARNEY: Yes, April.

Q Was the Johannesburg part of the trip the President is going to take later this month basically for the President to go see Nelson Mandela?

MR. CARNEY: No, April. I think that that understates significantly the importance of South Africa and the bilateral relationship we have with that country. There is every reason to visit South Africa on a visit to Africa. But I don't have any specifics on the schedule or the plan for the President's trip beyond what we've put out already.

Q Well, we understood it that Johannesburg was added. It was supposed to be Cape Town for South Africa, and then Johannesburg was added. And Nelson Mandela, at that time, was in Johannesburg. And the question was how this is --

MR. CARNEY: Again, I don't have any specifics on a schedule that's still coming together to provide to you, except to say that we're obviously concerned about Nelson Mandela's health, and wish him well and a speedy recovery. But we obviously also have a very important relationship with South Africa.

Q When was the last time President Obama talked with Nelson Mandela, particularly as both of them really are the essence of the first black President for the United States and for South Africa?

MR. CARNEY: I don't have an answer to that question in terms of the last time they spoke. I know they did meet when President Obama was a senator. And the First Lady was in South Africa and met with Nelson Mandela when she visited South Africa a few years ago I believe. But I don't know when the President last spoke with Mr. Mandela.

Q And does he feel a kinship with him because of their historical placing in these two respective countries?

MR. CARNEY: I think the President has written about and spoken about Nelson Mandela in the past. So I would point you to what he said about this hugely significant figure in South African, African and global history.

Q Just to be clear, does the United States want to prosecute Mr. Snowden?

MR. CARNEY: There is an investigation underway, and it is for the investigators to determine whether or not crimes have been committed and to decide what charges, if any, will be brought. And I will not get ahead of that process.

Q You haven't so far.

MR. CARNEY: We have said -- well, Bill, I appreciate the opportunity to glibly get ahead of an important investigation but I'll pass on it. I think that we have made clear that we have very serious concerns about the leak of classified information about programs that are very important to our national security. But on this specific investigation and the status of the individual who's being investigated, I will leave comment on that to the investigators.

Q Speaker Boehner today called Snowden a traitor. Would you go that far?

MR. CARNEY: Again, I won't comment specifically on someone who's under investigation. I won't characterize him or his status. We believe it is the appropriate posture to take to let the investigation move forward and let the determination about where that investigation will go and whether any charges will be brought and what those charges might be if they are brought to the investigators, to the FBI and the Department of Justice.

Q As we've talked about this debate, you've said the President welcomes the debate and you've referred to his speech at the National Defense University. One of the takeaways from that speech, in his own words, was that he felt it would be a mistake for the U.S. to stay on what he called a war footing, that it was sort of self-defeating. Isn't the lesson that we've learned over the last couple of weeks after that speech is that we still are on the war footing? In fact, he's expanded surveillance to prevent terror attacks. So when you cite that speech, isn't there a bit of a contradiction there? When he was telling the public two or three weeks ago we're kind of ramping down, we don't want a war footing anymore, the expanded surveillance suggested we still are on a war footing.

MR. CARNEY: Well, I think you're conflating a number of issues here, Ed, and it's not -- that was a fairly long and detailed speech that delved into a number of --

Q One of the messages was that we're scaling -- that we're not on a war footing.

MR. CARNEY: Well, I think with regards to that, we have as a nation been in active, hot wars for more than a decade. And the President, keeping his commitment from when he ran for this office, ended the war in Iraq. And he is winding down the war in Afghanistan.

But it remains the case that we continue to aggressively pursue al Qaeda and its affiliates. And it is absolutely his obligation as Commander-in-Chief to do so and to ensure that we have the tools necessary to do that. It is also his view and his insistence that those tools that we have and that we use are subject to oversight and are carried out and are used in a way that that keeps faith to our laws and our values -- with our laws and our values.

So I don't think there's any inconsistency at all there. We remain in conflict with al Qaeda. Al Qaeda, even though it is greatly diminished -- core al Qaeda in particular -- remains a threat, and al Qaeda's affiliates remain a threat. We've certainly discussed that quite a bit -- whether it's in Yemen or elsewhere. And the President is taking every action necessary as Commander-in-Chief to ensure that we are adequately protected from that threat.

Q One other topic. CBS broke the story a couple days ago about the State Department -- about a memo from an official in the State Department inspector general's office claiming that a special agent had "determined" that Ambassador Gutman in Belgium was ditching his security detail to engage prostitutes and to allegedly solicit sex with children. He has sharply denied that. Is the President confident in the denial to keep Ambassador Gutman in place? And what is the President's reaction to the State Department allegedly shutting this down?

MR. CARNEY: Well, let me say a couple of things. These allegations are currently under investigation by an independent inspector general. There is no final report on these inquiries by the independent inspector general. And as in keeping with the position we take when we are dealing with independent inspector general investigations or audits, we will not comment until we have seen the results of that investigation. And there's a process in place for reviewing any sort of allegation of misconduct the likes of which you mentioned, and we believe that that process should unfold under regular order, and we're not going to prejudge anyone or anything before all the facts are determined.

That said, I want to make clear the President has zero tolerance for misconduct by any government employee. And I think his zero tolerance for misconduct has been demonstrated amply throughout his presidency. But we're not going to prejudge based on unfinished investigations by an independent IG.

Q I appreciate that distinction. One last thing on this, which is you say it's still under investigation, the allegations against the ambassador. But there are also allegations in this memo against Patrick Kennedy, who's a very high State Department official, suggesting that he killed the original investigation, sort of blocked it, to protect Ambassador Gutman and maybe others. My question is, does Under Secretary Kennedy's conduct here, is that under investigation as far as the White House --

MR. CARNEY: I believe all of these matters that you raise are under investigation, active investigation by the independent IG at the State Department. And we will not prejudge the outcome of an ongoing inquiry like that.

Q On that same topic, Jay, is it appropriate that the State Department has gone so long, I think since 2008, without a fulltime inspector general?

MR. CARNEY: I don't have any information for you about the staffing of the IG's office, but I'll have to take the question. What I can tell you is that -- if this related to the questions that Ed mentioned -- there is an active investigation --

Q It's not. Just in general terms, the fact that the State Department --

MR. CARNEY: This just occurred to you?

Q No, well, it's because it's State Department, it's Labor Department, it's Interior, Homeland Security, Defense, and I think it's the Agency for International Development all of which do not presently have full-time inspector generals. So it would be a broader question I'm posing.

MR. CARNEY: Okay. Well, I'll have to take the question.

Q I appreciate it. Thank you. On a separate topic then, very briefly, I think Julie got to it quickly -- on Plan B, I know the situation has changed, but has the President's personal position on emergency contraception changed?

MR. CARNEY: The President's views are as he expressed them. Those are his personal views, and he put them in the context of being a father. And he supported, again, the decision that Secretary Sebelius made at the time.

But the fact is, this case has been litigated; an appeals court has ruled against the administration, making available a version of Plan B immediately. And it is the view of the administration that given that ruling and the availability of Plan B, it is in the best interests of the country that the simpler version be made available. And if you're familiar with the ruling and the two different versions of the medication, I think that explains why we've taken the position we have.

Q And then, on one final topic -- Democratic Senator Wyden said of the Director of National Intelligence, James Clapper, that he, "didn't give straight answers on the NSA surveillance during a hearing that took place in March." The President has called for open and honest debate. I think Wyden says specifically that the American people have the right to expect straight answers from intelligence leadership to questions asked by their representation -- or their representatives. Is the President satisfied that the American people are getting straight answers from their leadership when it comes to American intelligence?

MR. CARNEY: Well, he certainly believes that Director Clapper has been straight and direct in the answers that he's given, and has actively engaged in an effort to provide more information about the programs that have been revealed through the leak of classified information.

Q Because even James Clapper said it was the least untruthful statement -- he acknowledged that it wasn't fully truthful.

MR. CARNEY: Well, I'm not sure what statement you're talking about.

Q This was the statement that I was referring to in the March hearing, where he was asked specifically whether all -- I have the direct language -- does the U.S. collect any type of data on all of the millions of Americans, and he said the answer to that was no. He later sort of amended it. But even -- in the conversation with Andrea Mitchell this weekend, he acknowledged that it was the least untruthful answer he could give.

MR. CARNEY: Well, look, I think Director Clapper has -- in the last week has demonstrated -- has been aggressive in providing as much information as possible to the American people, to the press about these very sensitive and very important programs that are authorized by Congress under Section 702 and Section 215 of the Patriot Act -- a public statute, a much-debated public statute that has been passed into law and reauthorized I believe three times by Congress with bipartisan majorities.

And I would point you to the statements and documents that have been put out by the ODNI that demonstrate the effort that he has undertaken to provide a significant amount of information on these programs, given the revelations that we've seen.

Mark Knoller, do you have something for me?

Q Yes, let me ask you this -- what advice would the White House give --

MR. CARNEY: I probably am going to regret -- (laughter.)

Q -- to an official or somebody with a top-secret clearance who thinks there is wrongdoing underway? What option does such an individual have to try and correct that? What does such an individual do?

MR. CARNEY: That's an important question and I appreciate it. The Obama administration has demonstrated a strong commitment to protecting whistleblowers. The whistleblowers can play an important role in exposing waste, fraud, and abuse. There are established procedures that whistleblowers can employ that also protect -- rather ensure protection of national security interests. And I would -- if you look at the history here, the President appointed strong advocates to the Office of Special Counsel and the Merit Systems Protection Board, who have been widely praised. They have collectively issued an all-time high number of favorable actions on behalf of whistleblowers and have begun to change the culture so that whistleblowers are more willing to come forward.

On November 27th, 2012, after four years of work with advocates and Congress to reach a compromise, the President signed the Whistleblower Protection Enhancement Act, which provides whistleblower protections for federal employees by clarifying the scope of protected disclosures, expanding judicial review, expanding the penalties imposed for violating whistleblower protections, creating new protections for transportation security officers and scientists, creating whistleblower ombudsmen, and strengthening the authority of the Office of Special Counsel to assist whistleblowers.

Because it was clear that Congress would not provide protections for intelligence community whistleblowers, the President took executive action, issuing a landmark directive that extended whistleblower protections to the intelligence and national security communities for the first time. The directive prohibits retaliation against whistleblowers who report information through the appropriate channels and established procedures, including a review panel of IGs of other agencies to ensure that such retaliation does not occur.

The President's commitment on this issue far exceeds that of past administrations, which have resisted expanding protections for whistleblowers and in doing so have steered away from transparency.

Q That was quite an off-the-cuff answer.

MR. CARNEY: I just happened to have this available. (Laughter.)

Q Does the -- are you willing to say whether you see Snowden as a whistleblower or a leader?

MR. CARNEY: I am not willing to comment on the status of the individual under investigation.

Q Thank you. Is Secretary Kerry participating in an NSC meeting tomorrow on Syria?

MR. CARNEY: I think I was asked this yesterday about yesterday. I can simply tell you that we have meetings here on Syria with some regularity. I'm not going to give a readout or preview of every meeting we have. But given the seriousness of the situation there and the importance of Syria with regards to American policy, you can be sure that we have regular meetings on these issues that involve both principals and deputies on the National Security Council. I don't have a specific meeting to announce from here because they are fairly frequent and routine.

Q Fair to say that the White House is edging closer toward a decision meeting?

MR. CARNEY: I don't have any decisions or announcements to make about policy, except to say that the President is constantly reviewing the options available to him and tasking his team to review those options with an eye towards what actions we might take that would bring us closer to the achievement of the goal that we seek.

Q And one other topic -- on Snowden, can you describe a little bit about the damage he has caused?

MR. CARNEY: I think I would refer you to the statements by the Director of National Intelligence, who is in a position to better assess that at the outset, and note that more comprehensive damage assessments are being done. It is without question a matter of significant concern when we see leaks of highly classified information about very sensitive programs that are classified for a reason, that they are important to our effort to combat terrorists and extremists, and those who seek to do harm to our nation and take the lives of the American people.

But for more specific assessments, I would refer you to the ODNI.

Q Any idea how long that damage assessment -- do you think it's going to take long?

MR. CARNEY: I'm not sure. I would ask them.

Q On Syria again, you reminded us that the President is constantly reviewing his options. And it's the same thing in the European capitals and Ottawa, too. Is there any concerted NATO option there?

MR. CARNEY: Well, I don't have a list of options to review for you since they're all on the table. I guess you could assume that any option you might ask me about within reason and logic would be on the table. What we tend to talk about here are what actions might be taken in response to assessments of more corroborated evidence about the use of

chemical weapons, for example, what actions might be taken with regards to further assistance to the Syrian opposition given the circumstances in Syria and given the assessments we constantly make about what the impact of a decision like that would be.

But I am not going to weigh in on specific options and whether they're being considered, because as the President has said, with a caveat on the exception of on the option of putting boots on the ground, the President has said all options remain on the table.

Q There are discussions also, are there with --

MR. CARNEY: We talk about this issue with our allies and partners all the time, because it is of such great concern to the President and American political leaders in general, as well as the leaders in the countries of our allies and partners who have grave concerns about what's happening in Syria, grave concerns about the impact of the violence in Syria on the region, concerns about the involvement of Hezbollah and Iran in the fighting in Syria on behalf of Bashar al-Assad. These are all matters that are of serious concerns beyond the borders of Syria.

Q Jay, can you tell me if the State Department review report on Keystone XL is on the President's desk?

MR. CARNEY: Again, that's a process that is operated out of the State Department and I would refer you to the State Department for updates on --

Q So, anything --

MR. CARNEY: Again, I think you should take that question to the State Department.

Q A follow-up on Syria again. Considering the military gain achieved by the Syria government, what makes you confident that the Geneva talk will take place altogether? And second, the U.S. is conducting military exercises with Jordan -- around 8,000 personnel. Is this a plan B for Syria -- I mean, different kind of plan B?

MR. CARNEY: Let me refer first to the -- that's clever -- (laughter) -- refer first to the question about Jordan.

Jordan is a close friend and ally to the United States, and our militaries in particular have a longstanding relationship. In reference to your question, a Patriot missile battery and F-16s are in Jordan in support of our annual joint exercise, Eager Lion. And that is, again, an annual exercise. So it not related to Syria or proposed options in Syria.

On the first question, as I noted earlier, there is concern here and elsewhere about the deteriorating situation there, about the involvement of Hezbollah and Iran in the fight in Syria on behalf of Assad. And the President is reviewing the options available to him when it comes to American policy, and working with our allies and partners on ways that we can assist the Syrian people and assist the Syrian opposition in trying to achieve the goal that we've stated, which is a peaceful transition to a post-Assad Syria to an authority

in place in Syria that respects the rights of all Syrians, that protects conventional and unconventional weapons, that combats terrorism and terrorists. And it is in pursuit of that goal that we evaluate the options available to us.

Q I'm glad you said all that, but what makes you confident that the Assad government will participate in Geneva, too?

MR. CARNEY: On the Geneva question, we are, as you know, working to convene a conference as soon as practical, which means as soon as it is determined, in partnership with the United Nations and with our international partners, that we have done the necessary preparations to bring the parties together and move forward towards a political solution. And we are pursuing this, and we're pursuing a conference in Geneva.

But we are not -- that is not the one track we're pursuing here. The political process cannot occur in a vacuum. There is ongoing fighting in Syria. That is why we have, even as we continue our discussions with our allies, with the Russians, with the opposition about Geneva, the situation on the ground means that we continue to explore what more we can do to support the opposition as it confronts the tyranny of Bashar al Assad.

Q Jay, on the China summit?

MR. CARNEY: China summit?

Q Yes. NSA and Donilon on Saturday had said that the President was going to follow the summit with some conversations with U.S. allies in Asia and that Donilon himself was going to have some meetings with representatives from those countries today. Have any of those conversations happened yet? Can you tell us anything about that?

MR. CARNEY: I have no presidential interactions to read out to you, and I'll have to check about the National Security Advisor.

Q Do you expect anything today?

MR. CARNEY: Again, I just don't know. I'll have to take the question.

Q Jay, on the NSA thing, it's obviously a big deal. You've got members of the President's own party questioning what the DNI said about this. This clearly has repercussions that are far more significant than some of the other things we've talked about in the briefing room. Isn't it time for the President to address the American people directly? Isn't this sort of a litmus of leadership, to tell people when you're taking them in a new direction, and when they're confronted with these various challenges?

MR. CARNEY: Well, Glenn, the President took questions and answered them at length on this specific issue on Friday.

Q How many questions did he take?

MR. CARNEY: I think he answered for a total of 14 minutes; two multi-part questions on these issues that probably, given the standards here, that's six or eight questions. And the fact of the matter is he will continue to discuss this, and he will continue -- he is interested in and believes in a debate about these issues and believes it's worthy and important to engage in that debate.

Q What is this debate?

MR. CARNEY: And I would just note, as I did earlier, that prior to these revelations, the President addressed this specific issue in a speech at the National Defense University --

Q But we didn't know about the magnitude of this.

MR. CARNEY: Oh, so you're saying you weren't interested until there were revelations?

Q I think most Americans were not aware of this. Don't you think --

MR. CARNEY: But, Glenn -- let me just say that the Patriot Act, which I know you've heard of, is a public statute. There is spirited and animated debate about the reauthorization of the Patriot Act every time it comes up for reauthorization, which includes, most recently, in 2011. And the provisions under which -- the sections of the law under which these programs exist have been and are debated, and they have been, since the first reauthorization, updated in a way that made sure that oversight that did not exist over programs in the previous administration, in the first years of the previous administration, does exist. And that was at the insistence of lawmakers including then-Senator Obama, that that kind of enhanced oversight by all three branches of government take place and exist with programs that are vital to our national security.

Q Former Attorney General Mike Mukasey has said that the President ought to have a fireside chat with the American people about this. Why not do that? I mean, is there --

MR. CARNEY: Well, I'm not saying -- I think I just said -- Glenn, although I appreciate yours and the former attorney general's specific recommendations about the modalities of presidential communications -- the President has and will speak about this subject.

Q Jay, you just said now to Glenn and to answers today and yesterday, you've referred us back to the President's speech at National Defense University. Nowhere in that speech does the President specifically address the use of private contractors either for intelligence or for any of the other initiatives that the President was looking to address. Is the President --

MR. CARNEY: Jared, I think you've kind of missed the big story here. But I grant that there's a question here about contractors, but the focus of the President --

Q The President --

MR. CARNEY: -- about the conversation we've been having here is the balance between our security interests and our desire for privacy.

Q Right, and the question I was trying to ask was that is the President looking at this as an opportunity to reexamine the proportion or depth that private contractors have, including in our intelligence community?

MR. CARNEY: Well, I think that is an interesting question and perhaps worthy of debate as part of this conversation that we should be having. I would note that contractors have long been involved in both our defense and intelligence efforts, and that when it comes to security clearances, they are subject to the same system of checks and security clearance procedures as government employees. But, again, I -- which is not to be at all dismissive of the question, because I think that, too, is certainly a question that merits debate.

But the issue is if you are a private contractor and you take an oath to handle and protect classified information, you are under the same obligations as I am and Josh is and others here who have security clearances. So the legal protections and the legal regime is the same, and the obligations are the same.

Q But in an hour at National Defense University the President didn't specifically mention private contractors once. And this is now -- you say that he wants to have a conversation --

MR. CARNEY: Jared, I appreciate -- I'm not sure what point you're trying to make. The President gave a lengthy speech that was about specific issues like the use of --

Q Because you keep cutting me off. (Laughter.) What I'm trying to ask is the President didn't mention specifically contractors.

MR. CARNEY: You've said that.

Q -- in the vacuum of that omission, the Snowden incident has filled that gap and so the President wants to have the conversation. Does this conversation begin now on the contractors issue, which is up to 70 percent of intelligence gathering in some capacities? Doesn't that open a door that the President had left closed?

MR. CARNEY: No. I think that that is an issue, as I think I said in answer to your partial questions, that merits debate. But whether it's a private contractor or a government employee, the issue of classified information and the obligations that individuals who take an oath to protect it have is the same, one.

Two, it is certainly worth a discussion -- there has been discussion and debate in the past about the use of contractors in various other parts of the government, and that's certainly worth debate. But when it comes to the issue of protecting our privacy and protecting our security, the balance that we seek remains the central issue regardless of the employment status of the individuals who take the oath to protect classified information.

Q Jay, on immigration, the President this morning talked about maybe potential changes to the bill. Senator McConnell is looking for what he terms "major changes" in the areas of border security, benefits, and taxes. Is the President open to any major changes to this bill?

MR. CARNEY: The President gave remarks about immigration reform just a few hours ago, and made the point that the bill that emerged from the Senate Judiciary Committee represents an extraordinary amount of hard work by a bipartisan group of United States senators, a process in committee that allowed consideration of numerous amendments and passage of amendments with bipartisan support.

It does not represent letter for letter exactly what the President wants, nor does it represent letter for letter exactly what any individual Republican lawmaker or Democratic lawmaker wants. But it does represent a strong consensus position on the central principles that the President laid out when it comes to comprehensive immigration reform, and we strongly support that bill.

And we look forward to a process that begins today of consideration on the Senate floor of comprehensive immigration reform. And we sincerely hope that as this bill is debated and as amendments are considered that the significant majority of lawmakers in the Senate who support comprehensive immigration reform -- reflecting the support that's out there in the American public and the views of the President -- prevail over any efforts to sabotage that, when we have, as the President said, a unique opportunity to address this challenge for this first time in many, many years. And we do not want to miss that opportunity, an opportunity that will be good for the middle class, be good for our businesses, be good for our security.

On one of the issues that is frequently raised when it comes to immigration reform -- border security -- it is important to note, A, that we have taken significant steps to enhancing our border security. Since President Obama took office, we have I think the most boots on the ground on the border that we've ever had as a nation, and we've doubled the number of border patrol agents. And in addition to that, the bill itself that the Senate passed out of committee represents the most significant border security bill in our history in terms of resources allocated towards further border security. And that's very important.

It also makes clear that we have to have a clear path to citizenship for the 11 million illegals in this country -- illegal immigrants in the country, and that that path has to be clear because that's the right thing to do for our businesses and for the middle class and for our economy.

So the President, as you heard him say today, looks forward to a healthy debate in the Senate as they consider this important legislation; looks forward to bipartisan passage of that bill in the Senate and in consideration in the House, and ultimately passage by the full Congress.

Q Jay, does the President believe that the government is currently striking the right balance between privacy and security? Is it getting it right? And if so, why? And if not, which way should it tilt more, privacy or security?

MR. CARNEY: The President has addressed this, and so I will paraphrase him by saying yes -- (laughter) -- the President believes that -- thank you, Glenn. The President believes that we are striking the right balance, in his view, through programs that are subject, first of all, to debate, consideration and passage by Congress; and then subject to an oversight regime that involves all three branches of government.

And I think it's important, whether it's Section 702 or 215, to be fully aware of the kind of oversight that exists when it comes to these programs. And I'd like to at this late date or late moment in my briefing to remind you of some of that oversight that exists -- if I have it here, which I may not.

Q While you search let me ask, why welcome the -- why invite all the debate? If there is this debate now, if your position is --

MR. CARNEY: Because the President has made clear that he does not believe that just because he has come to the conclusion that we have struck the balance that is the right balance that that should end debate. He believes that this is a subject where well-meaning and thoughtful people can disagree and that we ought to have that debate. And we certainly are having it now and we should continue to have it.

But what I think is important to note, as we've seen these revelations, is that there is a system in place with regards to these two programs that ensures that there is oversight by the judicial branch, by the legislative branch and by the executive branch to make sure that these programs as they are implemented are done so in a way that is consistent with the law and with the guidelines that exist to ensure that there aren't -- that they don't run afoul over our laws or values.

And depending on the programs -- the 215 program we talked about that is subject to renewal every 90 days through the courts, it is briefed and reviewed by Congress. And similarly, with 702, there are procedures for both requirements for judicial consent and review, and for congressional review and notification and updates. Additionally, there are procedures in place in the executive branch for monitoring these programs to ensure that in the implementation of the authorities granted by Congress, those who carry out these programs are doing so in a way that's consistent with our law, and with the values and the oversight regime that's in place.

Thanks very much, guys.

END

2:01 P.M. EDT