

Press Briefing by Press Secretary Jay Carney, 6/13/2013

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Office of the Press Secretary

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James S. Brady Press Briefing Room

12:21 P.M. EDT

MR. CARNEY: Thank you all for being here this afternoon. And let me just say a couple things before we start. First of all, for the reason aforementioned, I need to make a hard stop of 1:00 p.m.-1:05 p.m.

Secondly, today the President and Vice President will meet with family members of victims of the tragedy at Sandy Hook Elementary School. We commend the families' courage and perseverance in continuing to press for common-sense legislation to reduce gun violence, and we want them to know that as we approach the six-month anniversary of that terrible day, we will never forget, and we will continue to fight alongside them.

Second announcement: This afternoon, the President will meet with Senators Leahy, Schumer, Durbin, Menendez and Bennet here at the White House for an update on the Senate's efforts to pass common-sense, comprehensive immigration reform.

Third and final announcement is that today is Clark's last day as assistant press secretary, and he is heading over to the Department of Homeland Security -- heading back, rather -- where he will be the Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs at the Department of Homeland Security. Fancy title. But I hope all feel the same way that we do, that he has been an essential element of this office and has helped you as he has helped us in his time here. So we'll miss him.

And with that, I'll take your questions.

Q The United Nations says that 93,000 people have been confirmed killed in Syria. The actual number is likely to be far greater than that. We've all heard from the White House that you condemn the violence, that you want Assad to go, that the U.S. has provided nonlethal assistance to the rebels. None of that has quelled the violence there. In fact, the situation has only deteriorated. Can you tell us a little bit about whether there's some frustration by the President and the White House that you haven't been able to do more, and what the President is actually considering? What's not just on the table as a broad array of options, but what he'd actually consider as his next steps?

MR. CARNEY: The President and every member of his national security team are greatly concerned by the terrible situation in Syria and the worsening situation in Syria. As you know, the United States has made itself the number-one contributor of humanitarian assistance to the Syrian people. We provide direct assistance to the Syrian opposition -- to the Syrian opposition and the Supreme Military Council.

We are working with the Russians and our allies and partners, as well as the opposition, to bring about a conference under the Geneva Communiqué for the transition that we and the Syrian people seek. And the President is reviewing and considering what other options are available to him and to the United States, as well as our allies and partners, for further and additional steps in Syria. And that process continues.

Every option that he considers, he evaluates, and his team evaluates, based on the long-term view of whether or not implementation of a new policy option will actually help bring about the desired result, as opposed to seeming like a good thing to do but not actually changing the situation or improving the situation and perhaps worsening it instead.

That has been the process that the President has insisted he and his team undertake as they evaluate these options, because as terrible as the situation is in Syria, he has to make decisions when it comes to policy towards Syria that are in the best interests of the United States, first and foremost -- in our security interests -- and then to look at it also through regional interests as well as the interests of our allies and partners, and the Syrian people. These are all difficult decisions because of the tyrannical behavior by Bashar al-Assad, his wanton willingness to murder his own people simply to cling on to power.

And the President and every member of his team understand the gravity of the situation and are making decisions and evaluating options accordingly.

Q Does he feel any particular sense of urgency, given the deteriorating situation, the growing influence of Hezbollah in Syria right now?

MR. CARNEY: As I've said, we have noted and condemned, and are concerned by the involvement of outside actors in trying to prop up Assad. It only increases the potential for greater regional instability, for the conflict in Syria spilling over potentially into other parts of the region. And that is a concern.

The death and destruction remains, of course, the primary concern. And the potential consequences for continued chaos in Syria remain a great concern. And I've been asked recently about are you now meeting on Syria, and I have said what has always been the case, that in this building and in the Defense Department, in the State Department and elsewhere, in the IC, people are meeting on this subject and discussing this subject and reviewing options and assessing the facts that we have constantly. And that's true here and it's true with regards to all the principals involved in the policymaking process.

Q Is there any plan for the U.S., France and Britain during the G8 Summit next week to sort of go in with a coordinated message to the Russians on Syria?

MR. CARNEY: As I said yesterday on Air Force One, we fully expect Syria to be a topic of discussion at the G8. There will be other topics, but there is no question that Syria will be one of them -- in particular, because of the interest of the United States, the United Kingdom and France, as well as other participants.

I don't have any announcements to make about policy-related matters in the run-up to the G8. We'll try to brief you -- not necessarily about Syria, I don't want to be confusing here -- but we'll preview that trip for you tomorrow. But with regards to Syria, I can simply say that we fully expect it to be a topic of conversation and discussion.

Yes, Jeff.

Q Jay, President Clinton made some critical or fairly critical remarks about President Obama's policy towards Syria yesterday. Does the White House have a response to that? And does it add any pressure -- does the President feel any pressure from comments like that to act?

MR. CARNEY: The President, Jeff, as you know, views these significant challenges in the international arena through the prism of U.S. national interests, and he makes decisions based on what he considers the essential longer view about what options we may undertake with our allies or, unilaterally, with the opposition, and assessing whether or not they will help bring about achievement of the ultimate goal, which is a transition in Syria to an authority there that respects the rights of all Syrians, that ceases the violence, that protects both conventional and unconventional weapons.

The President is very serious about the need to evaluate the options available to him based on the assessment that he makes and that his team makes of what's in our national security interests and what policy options will be most effective.

And obviously, a lot of people who have expertise in the matter, both outside of government and in Congress and inside of government, have perspective to add and opinions to contribute and analysis to provide, and the President welcomes all of that. In the end, of course, he and his team have to make the decisions that they believe are in the best interest of the United States and the American people.

Q So would you say he welcomes President Clinton's comments?

MR. CARNEY: He welcomes, again, the input of every individual out there who has perspective on a situation like this, absolutely.

Q And as he and the rest of the team are studying the option of arming Syrian rebels, is the concern about those weapons ending up in the more militant or Islamic militant part of the rebels' community, is that one of the things that may be holding up the decision?

MR. CARNEY: There are a number of factors that come into an assessment about that particular policy option. That is one of them, and we've been explicit about it for some time now. But it is also true that the opposition has strengthened and has become more sophisticated. And we have, over time, worked more directly with them and developed stronger relationships with leaders within the opposition. And that was a process that we talked about and I think then-Secretary Clinton talked about in the past.

So this is not a static picture. What was true about the state of the opposition and the nature of the opposition six months ago or a year ago is not necessarily true today. So we evaluate that as well. But obviously, the concern that you mentioned is one of the concerns that we have been very forthright about as we've made these assessments.

Q And lastly, on immigration, you mentioned this meeting this afternoon. Can you tell us a little bit about what they'll be talking about?

MR. CARNEY: They'll talk about the progress being made in the Senate on the comprehensive immigration reform bill that emerged with bipartisan support from the Judiciary Committee --

Q Amendments or anything?

MR. CARNEY: I'm sure that the senators who are participating will update the President on the process and the debate and the amendments, but I don't have any specific amendments to note that they'll discuss. There are obviously a lot of amendments that will be considered.

The President's interest, as you heard him say just the other day, is in the Senate recognizing that we have a unique opportunity that has been a long time coming -- and isn't likely to come again anytime soon if we do not seize it -- to pass comprehensive immigration reform with bipartisan support, which is the only way to do it.

And we have been encouraged by the progress in the Senate.

We've been encouraged from the start by the seriousness of purpose of the Gang of Eight, by the leaders in the Senate and other participants in this process, and we continue to be heartened by the progress we've seen, even as we make clear that there is much road to travel and there are obstacles along the way and we expect that those who oppose immigration reform will attempt to derail it.

And we urge every senator, as he or she considers this legislation, to understand that no one can get exactly what they want out of this process. That is the nature of compromise. The President strongly supports the existing Senate bill. It is the product of a bipartisan

compromise. It is not exactly word for word as he would write it, but it does reflect the principles he laid out. And I think the same statement can be said by every coauthor of that legislation and every senator who will eventually support it. It won't be exactly what they want word for word, but it will be -- it is already a significant bipartisan accomplishment. And we hope to keep this train moving.

Jessica.

Q Nancy Pelosi, Minority Leader Pelosi just got into a heated exchange with a reporter over the late-term abortion bill presented by Representative Franks, saying that this bill “would make it a federal law that there be no abortion in the country. You're taking an extreme case, this is an extreme case. What I'm saying to you is what happened in Philadelphia is reprehensible and you have an agenda” et cetera. Does the President and this White House believe that this bill is an important bill, or does he agree with Minority Leader Pelosi?

MR. CARNEY: Well, since you've just notified me of those statements by the Minority Leader, I obviously haven't spoken to the President about them, don't know if he's aware of them.

You know the President's position on women's health and on women's right to choose. And he has been absolutely clear about where he stands. And with regards to the bill in question, I believe that's one that got a little attention yesterday in a way that I'm sure Republicans wish the public would forget, because it reflects an alarming misunderstanding of what is a crime and what that means, and an alarming disregard for women in many ways. And we obviously -- as we did last year when similar comments were voiced -- take great issue with them.

Q On a second matter, on Syria, there's been some planning for a conference later this year in Geneva, but since the violence has escalated, is planning for that conference now on hold?

MR. CARNEY: No, it continues. As I've said of late, we are working to convene the conference and do the work necessary to have the preparations in order that would bring all the parties together and move towards a political solution. But that process is not, and

cannot, occur in a vacuum. And the fact is there are developments on the ground that make -- that play into that process. And the bloodshed has worsened. The loss of innocent life has escalated.

And this goes to the questions I was answering in my conversation with Julie. We are very aware of how serious the situation is in Syria, and we are evaluating our options. Even as we pursue this diplomatic channel solution with the Russians and others, we are aware of the need to continue to explore what we can do to support the opposition on the ground.

Q And then finally, on the NSA, Representative Peter King has said that he believes that Glenn Greenwald should be prosecuted for his leaks. Does the President share that view, first of all? And secondly, Speaker Boehner today said that he is surprised the White House has not spoken out more forcefully in defense of the program and explaining more forcefully why it's necessary. Would you just react to that?

MR. CARNEY: Well, I think you heard the President speak about his views on the program and the necessity -- the programs in question here -- and the necessity to have such programs in place in order to protect our national security. And I think you heard the President make clear that he believes that, in the tradeoffs that we have to make to pursue our security and protect our privacy, we have found through the system we have the right balance. But he understands that others may have a different opinion and that the debate about that is an important one.

On the issue itself of the necessity of these programs, the President agrees with General Alexander, the head of the NSA, who spoke yesterday on Capitol Hill about the programs under Sections 215 and 705, and how they have helped thwart dozens of attacks. And he used two examples that have been declassified. And I think it's important -- you heard Director Clapper mention them as well. There was a plot to attack the New York City subways in early September of 2009, and while monitoring the activities of al Qaeda terrorists in Pakistan, the NSA noted contact from an individual in the U.S. that the FBI subsequently identified as Colorado-based Najibullah Zazi.

The U.S. intelligence community, including the FBI and NSA, worked in concert to determine his relationship with al Qaeda, as well as identify any foreign or domestic terrorist links. The FBI tracked Zazi as he traveled to New York to meet up with co-

conspirators where they were planning to conduct a terrorist attack. Zazi and his co-conspirators were subsequently arrested, and Zazi, upon indictment, pled guilty to conspiring to bomb the New York City subway system.

This plot at the time was characterized as “the most serious terrorist threat on U.S. soil since 9/11.” And we were able to -- the government and the NSA and the FBI and all of the agencies working together were able to thwart that attack because of the tools available to them, authorized by Congress, overseen by federal judges and by Congress, as well as internally by the executive branch.

A second plot in Chicago in October of 2009: David Coleman Headley, a Chicago business man and dual U.S.-Pakistani citizen, was arrested by the FBI as he tried to depart from Chicago O’Hare Airport on a trip to Europe. Headley was charged with support of terrorism based on his involvement in the planning and reconnaissance of the hotel attack in Mumbai of 2008. And at the time of his arrest, Headley and his colleagues were planning to attack the Danish newspaper that published the unflattering cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed at the behest of al Qaeda.

Compelled collection authorized under FISA Section 702 against foreign terrorists and metadata analysis authorized under the business records provision of FISA were --

Q I think his criticism was that the President wasn’t doing it enough. And I get the --

MR. CARNEY: Jessica, let me get to that. I appreciate it, but I did want to spell this out, because people often ask -- because these are, by necessity, classified programs -- can we demonstrate that they’re effective? Are they really in our national security interests. And so there was an effort undertaken to declassify these instances to demonstrate to you and the American people that there are concrete results from these programs.

And let me just say that again, under Section 702, as well as the business records provision of FISA, the FBI and other authorities were able to investigate Headley's overseas associates and their involvement in Headley's activities.

So these were two specific instances where these programs, authorized by Congress, overseen by Congress and federal judges, overseen with internal check and balances within the executive branch, were found to be directly effective in thwarting terrorist attacks. And I cite General Alexander and his note yesterday that these programs have over time contributed to the thwarting of dozens of attacks.

So the President spoke about this on Friday. I am sure he will speak about it again. He made very clear his views both on the need to debate this issue, but on the fact that we have a system in place that contrasts with the system that existed prior to Congress taking action in I think 2006, 2007, 2008, to ensure that there was the proper oversight by Congress and by the federal judiciary.

Q Jay, you started this briefing off by saying that the President is meeting with five --

MR. CARNEY: That I have a wedding to get to.

Q After that, you started by saying that the President is meeting with five senators to talk about immigration. All five are Democrats. I'm just curious why no Republicans?

MR. CARNEY: The President has in recent days been in contact with a number of Republicans about the progress being made on comprehensive immigration reform. So he is reaching out to members of both parties in the Senate. And the White House in general is engaging with members of both parties in the Senate, as well as the House, as this very important legislation moves forward.

Q On Edward Snowden, how concerned is the administration that he could cooperate with the Chinese or even defect to China?

MR. CARNEY: The individual who is under investigation in the matter of unauthorized leaks of classified information is not a subject that I can discuss because of that investigation. And I wouldn't want to characterize his status or express concerns about, or observations about, what he may or may not do, or what may or may not happen as a result of this investigation.

The leaks themselves -- as General Alexander said, Director Clapper has said, as the President has said, and others have said -- were very serious. And they go right to the heart of our efforts to combat terrorism, to combat efforts by extremists who desire to attack the United States and the American people. They are programs that are authorized, that are overseen by all three branches of government, and that are part of a process where assessments and evaluations of the programs are constantly undertaken to ensure that they are implemented in a way that is consistent with the law and with our values.

Q Jay, I appreciate your --

MR. CARNEY: I just can't talk about the individual.

Q -- about the investigation. I'm not talking about an investigation here. I'm talking about a potential future problem here. How concerned is the White House, is the President, that whoever was responsible for the leaks that happened has more to leak and could cooperate with a foreign government?

MR. CARNEY: As a general matter, the President is concerned about any leaks of highly sensitive, classified information. And he believes we need to take steps to prevent classified information from being leaked because it can do such great damage to our national security and it can endanger people. It can risk the lives of Americans and those who assist the United States in our efforts to protect the American people.

But with regards to this specific individual, I just don't have an observation to make.

Q And then, one clarification on the program itself. Does the NSA collect any type of data on millions or hundreds of millions of Americans?

MR. CARNEY: I think we have been very clear in recent days about how that provision, Section 215, works and the metadata, as they describe it, that is collected. And I would point you to statements by Director Clapper and others for more specifics about the program.

Q But is that a yes that the NSA collects any type of data?

MR. CARNEY: Jon, I appreciate the “gotcha,” but I think I've addressed this and Director Clapper has addressed this. These were classified programs, portions of which have been declassified in order to discuss them publicly in the wake of these revelations. They are programs that were authorized by Congress, that are implemented with the full oversight of Congress. There are briefings of members of Congress regularly on the implementation of these programs. The one that you're referring to is authorized only on a 90-day basis by the FISA Court. And it is very important in the President's view that that oversight regime exist.

Q Authorized and now declassified -- your answer is, yes, the United States does collect data on millions, hundreds of millions of Americans.

MR. CARNEY: I think he's been very clear what Director Clapper has said and what others have said about the collection of --

Q Well, he's saying no to that.

MR. CARNEY: Look, the program collects phone numbers and duration of phone calls. Any action taken on that data requiring further investigation or inquiry requires court approval.

Q You said the President welcomes President Clinton's remarks. He doesn't agree with them, though, does he?

MR. CARNEY: What I said -- first of all, I haven't seen the full context of President Clinton's remarks --

Q There were several points, one that it's possible the President is afraid of polling data suggesting -- being overly cautious because of that, is one point he raised. And he also said, “Because Hezbollah and Iran are into the fight now, it's time now and possibly past time to give rebels real lethal weapon support so they can get back in the game and fight

against the advance that Hezbollah, Iran and the Syria regime are making.” Those are two points. I just want to see -- obviously you welcome them. You don't necessarily agree with them, do you?

MR. CARNEY: We're assessing options all the time, including, as we've discussed, providing weapons to the opposition. The first point -- again, I'm taking your word for it that that's what was said, and the context I will have to investigate myself -- but the fact of the matter is the President makes a decision about the implementation of national security options based on our national security interests, not on what might satisfy critics at any given moment about a policy. And we've discussed over the months here, there are very serious implications to the kinds of policy options that have been discussed, including providing weapons, including questions I've had about a no-fly zone and other things that have been discussed. And that's why you have to assess them so clearly and so --

Q Public opinion would not factor into that?

MR. CARNEY: Of course not. What does factor in is what's in the national security interests of the United States and what has the best chance of working -- not satisfying an urge to do something today, but beyond today and next week and the following week -- what actually has the potential to help bring us closer to the achievement of the goal.

Q -- those things that are now being called for would in fact meet that standard.

MR. CARNEY: The President is -- don't get me wrong. The President, as I've said clearly now over the past half hour, is very closely evaluating options available to him. And we're fully aware about the worsening situation in Syria and are assessing options in light of that.

Q Is it fair to say the meeting with the Gang of Eight Democrats on immigration is about whether or not you can get 60 votes, and this rather -- this important tactical decision about securing 60 or possibly making concessions on the Senate floor to get you -- get more Republicans, to get you maybe over 65 to 70, to build more momentum for the House? It seems to me to be a very important tactical decision and it seems like it needs to be made very soon, based on what I've been told --

MR. CARNEY: I think there will be a number of topics discussed around this important legislation, both tactical and strategic, as well as substantive.

Q Do you disagree with anything I've just described?

MR. CARNEY: I didn't follow all of it. (Laughter.) But the fact is the President wants a strong --

Q -- 60 to 65. It's pretty simple.

MR. CARNEY: -- and believes there should be a strong bipartisan vote in support of comprehensive immigration reform that is in keeping with the principles that the Gang of Eight set forth, that the President has set forth, that is widely supported by the American people that will do right by the middle class and do right by our businesses and strengthen our economy.

Q Is there anxiety currently you don't even have 60 votes yet and that you need to push -
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MR. CARNEY: I think that we've seen in a variety of ways the Senate demonstrate that there is broad support for comprehensive immigration reform for members of both parties. We have work to do. We have a process that's underway, a debate that's been joined, and amendments that are being considered.

And what our goal is, the President's goal is, is that the Senate keep its eye on the ball and not allow those who clearly have no interest in passing comprehensive immigration reform -- with all its benefits to the economy and the middle class and our business -- not allow them to derail this process but instead to keep focused on a bill that will achieve the principles that the President and the Gang of Eight have laid out.

Q The Mayor of West, Texas is objecting to FEMA's decision not to provide public assistance and a major disaster declaration for that city or provide individual assistance. Is the President comfortable with FEMA's decision?

MR. CARNEY: Well, first of all, I haven't spoken to the President about it. I would refer you to FEMA for any specific questions on assistance.

As you know, shortly after the incident in West, Texas, President Obama declared an emergency for the explosion in West, providing immediate financial assistance to the state as it responded to the explosion. That emergency declaration has been amended twice to ensure that additional assistance could be provided both to the impacted individuals and to support state and local recovery efforts, including coverage providing 75 percent cost-share for eligible cost associated with the recovery.

Since the initial emergency declaration, 775 individuals have registered with FEMA for assistance, and FEMA and the SBA has provided more than \$7 million in direct federal disaster assistance grants and low-interest disaster loans for eligible individuals and families.

And this is just the beginning of the extensive assistance that FEMA will continue to provide under the existing declaration. FEMA's public assistance personnel at the joint field office in West, Texas, and in the field, are actively working with state and local officials to prepare project worksheets for reimbursement of costs related to debris removal and emergency protective measures.

In other words, there is, under the existing declarations and the amendments to them there is assistance that has already been provided and more assistance that will continue to be provided. As for the assessments that are made using standard formulas, I would refer you to FEMA.

Q How long did the President stay up last night watching the Blackhawks game?

MR. CARNEY: It was still going on when we got -- as you know, we landed on the South Lawn and it was on the screen as we were flying back. I know he's pleased by the result. I'm not sure -- I haven't asked him if he stayed up to watch it to the end.

Q Jay, back on Syria. Part of the context of what former President Clinton was saying, as I understand, is that he was asked a question about his own experience with Bosnia and Kosovo. As you said a moment ago, the Commander-in-Chief wants to make the right decision, doesn't want to be rushed into a decision. But part of what former President Clinton was saying was that he had regrets about not dealing with Bosnia and Kosovo sooner. How much does something like that weigh on President Obama? He's talked publicly about the slaughter and how it has continued. These are not easy decisions. But how much does that kind of pressure weigh on him?

MR. CARNEY: I think that the President -- it's a great question -- and the President is very aware of past precedent in these kinds of situations and with regards to the kinds of decisions that a President has to make constantly on matters of national security, and seeks the insight and advice of experts both within the administration and outside of it. And I think that -- again, having not seen the full extent of President Clinton's remarks, I think that those are all valid points. Having said that, President Obama assesses this specific situation, which can be analogous but not perfectly so to the past, and judges what's in the best interest of the United States today and what policy options present the best opportunity for achieving our ultimate goal.

Q And to your point, are you aware of any phone conversations or meetings between the two Presidents where this has been a primary topic of conversation, Syria?

MR. CARNEY: I am not. As you know, they saw each other at the Bush library event in Dallas. But I don't know whether they have spoken.

Q Last thing. Someone who we do know he takes advice from is Susan Rice. When does she start? And I ask the question because as National Security Advisor -- it hasn't been clear on what day -- she is someone who has very publicly talked about her own wrenching experiences in waiting too long to get involved in conflicts. And I wonder how her advice may weigh on the President as she takes on a bigger role?

MR. CARNEY: Well, she already is a member of the President's national security team, senior team.

Q But right here with him in the White House.

MR. CARNEY: Right. She starts I think July 1st. Is that right? I believe it's in July, something around that. I forget. I think we said at the time when she was going to start and when Tom was leaving.

But one of the reasons why it will be such a smooth transition is that she has been from the very beginning and even before the President took office a senior advisor to the President on national security matters. And certainly, her experience both in this administration through the unbelievable events and consequential decisions that we've seen over the last four and a half years in the world and from the United States, and in her prior experience in the Clinton administration and obviously in between, she brings a lot to the table. And that's why the President has always relied on her advice.

Peter, and then -- I'm sorry, I know you guys, we're taking up a lot of time here.

Q I'll make it brief. Does the President believe that the prosecution of military sexual assaults should remain within the military chain of command or should be outside the military chain of command?

MR. CARNEY: I have to take the question. I think that what the President wants and what the President has made clear is that sexual assault is unacceptable and it is particularly objectionable when it occurs within our United States military, and that those, as he said, who wear the uniform of the United States dishonor it if they engage in sexual assault, and those who wear the uniform who are the victims of sexual assault should know that their Commander-in-Chief has their back and he has zero tolerance for this. And he has insisted to the leadership at the Pentagon and the Defense Department that we need to take direct action to deal with it.

Q And if you could take that question, only because of the debate that took place between sort of the old guard and the new guard, with many of the female senators in particular saying they disagreed with the decision ultimately that was made.

Very quickly, given the conversation that's going to take place between the President and the Vice President with some of the families of the Newtown tragedy six months ago, there was a new ad put out by the NRA targeting specifically Joe Manchin, which appears in the eyes of some observers to be darkening or shading the face of the President that some people suggest has some sort of sinister tone to it. Does the White House or the President have any opinion of that ad, or has he seen it?

MR. CARNEY: I just heard about it for the first time, so no opinion.

Q Then only final question is with the Pride reception that's taking place tonight, is the President going to sign an executive order either now or in the near future in terms of ending LGBT workplace discrimination by federal contractors? Is there any plan to do that?

MR. CARNEY: I've answered this question a few times. And we have said that we are supporting a legislative effort, the so-called ENDA legislation. And that's the approach that we've taken. So I would not expect any executive order to be signed at the reception.

Q -- several messages for Turkish government saying that the U.S. supports freedom of expression, including the right of people to peaceful protest, because that is fundamental to any democracy. But when you look at the recent events in Turkey and Prime Minister's approach to them, obviously things are not going exactly as hoped. What does the U.S. think right now about Turkey? Has the President called the Prime Minister yet, or will he?

MR. CARNEY: I have no calls from the President to read out. There have been communications -- Secretary of State Kerry has spoken with his counterpart, the Foreign Minister, and I'm sure there have been other communications at different levels.

I can simply say that we continue to follow the events in Turkey with concern, and we welcome efforts to resolve this situation through Democratic means. And we remain concerned by any attempts to punish individuals for exercising their right to free speech as well as attempts by any party to provoke violence. We urge calm on all sides.

As we have said, we believe that Turkey's long-term stability, security, and prosperity is best guaranteed by upholding the fundamental freedoms of expression, assembly, association, and a free and independent media. Turkey is a close friend and ally of the United States and we expect the Turkish authorities to uphold these fundamental freedoms.

Q Also, Iranian elections are going to be held tomorrow. Millions of Iranians will choose a new leader, their new leader. Is the Obama administration prepared to rethink its Iranian policy if there is a new leadership?

MR. CARNEY: When it comes to policy -- and especially on the issues that are a source of great disagreement between Iran on the one hand, and the rest of the world, virtually, on the other -- ultimate authority in Iran rests with the Supreme Leader. And we remain hopeful that Iranian authorities will be ready to engage in serious negotiations with the P5-plus-1 regardless of the outcome of the elections. The P5-plus-1 is ready to meet with Iran when Iran is ready to respond substantively to the balanced proposal put forward by the P5-plus-1 in Almaty.

Q Jay, you said that the President makes decisions on Syria based on national security and not public opinion polls. Is the President familiar with what public opinion polls say about security? Has he looked at any of that data?

MR. CARNEY: Again, he reads the newspaper from time to time, but I think he's pretty clearly focused in the decisions that he makes that involve our national security interests and decisions that can come at great cost and great risk through the lens of deciding what's in the best interest of the United States, of protecting the American people, and what can work, what can be effective.

Q Jay, can I just clarify two quick questions? On Syria, among the options that the President is weighing in terms of what would be in the U.S. interests and the goals of the Syrian people, I just want to clarify, one of those options is to do no more, is that right? To do no more assistance?

MR. CARNEY: Well, again, all options are on the table. I supposed that would be an option. It's not one that we're giving a great deal of consideration to. We have ramped up our assistance to the Syrian people and the Syrian opposition over recent weeks and months. And I think that reflects a process that has -- that those decisions reflect the seriousness with which we take this problem and our recognition that on the ground, the violence is escalating and the plight of the Syrian people is worsening. And that's why we have made the decisions we've made thus far, and it's what we consider as we look at other options.

Q And just one clarification also on immigration. Can you say how optimistic the President is right now that the House will hold a vote on immigration reform this year?

MR. CARNEY: Well, we certainly hope and expect that the House will take action on immigration reform. Immigration reform is something that we have seen in the Senate and out in the country has broad support. It is the right thing to do for our economy. It is the right thing to do for the middle class. It is the right thing to do for security.

This bill that has passed out of the Senate Judiciary Committee would be the largest order enforcement security bill in history. And that and the provisions contained therein and the resources provided by it would build on the strengthening of our border security that has taken place over the past four and a half years -- a strengthening that has been recognized by members of both parties as well as experts in the field.

We need to continue to take action to secure our border. We need to make sure that our businesses -- that everybody is playing by the same set of rules, because that's good for our businesses. It's not -- for businesses who play by one set of rules, play by the rules, and then others who don't, those who play by the rules get hurt. Everybody needs to play by the same set of rules when it comes to hiring. That's an important provision of comprehensive immigration reform.

And it's important to ensure that immigration reform contains within it a clear path to citizenship -- a long path with many, many requirements along the way, but a clear path for those 11 million living here illegally.

Margaret. This is going to have to be the last one. I've got to catch a train.

Q I'm going to do a great job then. (Laughter.) On a variety of foreign policy issues, not just Syria. The President has often stressed that a multilateral approach is better than a unilateral approach. So I guess what I'm trying to figure out is if he felt that the time had come for various reasons to arm the Syrian rebels, is that a decision that he would consult with Congress, announce to the American people, et cetera, as a U.S. decision? Or is that a decision that, once he had made up his mind about what this country should do, he would seek to announce only in a multilateral context?

MR. CARNEY: Well, I have no announcements to make or predictions to make about how any announcement might unfold. I think that the kinds of aspects of a decision like that, or in options being considered like that take into account all of those issues.

And, absolutely, we believe it is often the case that implementation of policy in this region and elsewhere can be made more effective when we are working with our allies and partners. We have done that in Syria. We have done that elsewhere in the region. We have done that elsewhere around the world and will continue to do that. But it's not a one or the other proposition. He looks at all of these options, and will do so with regards to this option.

Yes, last one. But I can't -- my sister will kill me if I miss her daughter's wedding.

Q Just given the various timetables on the trade, TTIP trade talks both in the U.S. and in the EC. Do you expect that the G8 is going to be where the President and these leaders are able to announce the launch of these negotiations? Or do you think it will have to wait until Germany? It's just an easy question to round out the --

MR. CARNEY: You think? (Laughter.) Well, I have no predictions to make about what might be announced at the G8 or in Germany, but I invite you to try to pry more information from those who will brief you on the G8 tomorrow.

Thanks very much.

END

1:08 P.M. EDT