

Press Gaggle by Press Secretary Jay Carney and Deputy National Security Advisor for Strategic Communications Ben Rhodes to Preview the United Nations General Assembly

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MR. CARNEY: Good morning, everyone. Thanks for coming to our gaggle. I have with me today Ben Rhodes, who is the Deputy National Security Advisor for Strategic Communications. Many of you know him. He will be, at the top of this briefing, discussing the President's trip next week to New York for the United Nations General Assembly. He'll go through the schedule. He'll also take your questions on what the President will be doing up there and the meetings he will have.

If we could address all those questions to Ben at the top, let Ben go, I will remain to handle your questions on other topics.

And with that, Ben Rhodes.

MR. RHODES: Great. Thanks, Jay. I'll start by just going through the President's schedule. We go up to UNGA on Monday, September 19th, in the afternoon. The President will have a greet with the staff of USUN, but he has no further UNGA-related events that day.

But then we have two very busy days. On Tuesday morning, the President will be meeting with the chairman of the Transitional National Council, which we've recognized as the legitimate government of Libya, Mustafa Abdul Jalil. The President will have an opportunity to congratulate Chairman Jalil on the success of the Libyan people in ending the Qaddafi regime. He'll be able to express U.S. support for a post-Qaddafi transition in Libya, and to discuss the TNC's plans for a post-Qaddafi transition.

After that, you'll recall that in his statement at Martha's Vineyard, the President called for a meeting on the margins of UNGA to address the future of Libya. So there will be a high-level meeting, multilateral meeting on Libya at 10:30 a.m. that morning. It's being hosted

by the U.N. Secretary General. This will involve many leaders who will express their support for the future of Libya. The President will have a chance to make remarks at that meeting about the nature of U.S. support and the type of Libya we'd like to see going forward.

Again, the meeting will have several functions. First of all, it does provide a venue for leaders at the highest level to express their support for the TNC and for the Libyan people. It will be an opportunity for the U.N. to assert and underscore its critical role in a post-Qaddafi Libya. The U.N. is setting up an office in Tripoli to support the transition there. And so, therefore, the international community will also underscore the role of the U.N. going forward. And there will be a chance for the TNC to put forward some of their planning for a post-Qaddafi transition.

That's gone on for some time now through the contact group that's been established for many months now, even preceding the end of the Qaddafi regime. But obviously additional planning has been done in recent days. The TNC has been very affirmative about pursuing inclusive transition that brings together the Libyan people. And so they'll have a chance to address those plans at this meeting.

After the high-level Libya meeting, the President will have a bilateral meeting with President Karzai of Afghanistan. This will be the first meeting that the two Presidents have had since President Obama laid out his plan for a U.S. transition earlier this year. So they'll have the opportunity to discuss how the transition is going from ISAF to Afghan lead in certain provinces.

They'll have a chance to discuss the strategic partnership that we're pursuing with Afghanistan that would include an enduring relationship beyond 2014 when the transition is complete. And they'll have a chance to coordinate in advance of some important upcoming summits, including meetings in Istanbul and Bonn that will address the political support for Afghanistan and the political process within Afghanistan, as well as a NATO summit that we're hosting here in Chicago next year.

After the bilateral meeting with President Karzai, President Obama is going to meet briefly with President Rousseff of Brazil. Of course, we had a very good trip to Brazil earlier this year. The President has gotten off to a very good start with President Rousseff. I'm sure they'll discuss issues related to energy and the global economy and the Americas.

But the primary function is, after that bilateral meeting, the United States and Brazil are launching a new Open Government Partnership Initiative. Those of you who covered UNGA last year may recall that in his speech the President called for a new initiative around open government and called for countries to come back to UNGA this year with commitments in the area of open government.

And by open government what we mean is issues related to transparency and accountability using the tools of the 21st century for governments, including democracies and emerging democracies, to put forward action plans that demonstrate how open

government can be used to deliver better services, greater accountability, anticorruption measures for their citizens. So there will be a -- we're still, I think, finalizing the number of countries, but dozens of countries will participate in this meeting.

The countries that form the core group of the Open Government Initiative are eight -- led by the United States and Brazil, who have already -- will be presenting their national action plans associated with open government. And the additional countries that are participating in the meeting will also be making their own commitments, and we anticipate this to be a multilateral initiative that will be ongoing as countries can share best practices and make commitments internationally around open government, which is, again, a critical element of the promotion of democracy and support for democracy and human rights in the 21st century. So that event will, we anticipate, run from roughly the mid-afternoon, two to four.

After the open government event, the President will meet with Prime Minister Erdogan of Turkey. We have a very close and broad alliance and working relationship with Turkey. We work with them on range of very important issues. Turkey has been a close partner of ours on issues related to the Arab Spring, and I anticipate the two leaders will talk about events in Syria, where we share grave concerns with the Turks about the actions of President Assad; Libya, where Prime Minister Erdogan and the Turks have played a constructive and critical role in supporting the end of the Qaddafi regime, and a transition to a democratic Libya.

Turkey has recently agreed to host radar as a part of NATO's phased adaptive approach to missile defense, which is a very important marker in the alliance between the United States and Turkey and NATO. And they'll have a chance to review that. And, of course, they'll be able to discuss the Middle East, and Arab-Israeli issues as well. And we have, of course, encouraged Israel and Turkey, two close friends of the United States, to work to bridge their differences. So we'll have an opportunity to discuss those issues. That completes what we've got on the schedule for Tuesday related to UNGA.

On Wednesday, the President will address the U.N. General Assembly. As is the case each year, it's an opportunity for him to both provide an update on the state of American foreign policy, while focusing in on several priorities. I think he'll have a chance to review the progress we've made in ending the war in Iraq as we wind down to the conclusion of our military operation at the end of this year, as well as our transition in Afghanistan.

I think he'll have a chance to address the dramatic change that's taken place in the course of last year, since the last meeting of the U.N. General Assembly, with Democratic transitions in many different parts of the world; from the creation of independent South Sudan, the peaceful -- or transfer of power to a democratically elected leader in Cote d'Ivoire, but, of course, also the Arab Spring and the events in Egypt and Tunisia and Libya, as well as the ongoing struggles for democratic change in Syria. He'll, of course, address the Israeli-Palestinian issue, and express our support for a negotiated, two-state solution between the parties. And he'll be discussing the nonproliferation agenda that has

been critical to his national security policy, and that has involved actions by many of the member states of the U.N. and the United Nations itself, as well as our efforts to get the global economy moving as we approach a G20 meeting in France.

After that meeting, we will have a bilateral meeting with Prime Minister Noda of Japan. This will be the first opportunity for the President and Prime Minister to meet. There's been a lot of leadership turnover in Japan, but I think what we've seen is constant support for the alliance. So they'll discuss alliance issues, issues related to the global economy, and issues related to Asian peace and security, in advance of the President's participation in the APEC -- or hosting the APEC summit in Honolulu and participating in the East Asia Summit in Indonesia.

After that, as is the course each year, the President will have courtesy calls with the President of the U.N. General Assembly, as well as the Secretary General of the United Nations, and then he'll attend the luncheon that's hosted by the U.N. Secretary General in New York. Then he'll be delivering remarks at the Clinton Global Initiative. Each year, the President has attended the CGI to deliver brief remarks, and he will do so again this year, welcoming the work that they do and discussing issues related to global economic growth.

Following CGI, he has bilateral meetings with some of our closest allies. He'll meet with Prime Minister Cameron of the United Kingdom, and then he will meet with President Sarkozy of France. And we anticipate that they'll be able to continue their close coordination on global economic issues as the eurozone deals with a range of challenges. They'll be able to review events in Libya, where we worked with the French and the Brits to, again, protect the Libyan people and to support their aspirations. He'll have a chance to discuss other Arab Spring-related issues, including our support for change in Syria. And then I anticipate they'll of course have the opportunity to discuss issues related to Middle East peace as well.

Following those bilateral meetings, the President will meet briefly with President Kiir of South Sudan. Again, those of you who covered UNGA last year will remember that we hosted a multilateral meeting to support a successful referendum for South Sudanese independence at a time when that was very much in doubt.

We welcome, of course, South Sudan as the newest member state of the United Nations. The United States has played a long role in supporting a resolution to the conflict in Sudan and self-determination for the South Sudanese, so this will be a meeting to mark that progress.

And after that the President will be attending a reception that he does every year for the members of the UNGA. And then the only other thing I'd add is we anticipate a meeting between the President and Prime Minister Netanyahu of Israel as well. We're just working to lock in that time.

So with that, happy to take any questions.

Q Ben, two questions on that last point. Do you expect the President to meet with Abbas as well?

MR. RHODES: There are always -- UNGA is a very dynamic situation, so it's quite likely that he may meet with and have exchanges with other leaders. As we lock in any additional bilateral meetings, we'll let you know. There are no plans for that at this time. But we'll, of course, keep you updated if the schedule changes.

Q Okay. And more broadly, does the President in his address plan to speak to the issue of Palestinian statehood, specifically what the Palestinians, as we understand it, are certainly planning to do -- either before the Security Council or the General Assembly? Beyond the President's push for a return to direct talks, does he plan to address what the Palestinians are, in fact, doing? And is there a concern that might overshadow President Obama's message?

MR. RHODES: Well, I'd say a number of things. First of all, every year at the U.N. General Assembly, the Israeli-Palestinian issue is of great interest and concern to all of the member states. This year, of course, that will be the case as well.

I think what the President will focus on is a number of things as it relates to the Israeli-Palestinian issue. Number one, what we've been focused on is creating the basis for successful negotiations going forward. Clearly, we reached an impasse earlier this year as direct talks did not continue. But what we wanted to do was lay out principles that could be the basis for the parties to come back to the table.

So that's why in May the President took the step of laying out U.S. principles on security assurances for Israel, as well as the territory of a future Palestinian state being based upon 1967 lines with mutually agreed-upon swaps.

We believe that provides a basis for the parties to, again, negotiate peace and negotiate a two-state solution. We're working with our international partners, again, to broaden support for the future success of negotiations, so we're talking to our European allies, the Russians, the United Nations and members of the Quartet about ways in which we could, again, provide support for successful negotiations going forward.

So I think he will address, again, how we think the parties can come back to the table and make -- and the basis upon which they can make progress.

With regard to the Palestinian -- any Palestinian action at the U.N., you, of course, know that we've been very clear that we don't believe that unilateral actions through the United Nations will lead to a Palestinian state, that the way to achieve a Palestinian state is through negotiations between the parties. That's the only way you're going to be able to deal with issues of borders and security, and the future of Jerusalem. And, again, the final status issues have been widely known for some time now. So we believe that for peace to be lasting, for the Palestinians to realize their aspirations, that's going to have to be accomplished a negotiation with Israel, not through actions at the United Nations. So that will be the U.S. position in New York.

Mark.

Q Ben, does the U.N. recognize the TNC as the government of Libya?

MR. RHODES: There are discussions -- we want -- we certainly support that action. The United States recognized the TNC several weeks ago, and many other countries have. And there are talks going on in New York right now around precisely that question. So we would like to see the TNC recognized as the government of Libya. And, again, those talks are ongoing at the United Nations right now. Of course, there are issues that need to be resolved to actualize that, but it's something we support and it's something that's being discussed in New York.

Q Does the U.S. have any information on where Qaddafi is?

MR. RHODES: No, of course, again, I think our estimation is that there's no indication that he's left Libya. There are a variety of reports of where he might be within Libya, but none of those reports have been confirmed. You've seen some of his family members leave the country. I think what's perfectly clear is that that regime has collapsed, that they control very, very little territory in Libya. The opposition has fully consolidated control of Tripoli, for instance, and other major population centers. So we're confident that the Qaddafi regime has come to an end, but we'll continue to work with the TNC as they seek to bring Qaddafi to justice.

Q Ben, do you expect the Palestinian statehood vote to come while you're there, either in the General Assembly or the Security Council? And would the U.S. then veto if it's the Security Council?

MR. RHODES: The Palestinians have not yet made any formal notice or any formal action to bring this to the United Nations; there's actually been a lot of discussion, speculation, statements made. So we have -- we cannot say with precision when there might be Palestinian action, or whether it would be next week. We've made our position known as relates to the Security Council, that we would veto actions through the Security Council -- and oppose action through the Security Council associated with a unilateral declaration of statehood. The UNGA is obviously a different situation in terms of the fact that we are one vote in the UNGA versus the Security Council. But, again, we have no -- there has not yet been a formal notice made by the Palestinians about what they're going to pursue at the United Nations. So we can't be precise with timing.

Scott.

Q Ben, what is your assessment of what would happen if the Palestinians simply ask for observer status through the General Assembly, which we can't block? How would that complicate matters? How would the U.S. respond?

MR. RHODES: Well, again, I think from a -- we'd start from the premise that you're not going to accomplish the objective of statehood through the U.N. General Assembly or the U.N. system at all; that for there to be a Palestinian state that realizes the aspirations of the Palestinian people, they need to work this out with Israel -- of course, the country that they will be living side by side with. So, in the first instance, we don't think that you can accomplish statehood through the U.N. General Assembly.

Again, as it -- in terms of what the Palestinians may or may not pursue, there is a broad variety of courses of action. Again, our fundamental baseline position is those actions are not going to lead to a Palestinian state and that we are going to oppose efforts to deal with issues -- that should be negotiated between the parties -- at the U.N.

Scott.

Q Will the President use his speech to speak specifically to the Arab world about the U.S. position on the Palestinian statehood question, and why the U.S. believes the Palestinian situation is different, for example, from the situation in Syria or Libya?

MR. RHODES: Sure. I think the -- we will be speaking to the entire world, including the Arab world, given that it's the U.N. General Assembly. I think the President will make clear why he believes that peace can only be achieved through negotiation, that these types of actions at the U.N. don't solve the problem. We want to solve the problem. The President has called for a Palestinian state. I think he's taken a variety of steps. We've pursued different channels -- we've pursued proximity talks with the parties, we've pursued direct talks; the President has put forward principles for the basis of negotiation. It's a hard problem that's taken, of course, decades to address. But I think our fundamental message is going to be, if you support Palestinian aspirations, and if you support a Palestinian state, that the way to accomplish that is through negotiation with Israel. That's the only way you're going to reach an agreement on borders; that's the only way you're going to reach an agreement on issues related to security.

So that will be our position, and if you look at our support for self-determination, that is -- that runs across the world. But, for instance, if you look at South Sudan -- that was -- the South Sudanese achieved their independence through a negotiated settlement that, again, allowed them to reach an agreement with the support of the international community, with Sudan and the government of Sudan there, and to have, again, an independence ceremony this year. Every situation is different; what's constant is the U.S. support for self-determination in the world. But in the context of a conflict like this one, we believe that the way to achieve that goal is through negotiation.

Q If I could follow, in your diplomatic efforts to get talks started again or a proposal on the table that could be accepted for those talks to start again -- the Israelis say there's no preconditions on beginning those talks, and yet I'm confused at times because they seem to suggest that the Palestinians would have to recognize Israel as a Jewish state before they begin. What is your understanding of the Israeli position on what they would accept to begin talks?

MR. RHODES: Well, again, I wouldn't want to characterize the Israeli position. I think what is true is that the Israelis have indicated a willingness to move back into direct talks. The Israelis have, of course, sought that recognition in the past, so that's been an enduring position of the Israeli government. The United States, of course, has expressed our belief that, again, a two-state solution would include a Jewish state of Israel as the homeland for the Jewish people. But in terms of sequencing, that's really a question for the Israeli government. But those positions have been firmly established for some time.

Q But it obviously matters a lot if it's a precondition or if it's resolved in negotiation, obviously, that --

MR. RHODES: Yes, and I would -- the Israelis are the ones who would have to speak to their negotiating position.

Yes.

Q Ben, back in 1988-1989, the Palestinians also made a drive to upgrade their status at the United Nations, and at that time the -- I believe it was the Bush administration threatened that any U.N. organization that admitted them or upgraded their status, any multilateral organization, would be cut off from U.S. funding. Is the Obama administration taking the same position? And are there -- would there be any adverse consequences from the U.S. if the Palestinians go forward to seek upgraded status?

MR. RHODES: I think, at this point, we don't even know with any degree of certainty what course of action the Palestinians are going to pursue at the U.N., what the sequencing of actions they may pursue at the U.N. will be. So I wouldn't want to address potential consequences to those actions before we can look exactly at the situation we're dealing with. Clearly, we don't believe that the way for the Palestinians to realize statehood is through the U.N. system. So we'll continue to oppose those efforts. But until we know what the precise proposal is, we're not capable of, again, speaking about potential consequences.

Margaret.

Q Thanks, Ben. I want to make sure I understand -- I understand how the President will talk about the Libya situation in the UNGA speech, but will that be the thrust of the speech, or is the speech more about the early successes in Libya and the Arab Spring -- about that situation, or will there -- I mean, all of us talking about the setup are like, oh, the Palestinian situation. Is that what he considers the main thing he wants to talk about in that speech? And then also, how is he planning to deal, both publicly in his speech and also privately in the bilats, with the European economic crisis? I know it's -- UNGA is more foreign policy, but that's the elephant in the room.

MR. RHODES: Yes. No, look, the way we -- I think it'd be quite similar to how we've addressed this in the last two years, when this was also an issue of acute interest and concern. The President has a broad agenda, as you've heard here, in terms of our support for Libya, in terms of our support for the promotion of democracy through our Open Government Initiative and other measures. And I think in his speech he'll be speaking to that broad agenda.

And it, frankly, comes at a time of great promise in many respects. The United States is winding down the two wars that have dominated our engagement with the world for the last 10 years. We have decimated the leadership of al Qaeda, and we've seen the advancement of human rights and democracy in parts of the world that had not known them before in the Middle East and North Africa. So it's a time of great promise, and I think that the President will be speaking to that promise.

But, of course, there is also frustration with the lack of progress on Israeli-Palestinian peace, so he'll be speaking to that as well. But I think it's one part of a broader agenda and a broader message that encompasses a range of U.S. security interests, economic interests and priorities.

On the euro -- the situation in Europe and the global economy, I think it will certainly be an issue of discussion, of course, with President Sarkozy and Prime Minister Cameron, as well as President Rouseff, Prime Minister Noda. A lot of the nations coming -- that the President will be meeting with at the UNGA, of course, have a stake in dealing with the challenges in the global economy.

I'd also point out that it comes about six weeks before the meeting of the G20 in France at the beginning of November, so it's also an opportunity for him to discuss with his G20 counterparts how they might want to, again, continue close economic coordination that has proven so critical over the course of the last two and a half years, as we lead into France. So I think there will be some of that -- those discussions as well.

Q Quick follow. What -- other than saying Europe has to do something, what can the U.S. actually do to try to effect a positive outcome of the European crisis?

MR. RHODES: Well, I think, again, we have seen that, insofar as we are able to coordinate our approaches with the Europeans, have an understanding of how they're addressing their own challenges and have an ability to discuss with them how we're supporting growth here in the United States, that allows us to give greater confidence in terms of what we're doing going forward on the economy.

As it gets into some of those specifics, there are people who are better capable of me speaking to that. I know Secretary Geithner has been traveling recently as well.

So, again, I think the issue I'd underscore from my perspective is the coordination, the essential nature of the G20 as a body to foster that coordination, and, again, the ability to have kind of a constant line of communication with some of these critical partners like the French and the British.

Q May I follow up?

MR. RHODES: Yes.

Q Thank you. The BRICs are scheduled on the 22nd to discuss the issue of the BRICs helping the EU. I understand it's the initiative of the Brazilians. So do you expect that issue to be discussed between the President and President Rouseff?

MR. RHODES: Again, I think that you'll see him discussing the situation in Europe and the eurozone with a number of his counterparts. I couldn't get into specifics of the [BRIC] proposal.

Q But do you agree with the approach in general?

MR. RHODES: I wouldn't be the one to comment on that.

Q And if I may, another issue. The Russians say that they wanted the Security Council on Kosovo to at least come out and say, we think this issue should be decided through dialogue, on both sides. And they say --

MR. RHODES: Kosovo, you said? Kosovo, is that what you --

Q Kosovo. Mitrovica, northern Kosovo. They say, let's support at least a dialogue, the principle of dialogue between all sides. And they say our Western friends did not support that. Can you tell me if you think that is true, and then why?

MR. RHODES: I don't have the specifics on the discussions that have taken place at the Security Council. We've obviously been working for some time now to calm the situation and to provide a peaceful way forward. But, again, I think the folks in Europe would be best positioned on that.

Sam.

Q This week, the President has had a rough week, in terms of coverage, in the wake of New York 9 -- a lot of speculation that the President is losing Jewish voters. Does the administration view this speech next week as an opportunity to sort of reaffirm the President's commitment to Israel?

MR. RHODES: Well, I think it's an opportunity to reaffirm the actions that have been taken over the course of the last two and a half years. I think what you've seen, time and again, is the United States and Israel standing together, and the United States supporting Israel -- in some instances, unprecedented ways.

The security cooperation between the United States and Israel has never been stronger. Ehud Barak has made comments that make that point. We've provided assistance to ensure their qualitative military edge; we've provided assistance related to Iron Dome that's been critical to protecting the people of Israel against the threat of incoming missiles and rockets.

Similarly, we've stood up against the de-legitimization of Israel at the U.N. repeatedly. In the first year, we stood up against efforts to single them out in the Goldstone Report. Last year, we stood up against efforts to single them out around the issue related to the flotilla to Gaza. And so, we have a strong record of standing up against efforts to single out Israel, to engage in the de-legitimization of Israel through the U.N. system and other venues.

And this year flows out of that. And just recently, of course, you've seen the United States intervene, to try to resolve a crisis in Cairo at the Israeli Embassy, for which the Israelis have made very clear that that was a symbol of the closeness of the relationship.

So, I think if you look at the security ties, the U.S. efforts to counter de-legitimization of Israel, and, again, U.S. efforts to achieve a peace through negotiated settlement, we've got a very strong record of support for Israel that should be evident to anybody who shares our concern for the future security and prosperity of Israel.

So I think this week comes in that continuum and will extend, again, the ties between our two countries. And the President will be able to make that point.

Q Should we expect the President to remind folks of everything you just said?

MR. RHODES: I don't think he necessarily has to. I think that it's evident; the security cooperation is evident; the de-legitimization efforts by us to counter those de-legitimization efforts are evident. So I think he'll be speaking broadly to the unbreakable bond between the United States and Israel. But I think the range of steps that we've taken should be clear to many, to include, by the way, also a very prioritized focus on dealing with the Iranian nuclear program, including sanctions through the U.N. that go far beyond anything that existed before in the past.

Q As you've said, a lot depends on what the Palestinians decide to do, what their course of action is. Can you give a sense of what, if any, progress is being made by the U.S. diplomatic mission over there to try to dissuade them from taking the statehood route? The Palestinians, Abbas himself, have said in recent days that they're going to go ahead no matter what.

MR. RHODES: I think David Hale, our envoy, and Dennis Ross, from the White House, are in the region right now. They're having discussions with Israelis and Palestinians, but also other allies and partners of the United States. I think the principal focus of those efforts is to strengthen, again, a basis for negotiations going forward that, again, will have a greater chance of meeting Palestinian aspirations than action through the U.N.; and that, frankly, there's going to have to be -- whatever happens at the United Nations, there's going to have to be a process to get these parties back to the table when we get beyond next week.

So insofar as we can work with allies and partners around the world to engender greater support for a firm basis for negotiations going forward -- the President has already laid out ideas in his May speech around security and territory that could be a starting point for those negotiations -- that's what we're focused on. And, frankly, that's what our discussions with the Palestinians focus upon, the fact that that's the best way for them to achieve statehood -- and, frankly, the only way. Because you're not going to be able to negotiate the issues associated with statehood -- territory, security, the range of final status issues, Jerusalem, refugees -- unless it's the two parties negotiating themselves.

Q Yes, sorry. Just one other subject. This is not specifically UNGA, but there is word now that the administration has decided against selling F-16 jets to Taiwan, the new ones, but are going to put forth a proposal for a large package of -- for upgrading existing F-16s and providing other arms to the tune of about \$4.2 billion. Can you confirm that Congress is being briefed on that and give a sense of when this will be announced?

MR. RHODES: We can't brief on foreign military sales until Congress has been formally notified, so I'm not in a position to discuss that beyond saying that any actions that we take are in line with the Taiwan Relations Act, and are focused on meeting the defense

needs of the Taiwanese. But at this point, I don't want to -- we can't speak to that until formal notification of Congress takes place.

Q Ben.

MR. RHODES: Yes.

Q The President is going to speak or talk to anybody from South Asia, including India, Pakistan or Bangladesh? Also if there will be any discussion on the expansion of the U.N. Security Council? And finally, any discussion on the China situation and the international waters?

MR. RHODES: International waters?

Q Yes, sir.

MR. RHODES: Yes. Just to address the bilateral question, we don't have any bilateral meetings planned at this point. I think that it is our expectation that the President will be able to see -- in his travels later this year, including to the East Asia Summit and other forums, he'll have opportunities to engage with Prime Minister Singh.

Similarly, I think -- I notice that Prime Minister Gilani is not coming to the U.N. either anymore, given the flooding in Pakistan. So there are no bilateral meetings planned. I think we anticipate opportunities later in the year to have consultations with, for instance, Prime Minister Singh and the Indians.

In terms of international waters, I think that this comes up in New York, I think we anticipate there being a discussion -- a lot of discussions around issues related to international waters -- for instance, the South China Sea and other issues -- at those meetings later in the year when we are in Indonesia at the East Asia Summit and some of those other venues. So it's not a focus of UNGA, but we see on the horizon opportunities to address those issues.

Q And the expansion of the U.N. --

MR. RHODES: Again, there's been no evolution in the U.S. position. We obviously have expressed our support for permanent membership for India during the President's trip. Again, I think insofar as there's any discussion, I think what the President will be saying is you see many aspirants to greater status at the Security Council -- on the Security Council today. And I think the President will reiterate that all nations who participate in the Security Council system have a responsibility to uphold peace and security through their actions at the Security Council. And we had a very successful vote on Libya -- two votes actually -- that I think are very strong indicators of the strength of the Security Council, in that you had, at the U.S. request, provisions for all necessary measures to protect civilians in Libya -- that has not been the case for many years -- that allowed, I think, one of the more successful humanitarian interventions to prevent a massacre to go forward, that, again, spoke to the legitimacy and the strength of U.N.-sanctioned action.

And so I think that one of the things that we take away from the Libya operation is that the U.N. has a critical role to play in these issues; that the international community can prevent a mass atrocity; and that going forward, we want to continue to work through the United Nations and with multilateral partners to accomplish those objectives.

Q Thanks. Two questions. First, can you sort of give your assessment of where U.S. standing is now in the Muslim world, a little over two years after the Cairo speech, and what impact you think a veto, if it comes to that, in the Security Council would have?

And also, just a quick scheduling question. Is there any reason why he's not meeting with Merkel on this trip, on the European --

MR. RHODES: On the latter question -- I'm not sure if she's -- first of all, I'm not sure if she's coming or not. But we did just host her here for a state visit; they speak frequently on the phone. Actually, I think they're going to speak soon, again on the phone.

So, I think we're very closely coordinated with Chancellor Merkel. Again, she was here recently; we'll see her again. So there's no particular reason. We believe that we have the ability to coordinate closely with her.

On the standing question, I think what we've seen since President Obama took office is dramatic increases in the approval of U.S. leadership and the standing of the United States in many parts of the world. In Africa, in Asia, in Europe and the Americas, you see dramatic upticks in public opinion. We do see, again, continued challenge around public opinion in the Arab world, in particular.

So, in the first instance, I think, in different parts of the Muslim world -- Indonesia, Malaysia, concentrations in Europe, other places -- you see -- we've seen an increase in public opinion associated with the United States.

I think the Arab world has continued to be very challenging, and I think I'd ascribe that to two factors. Number one, what the President spoke about in Cairo, which is a very long legacy of mistrust that built up over a very long time, and that you're not going to be able to resolve those issues quickly, but rather, what you need to do is lay out the markers of where you're trying to go. And that provides a basis to build partnerships with people. And we feel like we're moving in that direction on a host of issues, whether it's ending the war in Iraq, supporting Democratic transitions in these countries that allows us to align our interests and our values in places like Egypt and Tunisia.

But I think the principal challenge has been the Israeli-Palestinian issue. And I think there's no question that there is great frustration at the lack of progress on the Israeli-Palestinian issue, in the Arab world, which is not -- again, which is not surprising given how important that issue is to people.

I think we share that frustration. The United States would like to see progress on this issue; I think the Israelis would like to see progress on this issue. The question is how you're going to achieve it. And, again, we don't believe that acting through the U.N. is going to accomplish the Palestinian objective of an independent state.

We believe that the way to accomplish that objective is through negotiated settlement, and the President has been, I think, very affirmative and persistent in pursuing different ways to resolve a conflict that has, again, gone on for decades; it didn't begin when this administration took office.

So that will continue to be an area where people in the Arab world want to see more progress. That's not surprising to us, but I think the best way to address that is to accomplish peace, and the best way to accomplish peace is through a negotiated settlement.

Q Would a -- if it comes to that -- a high-profile veto make that worse, despite all the work that President Obama has done to try to be seen as an honest broker on this issue?

MR. RHODES: I think that there is just a -- there is a general lack of -- until you're really making progress on resolving the issue, that that frustration is going to be ongoing. Whatever the particular manifestation of the challenge is at the time.

So I think what we've seen is a general frustration with the lack of progress that preceded the UNGA, and that will continue until, I think, we can signal that the parties are making progress towards peace. So I think it's an ongoing dynamic, and it's one that we're focused on addressing by solving the problem.

Q And do you think that -- I mean, there's obviously ongoing negotiations -- or efforts right now to bring them back to the table, yet we're just a few days away. Is there much real hope that you can have some kind of a breakthrough that forestalls this? I mean, what makes you feel that there is, that this can --

MR. RHODES: Well, no, I think that whatever happens in New York, this is going to have to be resolved between Israelis and Palestinians. So therefore, we're working now to have a basis for those negotiations. Again, that's why the President took the step he did in May, because direct talks preceding that had reached an impasse. So our view was we wanted to put out ideas that could be the starting point for negotiations so that, again, you start from a basis that's closer to your objective of a two-state solution, and that's why he put out the positions on security and territory.

That's going to continue to be the case, again, no matter what happens in New York, insofar as we're able to broaden international support for a basis for negotiations. That's going to be critical to getting the parties back to the table either way. So, again, we think it's time worth investing in terms of building international support for a basis for negotiations, and that there's going to have to be talks by the parties at some point to resolve this issue. So that's where we're investing our time and effort.

Q Thanks, Ben.

Q Thank you, Ben. On bilat with Japanese Prime Minister Noda, can you tell us a little bit more about what's going to -- what they're going to discuss on economy -- especially on economy? It's been six months since the earthquake, and there was a supply chain

disruption because of that, and which had some impact on the U.S. economy. And now Japanese economy is recovering --

MR. RHODES: Yes. No, I think that the agenda for that meeting will -- it's their first meeting, so I think that they'll want to address basic alliance issues, and a reaffirmation of support for the alliance. I think the United States invested a lot of time and effort in supporting the recovery efforts in Japan, so I think we'll be discussing those efforts and what Prime Minister Noda assesses as the state of play in Japan in the aftermath of the earthquake and tsunami.

I think they will focus a lot on economic issues. I think they'll discuss Japanese efforts to get their economy moving again, which would be critical to the global economy, to the U.S. economy as well. And I think that they'll want to coordinate in advance of the G20 in France, where Prime Minister Noda will, of course, be attending his first G20 meeting.

So I think economic issues will be a principal focus. They may also touch on Japanese support for efforts in Afghanistan and the Middle East and North Africa, where they've provided a role in terms of humanitarian assistance, political support. They've made a strong statement on Syria, for instance, and they've made constructive statements on Libya. So I think that -- but I think you're right; economic issues will be at the forefront.

Q Quick Netanyahu question, just real fast?

MR. RHODES: Yes.

Q Just, is the point of the meeting with Netanyahu to try to figure out if there's some compromise or -- either offer to the Palestinians that can be made, or a different type of UNGA resolution if the Palestinians are intent on having one? Is that kind of the goal of that meeting?

MR. RHODES: Well, I think the goal of the meeting is to determine, again, what is the best way to get the parties back together. And, again, I think we don't know yet the precise nature of what the Palestinians will seek at the United Nations. But, irrespective of that, we want to get a process reestablished that allows the parties to actually accomplish the goal of two states. So I think this will be a chance for them to discuss the efforts that we made diplomatically to date to support those negotiations, to address the situation at the United Nations, which will be very fluid, and to address, frankly, also our support for Israel more generally, and, again, our support for Israel and some of our other friends and allies in the region, like Turkey and Egypt, to move forward with repairing their relations as well.

MR. CARNEY: Let's do two more for Ben.

Q Has the President tried to reach out to Mahmoud Abbas personally and convince him not to take this course in the United Nations? And I have another question on Syria, please.

MR. RHODES: He has not spoken to President Abbas recently. Again, we've had a team in the region, I think, that's been consulting with the Palestinians and have consulted with President Abbas in recent weeks. We'll keep you abreast of any conversations that he might have with President Abbas.

Q And on Syria: Now that there is a regional support and international support for action in Syria, will the President try to capitalize on that in New York and ask for specific actions to help that change that you support happen in Syria?

MR. RHODES: We have called for President Assad to go. We have put in place the most robust sanctions that we can. We've worked with the Europeans, too, as they've pursued sanctions so that we're internationalizing our efforts to cut off funding for the regime so that it can't bankroll its crackdown. We've supported efforts by the Syrian opposition to put forward ideas about a democratic transition in Syria.

I think what we're focused on in New York, though, is we would like to see more robust action by the U.N. Security Council on Syria. We have supported a resolution out of the U.N. Security Council that would include a condemnation of Syrian actions, the types of sanctions that we're pursuing. Thus far, the Security Council has only issued a presidential statement, which was an important signal of international concern and condemnation of the regime's actions, but we would continue to support a U.N. Security Council resolution on Syria, and I think that will come up in New York as well.

MR. CARNEY: Last one.

Q Ben, you talked about Iran briefly on nuclear security -- nuclear issues. To what extent will he be using the speech to talk about the kinds of themes that you talked about also -- democracy, transition, and aspirations, freedom aspirations?

MR. RHODES: Yes.

Q For Iran.

MR. RHODES: I think it comes up in both contexts. First of all, on the nuclear side, I think the President has, again, a very aggressive agenda on nuclear issues that started in Prague that included efforts to reduce our own stockpiles through the START treaty; that included international efforts to lock down nuclear materials; that will continue next year in Seoul, and he'll speak to that; and that includes efforts to strengthen the nonproliferation regime and the NPT.

Iran is the principal -- a principal outlier to that treaty. They are the only country that is a party to the IAEA that cannot convince the IAEA of the peaceful intent of its program. So I think you'll hear the President discussing how Iran has failed repeatedly to meet its obligations to assure the peaceful nature of its program.

In terms of democracy, we saw in Tehran, a year before Tunisia, people protesting in the streets for their basic universal rights. And so I think the President will continue to speak to the fact that we want to see people everywhere have the capability of expressing

themselves, of living in peace, of choosing their leaders. And Iran has, again, thus far responded to those aspirations with suppression. And there's great hypocrisy in the Iranian government when they assert their support for democracy, and yet crack down on their own people and support a brutal crackdown in Syria by their principal ally in the region, President Assad. So I think the President will be speaking to support for democracy and universal rights across the region, and that includes Iran.

MR. CARNEY: Thank you all very much. Thanks, Ben. Appreciate it.

I'll take questions on other subjects unless you want to continue on this one. Somebody has got a very fancy carrying case here. I like that.

I wanted to get -- you were trying to get a question. Let me see if I can help you out.

Q Just regarding Obama at bilateral meeting in New York, Prime Minister Erdogan was in region, North Africa, Egypt, Tunisia, Libya today, giving strong messages to Arab nations, Islam and democracy, but also a strong message to Israel. So what is the President's view on this comment, or what President wants to accomplish meeting with --

MR. CARNEY: With --

Q Erdogan Tuesday.

MR. CARNEY: Well, as you know, they have an excellent relationship and it's an incredibly important bilateral relationship. And it's one of a series of meetings and conversations that the two leaders have had, and they'll continue to discuss the issues that are of vital importance between their two countries.

On the issue of actions that the Palestinians may take, our position is clear. And it is driven by a very clear policy goal, which is a goal shared by and sought by the Palestinian leadership and the Palestinian people, which is the creation of their own state. We firmly believe that taking the action that's been posited as possible would actually not help the Palestinians achieve their goal; would, in fact, be counterproductive. And our focus, the President's focus, has been on bringing the two parties back together so that peace can be achieved and a two-state solution can be achieved, and that can only be achieved through direct negotiations between the Israelis and the Palestinians.

Q Jay.

MR. CARNEY: You're good? Yes, sir.

Q Do you have any reaction to the -- I guess there are a couple stories out today that outline some dissatisfaction among Democrats, principally on Capitol Hill, with the style and effectiveness of the Chief of Staff here.

MR. CARNEY: Bill Daley is an excellent Chief of Staff. He is a fantastic leader both internally and externally in advancing the President's policy goals. He brings enormous experience to the job. And I would simply say that he took over that job at a pretty critical and remarkable time if you think about the change that came with the midterm elections,

the -- I believe he started, or hadn't even started yet but was beginning to enter the office when the shootings happened in Tucson, and then everything that has gone on since. He has had -- he is the Chief of Staff for this President at a time of divided government when obviously we have had to deal, as you have chronicled and your colleagues have chronicled, with divided leadership on Capitol Hill. And he has handled those significant responsibilities with great skill and elan.

Q Some friends at the Associated Press have a story out this morning quoting some email from -- between OMB officials with regard to Solyndra. I thought I had it in my notes here. "The optics will be bad," one reportedly writes to the other, if Solyndra were to collapse because the campaign season is "heating up." So, sort of a follow on yesterday's question, did politics play any role in not only generating the approval for the loan backing in the first case, or in the second case when they received more money, sort of a doubling down -- literally a doubling down -- another endorsement both financial and politically or at least economically of their business plan?

MR. CARNEY: The answer is no, and it's supported by the very email that you reference, because the loan process was run by the Department of Energy, merit-based by career officials. The interest at the White House was in, as we've discussed previously, when that decision would be made, one way or the other, so that decisions about scheduling an event for the Vice President could be made.

So I think the email you reference, my understanding is from the career person internally, was -- I think demonstrated -- makes the point that approval of the loan had to do with the merits as the experts at the Department of Energy saw them, and then the decision for the Vice -- and then the decision about scheduling an event flowed from that.

Q Can I follow up on Solyndra?

MR. CARNEY: Yes. Let me work my way back. But it will be fast.

Q Just a quick one. The President, to lay out his jobs plan, went before a joint session of Congress; on Monday he is going to be announcing his recommendations for debt reduction for the super committee. How is he going to do that? What's the -- what kind of -- ceremony, speech --

MR. CARNEY: He will communicate it, and we'll let you know -- we'll announce the venue and the methodology at an appropriate time.

Q When? Today?

MR. CARNEY: When will we announce it? Soon.

Q Will he -- can you say at least will he be making an appearance of some sort to do that, or would this be --

MR. CARNEY: Why don't I just wait for the announcement. You can be sure that -- a few things. The President will deliver on his commitment to providing a detailed proposal for long-term deficit and debt -- deficit reduction and debt control. It will be consistent with the views he's made clear, abundantly clear, since his speech at George Washington University about the need for balance, taking a balanced approach, that if we take a balanced approach, we do not have to do radical things like end welfare as we know it. Not welfare -- going back to my times as a reporter in the '90s -- but to end Medicare as we know it, which is -- as we know, they don't like to talk about it anymore -- but as the House Republicans put forward in the so-called Ryan budget. What was striking about the Speaker's jobs speech yesterday is that when he said, "No tax hikes," he was essentially reiterating the position of the Ryan budget, because there's no way to get from here to there if you don't do it in a balanced way, without tattooing Medicare, without decimating programs that support vulnerable Americans.

So back to first principles here: Balance is what the American people demand; balance is what the President will put forward on Monday.

Yes, sir.

Q I think you were asked a question yesterday about the Jewish -- losing support among Jewish voters. And I know Sam earlier also posed that --

MR. CARNEY: Ben took a question on that.

Q Yes. And the question is usually answered in, "The administration continues to have strong support from the Prime Minister of Israel," but is there any concern on the President's part about losing support among Jewish voters?

MR. CARNEY: The President is focused on getting the policy right. And the President's policy approach to Israel has been anchored in his unshakable commitment to Israel's security, an unshakable commitment that was articulated not just by him, but validated recently by the Prime Minister of Israel and the former head of Mossad in vivid language.

The President is committed to pushing a process forward that he believes will result in Israel and the Palestinian people achieving their long-sought-after goals: Israel, a secure Jewish state; and Palestinian, a state -- the Palestinians, a state of their own. So the answer is, he pursues the policy that he believes is in the best interest of the United States. It is grounded in his unshakable commitment to Israel's security, which is a commitment that this country has and that he deeply adheres to. And then the politics of this, I think, are -- take care of themselves, as they do with all the policies the President pursues. And I would simply, again, point you to the things he has done as President to so clearly demonstrate his commitment to Israel's security, and clearly demonstrate his commitment to pushing a process forward that, in the end, -- in answer to questions about the Palestinians as well -- that have embedded in them the ultimate goal here, which is a two-state solution that achieves both the Israelis' and the Palestinians' goals.

Q Thanks, Jay.

MR. CARNEY: Okay. Let me do one more. Ann Compton.

Q Thank you very much. The Wall Street Journal assessment of economists puts the possibility of a double-dip recession now at one in three. The President, with his joint session speech, said that the economy is now stalled. Does he now think it is a greater likelihood that a double-dip recession --

MR. CARNEY: I'm not going to -- again, we do not believe and -- we do not believe, based on the economic data, that there will be that kind of eventuality. But it is essential, because the economy, the economic growth, has stalled, and because job creation has slowed, that we take the kinds of actions that the President advocated in his joint session speech.

It has been described, I think accurately, as you need an insurance policy here. Let's say it's a one-in-three chance that that could happen. Obviously that's below 50/50, but you need -- we need greater growth and job creation, regardless of the statistical level of growth and the numerical level of job creation.

There is no debate -- there may be a debate about forecasting and what may or may not happen if we don't take action. What we do know is if we don't pass the American Jobs Act, according to outside economists, we forego the opportunity provided in that act to grow the economy by up to 2 percent, and create jobs up to -- between 1.3 and 1.9 million.

So that is why the President is advocating that. That is why those who put forward plans of their own need to be asked by you --

(Mr. Carney is given a glass of water.)

Oh, you are so kind, thank you. How about that?

Q Wow.

MR. CARNEY: Need to be asked by you, do those plans -- (laughter) -- she must have heard my voice, I was a little parched.

Q It's a signal that it's time to stop.

MR. CARNEY: Yes, it is. Well, Ben -- clearly she's communicating with Ben. It's like, get out of here, take the hook.

But anyway, those people who put forward jobs proposals, economic proposals, as the President did, their speeches -- if they're just speeches rather than concrete plans -- need to be evaluated, need to be held to the same standard. And they need to be judged as to whether they meet the test that the President's plan met, which is look -- have outside economists look at it -- not partisan think tankers -- outside economists look at it, and judge it -- judge whether it answers this question: Does it add to economic growth and job creation in the next year? If the answer is no, then it's not sufficient; it doesn't meet the demand the American people are putting out there.

So, with that, I will go to my final question, because I know you're desperate --

Q Are you going to reintroduce the American Jobs Act in the House? Are the Democrats --

MR. CARNEY: Well, as you know, we -- there are no elected members of Congress here to introduce bills. The process will go forward in the House and the Senate. We are absolutely confident of that.

There is a lot of effort right now to get you guys to pay attention to the process. Is the President meeting with this person, what's happening here -- it's like -- there is overwhelming support among Democrats. There is substantial majority support among Americans for the jobs proposals that the President put forward. There is also historically bipartisan support for the proposals he put forward. So that -- and economic outside analysis that says this jobs program will do, if enacted, what needs to be done for this country.

The procedural aspects of this are a nice distraction from the fact that we haven't seen commensurate jobs proposals from others, but they are a sideshow.

The procedure will take care of itself. The Senate has been acting on urgent things that are totally consistent with the President's vision. Let's avoid the kind of showdown -- ridiculous showdown -- we had over the FAA extension. Let's take care of that -- Senate acted on that. Let's make sure that we get those construction workers who are affected by the surface transportation bill, make sure they're employed and working. Senate is taking care of that. These are all consistent with the President's focus on the need to create jobs.

Yes, sir. Last question.

Q Jay, you've said that the White House was merely interested in OMB and the timing of when they would get this thing done. Can you explain why, in several of the emails, OMB staffers are indicating that they feel that they are being rushed?

MR. CARNEY: Again, I think that there was an interest in, we need a decision, one way or the other, so that we can decide whether or not -- so we can know whether or not we're going to schedule an event. That is -- there is just no evidence, as -- and again, this is all based on stuff that this administration has provided to a committee in Congress that then leaks it to you guys -- but this is part of a process where we're following the rules.

There is no evidence in anything you've seen that suggests otherwise.

Q But there is -- the OMB staffers themselves --

MR. CARNEY: We were saying that we need a decision. If the decision is no, okay. If the decision is yes, okay. But we need a decision.

Q So did you indeed rush them then if you're saying you need a decision?

MR. CARNEY: No. No.

Q Can we get -- why did they -- they said --

MR. CARNEY: The focus was on, can we schedule this event?

Q Several different ones said they were rushed.

MR. CARNEY: You can write it the way you want it. Write it based on the evidence.

Q I'm just quoting --

MR. CARNEY: And I'm saying that the focus was on -- as is clear in the emails -- we need to know if we're going to have this event or not.

Thanks guys.

END

11:26 A.M. EDT