

# Press Briefing by Press Secretary Josh Earnest, 8/29/2014

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James S. Brady Press Briefing Room

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MR. EARNEST: Before we get started, and just for the sake of efficiency, I know that there is at least one aspect of the President's news conference yesterday that attracted some attention. So I thought I might just sort of go over at least one aspect of that argument. And it's specifically this: The President stands squarely behind the decision that he made yesterday to wear his summer suit at yesterday's news conference. (Laughter.) It's the Thursday before Labor Day -- he feels pretty good about it.

So, anyway, with that bit frivolity out of the way -- Nedra.

Q So why aren't you wearing --

MR. EARNEST: I will say that I contemplated it. It seemed like it might be a little too much.

Nedra, do you want to get started with some more serious questions today?

Q Yes. Does the United States see a higher terror threat here following the announcement by Britain today?

MR. EARNEST: Well, Nedra, I can confirm that the British government has raised its domestic threat level from substantial to severe. Senior White House officials and other national security officials in the administration had been in touch with their British counterparts about this. I'd refer you to the British for the explanation about why they had made this determination in terms of their own terror threat level.

I understand that they have -- that, generally speaking, that it's related to the threat posed by foreign fighters that have Western passports, that have British passports that are fighting alongside ISIL in Syria. This is a threat that the United States has been focused on. We've been coordinating closely with our allies, both the Brits but others in Europe, about countering this threat and mitigating it. We've been doing that by cooperating through law enforcement channels, through national security channels, but also through intelligence channels as well.

As it relates to the United States national terror alert system, I don't anticipate at this point that there's a plan to change that level. But those are official announcements that are made by the Department of Homeland Security, so I'd refer you to them for an official determination on that. But it's my understanding right now that there are no plans to change it.

Q Does this administration believe that the Islamic State militants currently pose a threat to Americans here in the United States?

MR. EARNEST: Well, the concern, Nedra, that we have articulated is not dissimilar from the threat that the British have identified and acted on today. For a number of months now, we have been monitoring those individuals that have Western passports, that are citizens of Western countries -- either the United States or in Europe -- who have made the decision to travel to Syria or that broader region, taken up arms alongside ISIL. But they pose a threat because they've received military training, they are now battle-hardened, and they've demonstrated a willingness to risk their lives for their cause. Those individuals, as I mentioned, have Western passports, and that does give them some freedom of movement that could allow them to come back to the West and carry out acts of violence.

That is why the United States, in conjunction with our partners -- so these are other allied countries of ours -- have been monitoring this situation, have been tracking -- or at least monitoring the movements of these individuals. INTERPOL is involved in this effort. There are also countries in the region that have been supportive of the efforts of the United States and our allies to monitor the situation.

The United States is always making adjustments to counterterrorism measures. Some of those measures are seen and some of those are unseen. We talk about this typically when it comes to aviation security. But it is true as it relates to other aspects of our nation's homeland security system.

So this is a threat that we are monitoring. It's one that we had been focused on for quite some time. It has been the focus of intensive discussions inside the administration. It's also been the focus of intensive discussions with governments in the region and around the world.

Q Can you explain why the President changed his travel plans today to come back to the White House tonight? Does it have anything to do with this terror threat?

MR. EARNEST: It is not specifically related to any sort of assessment or change in the terror threat that's currently emanating from that region of the world. Merely, this is an opportunity for the President -- when he saw his schedule -- decided that he'd rather just make the late evening flight back here home to the White House. He can sleep in his own bed, do a little work tomorrow, spend some time with his family, and then travel back to New York tomorrow evening to attend a private event.

Q When you say "do a little work," is he planning to meet with advisors on any of these current pressing world problems?

MR. EARNEST: I don't know at this point of any specific meetings. But if there are meetings that take place that we can tell you about, then we'll let you know.

Steve.

Q Did the President yesterday mean to signal that he's nowhere near a decision on airstrikes in Syria, and, in fact, is not convinced that it's a good thing to do?

MR. EARNEST: I think the President was pretty explicit that he is determined to make sure that every element of his national security strategy is thought through. The strategy that he's laid out is multi-faceted. It includes a lot of important diplomatic work, both with the Iraqi government, but also with governments in the region. It includes some military work, separate from active kinetic strikes, but military work that's focused on offering support to the Kurdish and Iraqi security forces. There's a lot of -- there's an important military-to-military relationship there, and one that we're going to continue to cultivate.

But military action by the United States is also a part of this -- is also an important component of this strategy. The President has authorized military action in Iraq. And those military actions have produced some positive results. Just in the last few weeks, because of American military action, we averted a humanitarian disaster at Mount Sinjar. Because of military action in support of Kurdish and Iraqi security forces, we were able to blunt the rapid advance on Erbil. That's important because there's an American consulate in Erbil and American citizens, American personnel who are working in Erbil on a range of functions, including closely coordinating with Iraqi and Kurdish security forces.

There was also important work that was done by the United States military to conduct strikes in support of Iraqi and Kurdish security forces to retake the Mosul Dam. That's a piece of critical infrastructure in Iraq.

So we've already demonstrated, and the President has already demonstrated, a willingness to order military action and strikes in Iraq. Those were part of a thought-through strategy in terms of trying to safeguard American citizens who are in Iraq. And the President wants to be similarly rigorous as we think through other aspects of our strategy that could include military action. There are some who have called for the President to take action -- or order military action in Syria. The Pentagon is developing plans or military options for the President to consider, if he decides that it's necessary to do so. But at this point, the President hasn't made any decisions and hasn't ordered any military action in Syria. But if he does take that step it will be one that is carefully considered, one that is deliberately arrived at, and one that will be made in close consultation with the United States Congress.

And what sort of timeframe are you looking at in the decision-making process?

MR. EARNEST: Well, I wouldn't speculate about timeframe at this point. The President has been deliberate about this process, he'll continue to be. And I think that was evident from his answer on this question yesterday.

Q And lastly, on the immigration order question, is there -- are you thinking about delaying it for a little while because you don't want to impact the discussions over the CR that could trigger a budget shutdown, a government shutdown?

MR. EARNEST: Well, at this point, Steve, I don't have an update in terms of timing. You did hear from the President yesterday where he reiterated his strong commitment to take action within the scope of his authority to solve or at least address so many of the problems that are created by our broken immigration system.

There is legislation that has passed through the Senate, as we know, that would have addressed so many of these problems in a way that would have had substantial benefits for our economy. Unfortunately, we've seen Republicans in the House engage in a political strategy to block that piece of legislation from even coming up for a vote.

The President is disappointed that House Republicans have pursued that political strategy, and that's why the President has resolved to use as much authority as he can muster within the confines of the law to try to solve this problem on his own. He does that hoping that House Republicans will come to their senses at some point and pass a piece of legislation that would be even more impactful in terms of solving those problems, and would supersede any sort of executive action that he might take.

But the President is determined as ever to take that kind of action on his own, simply because House Republicans have blocked the ability of Congress to try to solve this problem.

Jim.

Q Josh, getting back to that comment, "We don't have a strategy yet," we know that the President was talking about a strategy for ISIS in Syria. But having said that, would he like to have that one back?

MR. EARNEST: Well, Jim, I want to clarify one thing -- what you described. The President was talking specifically about military options for countering ISIS in Syria. There are a number of things that we've already done as it relates to the broader situation in Syria to confront some of the challenges there. The United States, as we've discussed many times in this room, is the largest single donor of humanitarian aid to Syria in terms of dealing with the terrible humanitarian situation that has been caused by the violence in Syria. We've seen significant numbers, millions of people, who have been displaced by the violence there.

The United States has been engaged in an effort to support the moderate Syrian opposition. There are a range of ways in which that support is provided. There's also some diplomatic support that's been provided to them.

So there already has been some work underway in Syria to try to address some of the challenges there. But the President was candid about the fact that the Pentagon is still reviewing options that may be available to him, military options that may be available to him, to counter ISIL militarily in Syria.

Q But when you're the President, words matter. And just getting back to that first question, does he wish he hadn't articulated that sentiment differently?

MR. EARNEST: Well, Jim, he was asked a very specific question. And he was asked a question about --

Q Not a helpful comment, right? I mean --

MR. EARNEST: Well, he was asked -- let me finish this, this is important. He was asked a very specific question about whether or not the President would seek congressional authorization before ordering any sort of military action in Syria. And the point the President made was that that's putting the cart before the horse.

The President hasn't yet laid out a specific plan for military action in Syria. And the reason for that is simply that the Pentagon is still developing that plan, and he's still reviewing them. And it would be putting the cart before the horse to talk about what sort of congressional authorization would be required for a plan that hasn't even been put in place yet.

Q I don't mean to belabor it, but the fact that you came out so quickly and tried to explain what the President had to say suggests that what he said was not what he intended to say. Or are you saying that just the rest of us took it the wrong way?

MR. EARNEST: Well, I think what I would --

Q You know what I mean?

MR. EARNEST: Yes, I do know what you mean. The reaction that we had at the White House yesterday was not in response to the President's comments, it's in response to the way it was being reported. And I don't mean that to sound as a criticism of you all doing your jobs; you all have an important job to do. But we do believe that it's important for people, both you and your readers and viewers, to understand what message the President was trying to communicate and what strategy he has already laid out for confronting ISIL, and what decisions remain to be made as it relates to military options that are available to him in Syria.

So, again, that is not a critique of the media, it is just an observation that we didn't listen to the President's news conference and go formulate a strategy for responding. We listened to the President's news conference, watched your reporting, and recognized that if we wanted people to have a very clear understanding of what the President was trying to communicate, that we needed to engage you directly to do that. And that's what we tried to do.

Q And getting back to Prime Minister Cameron's comments, he said that this is not some foreign conflict thousands of miles from home. He seemed to take a tougher tone with respect to ISIS than the President did yesterday. And a lot of people observed that the President's comments yesterday were not really in line or in sync with the urgency expressed by Secretary Hagel, Joint Chiefs Chairman Dempsey, who described it as

beyond anything we've ever seen, talking about ISIS in Syria; that you can't really take care of the ISIS problem without dealing with Syria. What do you make of that? Is the President on the same page as his Cabinet when it comes to dealing with ISIS?

MR. EARNEST: I think the more important observation, Jim, is that the Cabinet is on the same page as the Commander-in-Chief. And I am fully confident that that's the case.

Q There's no debate inside the Situation Room when it comes to striking ISIS immediately in Syria?

MR. EARNEST: I don't think "debate" is the way that I would describe it. I mean, I'm not going to be in a position to read -- providing a detailed readout of a private meeting between the President and his National Security Council. But you've been -- you've had the opportunity now to observe the President's leadership style, and you recognize that the President is interested in hearing the unvarnished assessment of his senior advisors. That's true when he's talking to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff or the Secretary of Defense about our military strategy. It's also true when he's talking to his press secretary about our political strategy, or our communication strategy.

So the President is interested in eliciting the unvarnished opinion of everybody that's sitting around the table. And it wouldn't be particularly helpful to the President of the United States if everybody sitting around the table had exactly the same opinion or exactly the same perspective on this challenge.

So the President --

Q So there are differing opinions as to --

MR. EARNEST: Again, I'm not reading out the meeting, but I am in a position to convey to you that the President is determined to get the unvarnished assessment of the professionals who sit around the table and meet with him as he makes important decisions.

But I have no doubt -- and if you do, then you should go ask each one of them -- about whether or not they're on the same page as the Commander-in-Chief. I am confident that they are.

Let's move around a little bit. Justin.

Q I wanted to loop back to your answer on immigration a little bit. You said that there was no update on timing. And so I just wanted to read back to you that -- in fact, earlier this month you said that you expected the review to end at the end of summer, and that you anticipated that the President would act on those recommendations shortly after receiving them. The President also said that he intended to adopt the recommendations without further delay, both of which would indicate that you're going to get these recommendations before the end of summer and act on them before the midterm elections. And so my question to you is, is that still what we should be operating under?

MR. EARNEST: Well, I don't -- the President got asked a specific question about immigration yesterday --

Q And he didn't answer about timing.

MR. EARNEST: I think what he did answer was, if you'll allow me to offer up my own view on this, he answered the most important part of that question, which is, is the President still committed to taking action where House Republicans won't. And the President is as determined as ever to make sure he is going to use all of the elements of his authority within the confines of the law to try to address some of the problems that have been created by our broken immigration system.

There's an easy solution sitting on Capitol Hill that's already passed the Senate with bipartisan support. It has strong bipartisan support all across the country, but House Republicans are blocking it right now. The President is disappointed that Republicans have chosen to pursue that strategy that may, in the minds of some Republican political strategists, be in their best partisan political interest. But it's certainly not in the best interest of the country. And that's why the President is determined to take the kinds of steps that are available to him to try to address this challenge.

Now, a secondary legitimate question is what's the timeframe for that, and I just don't have any additional information to share with you about what that timeframe is.

Q Well, I mean, the reason that I asked -- the Los Angeles Times reported today, quoting a senior administration official, that you guys are considering splitting up the recommendations so that you'd implement things that are more palatable to both Republicans and Democrats running in vulnerable races to roll out before midterm elections and then push off some of the broader, sweeping things that we've certainly heard the interest groups that are coming in here discuss until after the midterm elections. So I'm wondering if you can talk at all about whether that's something that you're considering, or whether you expect, when the President comes out and talks about immigration, that we're going to hear him fully lay out everything that he plans to do.

MR. EARNEST: Well, I guess I'd say it this way -- to borrow a phrase that was used in a different context yesterday -- that's putting the cart before the horse. The President hasn't actually received the final recommendations from his Attorney General and the Secretary of Homeland Security for what options are available to him for acting unilaterally to address some of the problems of our broken immigration system.

So those who are speculating about how those recommendations might be implemented are a little ahead of themselves.

Q Are the political concerns being sort of spoken about by Senate Democrats who are running in vulnerable races going to play into your guys' decision when you make a choice about when or if or how to implement -- immigration?

MR. EARNEST: Well, Justin, what we have seen, as I mentioned earlier, is a conclusion that has been reached by House Republicans that it is in their political interest to do something that's not in the nation's interest, and that is to pass comprehensive, common-sense, bipartisan immigration reform legislation. That's unfortunate.

It's House Republicans who are making politically motivated decisions right now. The President is focused on trying to solve problems. And what the President would like to do is to have a legitimate, fact-based debate about this current condition of our immigration system. There are problems in our immigration system. That may be the one thing that is widely agreed upon among both Democrats and Republicans -- that our immigration system is broken. Right now, there's only one side that seems determined to try to fix it. And the President, in the context of using his own authority to try to fix that problem, wants to have a debate about the status of our immigration system, what the consequences are for allowing that broken immigration system to persist, and what Republicans have done -- or in this case, not done -- to try to confront that problem.

So that broader debate is an important part of the context in which the President wants to act. And --

Q Yes, sorry to belabor the -- this is my last one on this. But if the President is genuinely only concerned about solving or addressing the issue, and then we're hearing reports that the President might for political reasons delay implementing some of these recommendations that are going to come to his desk, don't those seem contradictory in some way? Wouldn't the President want to immediately implement all steps that he thinks, or is told, that would help resolve this issue?

MR. EARNEST: Well, I think -- there may be some people who are speculating that the President is making a political decision as it relates to immigration. I would put forward probably a non-controversial suggestion that those are probably people who are regular critics of the President. So I take that declaration with a grain of salt.

What the President wants to do is he wants to solve problems. He also wants to do that in the context of a debate that's well understood by the American public. And the context of that debate is an unvarnished assessment of the current state of our immigration system. He wants to make sure that the American public understands what the consequences are for our broken immigration system to persist, without solving it. And the President wants to make sure that the context of that debate is understood in that there is a reasonable, common-sense proposal that's already been passed in bipartisan fashion through the Senate, and would pass the House if House Republicans weren't blocking it.

Q What message could Secretary Kerry convey to the Gulf countries that he hasn't conveyed before? And what makes the President now confident that the Sunni neighbors of Iraq and Syria would behave differently, knowing that they contributed to the creation of extremists like ISIS and others through funneling money and arms to Syria for a long time?

MR. EARNEST: I think the President alluded to this a little bit yesterday when he was talking about this subject. It is very clearly in the interest of Iraq's and Syria's neighbors, even those Sunni countries, to not have a violent, extremist organization wreaking havoc in their neighborhood. It's destabilizing and it poses a pretty direct threat to those countries. So it is in their interest as never before for them to work in partnership with other countries in the region, and even other interested countries in the world, like the United States, to counter that threat and to mitigate the destabilizing impact of those violent activities that we've seen perpetrated by ISIL.

That will be part of the message and that will be the topic of discussion that the Secretary of State will carry with him when he goes to the region. I'm sure that they'll at least, one way or another, the State Department officials who are traveling with the Secretary will read out those meetings. So I wouldn't want to get ahead of what those discussions look like. But it is clear that the backdrop for those conversations is that the clear interest of these governments has in the last several weeks been crystallized.

Q Does the President agree with Prime Minister Cameron? And is he willing to go as far as Prime Minister Cameron, saying that the establishment of an Islamic state in Iraq constitutes a direct national threat to the United States?

MR. EARNEST: Well, I didn't see all of Prime Minister Cameron's remarks. The aspect of his remarks that I did see was the explanation put forward by his government about why they decided to change their terror threat level. And that specifically was related to the threat that is posed by individuals with Western passports that have been fighting alongside ISIL, that could, using their passports, travel back to the West and carry out acts of violence in the West.

And so I know that there are a number of security changes -- or changes in their nation's security posture that they have put in place. The United States is regularly monitoring our security posture. We're also working very closely with our allies both at a law enforcement level, as well as a national security level, to try to mitigate this threat. That's something that we have been engaged in for quite some time. And those efforts continue to this day, even this hour.

Mike.

Q A question on the Ukraine. The British government, who I guess is being the hawks today, is pressing European allies to block Russia from the SWIFT bank network, which is an important financial network. That would be a significant escalation in the financial sanctions against Russia over Ukraine. Does the U.S. government share the British government's view on this? Are you also trying to do something like that, to block them from the SWIFT network and damage their financial relations?

MR. EARNEST: I haven't seen those reports, Mike. I'd refer you to the Treasury Department, who can talk about what sort of financial tools are available to the United States and our allies as we consider efforts to impose additional economic costs on Russia for their actions in Ukraine.

Q Broadly speaking, though, are you looking to step up the financial sanctions at the moment, take them to another level when it concerns the financial sector?

MR. EARNEST: Speaking as a general matter, based on Russia's continued conduct in Ukraine, based on their continued effort to escalate that situation militarily, we have seen the continued movement of equipment and materiel across the border from Russia into Ukraine. We've even seen pretty definitive reports that Russian troops have moved across the border and are now firing on Ukrainian military positions.

So we have seen Russia interfere in Ukraine in ways that the international community is completely unwilling to tolerate. And as a result of that, it does put Russia at risk of facing additional economic costs that can be imposed by the United States in concert with our allies.

Q But putting aside the specific tactic I mentioned, would you expect to see further steps from the United States to isolate Russia in the financial sector?

MR. EARNEST: Well, Mike, as you know, the President is traveling to Europe next week. He'll have the opportunity to meet with a number of our NATO allies, and the situation in Ukraine is a prominent item on the agenda. And I'm confident that there will be serious discussions about imposing additional economic costs on Russia.

Major.

Q Josh, in Ukraine, is it an invasion? And did the Russians commit an act of war?

MR. EARNEST: Well, what we have seen from the Russians is consistent with the kind of behavior that we've seen from them for many months now. We have seen -- there's ample intelligence, social media reporting to indicate that they're actively --

Q But the EU and the NATO Secretary General now call it Russian regulars in Ukraine with military equipment. Is that an invasion? Is it an act of war?

MR. EARNEST: Well, the evidence that has been presented by NATO is compelling, and it does indicate that Russia is continuing to do the kinds of things, using their military might, to further destabilize the situation in Ukraine.

What we have asked -- called on the Russians to do is actually use their influence in Ukraine to try to deescalate the situation there. And it's clear that they're not doing that right now.

Q But doesn't the language matter in this case? Is there something that is -- you are reluctant to use those words to describe what appears to be happening in front of everyone's eyes in Ukraine?

MR. EARNEST: I think we've been very clear about describing what exactly has happened there. The President did when he was asked this question yesterday, and we have been for many months. As the Russian military has allowed weapons and materiel to be transferred across the border, as the Russian military has fired on Ukrainian

military positions, as the Russian military has even put boots on the ground in Ukraine, we have regularly marshaled evidence to indicate what exactly is happening despite the protestations of the Russian government that for some reason would have us all believe otherwise.

The fact is, those denials are completely without any credibility, and we've been pretty candid about that, I think.

Q You mentioned earlier that the United States government is monitoring the movements of these individuals, meaning Americans who have gone into Syria to fight on behalf of ISIS or ISIL. Does the decision so far not to increase the threat level here indicate that there is a higher degree of confidence within the United States intelligence community to monitor these people in a way that the British do not currently share?

MR. EARNEST: Well, I don't want to be in a position of assessing sort of the competence or success of an ongoing intelligence operation.

Q I'm not trying to ascribe competence. I'm trying to get a question of confidence, which are two separate things.

MR. EARNEST: They are.

Q The ability to monitor and have visibility of -- do we feel confident of our ability to monitor and have high levels of confidence about our ability to track these Americans in ways that possibly the British government does not?

MR. EARNEST: Again, that is an assessment of our intelligence capabilities that I don't want to venture from here. But let me say this: The United States, on our own right now, is dedicating significant resources and time and attention to mitigating this threat. We are also, in addition to that, working very closely with other interested parties, including the British, to try to counter this threat, to monitor these individuals and mitigate the threat of violence that they may pose to Western interests. And that is something that continues.

We're working very closely with the British on this. I mean, one thing that has been observed publicly -- that I would observe publicly from here, I think -- is that part of the British concern is that there is, according to published reports, a relatively large number of individuals with British passports who have gone to the region to fight alongside ISIL. The published reports, as they relate to the number of Americans who are there, is somewhat lower.

Q Okay. The President, in addition to saying there was no strategy in Syria said, "We can rout ISIL militarily." He said that; that's a direct quote from the President near the end of the press conference yesterday. First of all, how does he know that? And is that the goal ultimately of U.S. policy? If we don't have a strategy to get them in Syria, which is their base of operations, might be their aspirational capital of their caliphate, how does he know we can rout them militarily?

MR. EARNEST: Well, I'll say a couple of things about that. One of the things that the President said in the now-famous statement is the word "yet" was at the end. So the Department of Defense is hard at work on developing some military options for the President in Syria. Now, whether the President chooses to take advantage of one of those options, whether the President orders one of those options, remains to be seen. But these are plans that are being developed.

The President does have a lot of confidence in the military apparatus to develop some solid plans for him. But any sort of strike or military action that he orders will be a -- if ordered, will be a component of a broader strategy for defeating ISIL and mitigating the threat that they pose to the United States and to Western interests. And that will all be done with our partners both in the Iraqi government and the governments in the region, and with countries around the world. This will be a joint effort.

Now, let me say one other thing about what you said, because it's important. The question in the mind of the President is more complicated, and in some ways even bigger, than does the United States in conjunction with our allies have the capability to rout -- as he described it -- ISIL. The real question is, how do we sustainably secure the situation in Iraq so that even if ISIL is routed, that they can't sprout back up and make significant gains in Iraq, or anywhere else, for that matter?

And that is why the strategy that the President has put forward has at the top of that list a unified, successful, sophisticated, integrated Iraqi government that can unite that country to face the threat that's posed by ISIL, and to ensure that the Iraqi people can take responsibility themselves for the security situation in their country. That ultimately is how we will be in a position to deny ISIL the ability to create a safe haven where they could threaten other countries in the region or eventually even other countries around the world.

Q I understand that, and I appreciate you for saying that. Is there any risk, Josh, for this President to see complexity and it become an excuse for paralysis? Because people who look at this region say, if you solve this militarily then a lot of these other issues can be addressed, but you can't address these other issues if ISIS presents an ongoing, expanding terroristic and military threat to ever-larger pockets of space in Iraq and Syria. I mean, just this week they took four runs at an airbase, each and every one of them more tactically and operationally sophisticated than the one before it, and the fourth one was successful. They have shown a penchant to adapt on the battlefield, use ever-more sophisticated techniques, and gain space they believe are important to their overall territorial objectives. I mean, there would be those who would say, yes, there are all these other complex issues, but the military issue is before you now, and you better deal with it or else you can't get to the rest of these things.

MR. EARNEST: Well, that's why the President has been pretty clear about the idea that these things need to move together. And that's why the President, as the Iraqis have made progress in forming the kind of inclusive government that we have called on them to adopt for any number of months now, has moved side by side with the President's plan

to authorize military action in Iraq. I mentioned earlier that there are a number of things that have been accomplished by the Iraqi security forces with the important support of the U.S. military.

Q But even the President said yesterday that those bombing raids will be limited and pose little risk of exposure to U.S. forces. I mean, it's still a minor league effort.

Q But they've been -- I don't think I would describe it that way. They've been successful in encouraging Iraqi and Kurdish security forces as they retook the Mosul Dam. They've been supportive and successful in blunting the offensive that was underway against Erbil. Again, that would not have been possible without the American military intervention there.

But the President is also determined -- and the President said this not in yesterday's appearance in the briefing room, but in his previous appearance in the briefing room -- that he's the Commander-in-Chief of the United States military. And he will use that in support of Iraq's security forces to accomplish some of these goals. But the President is not going to become the Commander-in-Chief of the Iraqi air force; that ultimately, we need to have a situation where the Iraqi people and the Iraqi government and Iraq security forces can take responsibility for their own security.

And the United States and this President is willing to devote significant resources to assist and support Iraq's government and Iraq's people as they take that responsibility. But we can't do it for them, and the President is not going to try.

Q Last question on this. So absent that coalition and complex array of other issues, ISIL can stay?

MR. EARNEST: Well, I guess I don't know what you mean.

Q If it takes the Iraqis to do this, if we're not going to be the Iraqi air force, and the other partners in the region don't come in in ways that they're currently not coming in, ISIL gets to stay. I mean, what is the lead dynamic here? Is it defeating them the lead dynamic, or dealing with all these other things that make the complex over time more livable?

MR. EARNEST: The overriding dynamic here is making sure that the national security interests of the United States of America are protected. That is always at the top of the President's agenda.

Q Is that consistent with ISIL existing or not?

MR. EARNEST: What it's consistent with -- that strategy requires the Iraqi government to do the right kinds of things that will unite that country to face down this threat. The good news is they're making those kinds of steps. When I was speaking before you three weeks ago, Prime Minister Maliki was still Prime Minister Maliki. He isn't anymore. He has stepped aside, and Iraq does seem to be -- Iraq's political leaders do seem to be pursuing the kind of inclusive governing agenda that we would like to see them pursue.

Now, they've got more work to do. They still have to form a cabinet, but that work is underway. We saw that Iraq's security forces and the Kurdish security forces were being overrun by ISIL forces, but thanks to the intervention of the United States military and the bravery and courage and service of American servicemen and women, they've been able to turn the tide in support of Iraq security forces.

Never before -- and I mentioned this earlier -- never before has it been so clearly in the interest of regional governments to combat this violent extremist organization that's wreaking havoc in their neighborhood. That's not in their interest. So we're optimistic about the success that we may have in rallying them to this cause as well.

So we've made important progress on this over the last few weeks, but make no mistake, the President does not believe that just pursuing a military strategy is a substitute for the more comprehensive strategy that will be required to arrive at an enduring solution to this problem.

Jim.

Q In light of the British raising the terror threat there, and this being Labor Day weekend with a lot of Americans traveling, a simply question -- and we're monitoring these Americans and Westerners with passports -- is there any evidence from the TSA, from the FBI, CIA, NSA, any of our resources, that any of those people with the Western passports have been on planes or are on the way back from the United States, or are already in the United States?

MR. EARNEST: Jim, the most detailed intelligence assessment that I can offer from here is that there is no evidence or indication right now that ISIL is actively plotting to attack the United States homeland. That's true right now.

That said, it is important that we take the steps that are necessary as a part of the President's comprehensive strategy, to deny them a safe haven that would give them the kind of comfort that they would need to consider plotting those kinds of attacks. We also need to be very vigilant about the threat that is posed by foreign fighters, individuals with Western passports that have been fighting alongside ISIL that may be considering returning to the West to carry out some acts of violence here, too.

So we're vigilant about those things. And that is work that often takes place behind the scenes; that as we calibrate our security posture and have the kinds of discussions about intelligence and national security matters that are important to the safety of the United States of America, those things aren't often evident to the American people, but people can have some confidence that the administration and our national security professionals and our law enforcement professionals are very vigilant about the threat that we face in this regard.

Q If we are, in fact, monitoring, as you said, are we confident that we know all of the Americans that have gone to Syria to fight next to ISIL? And are we confident that we know that they're still there and not here, back here?

MR. EARNEST: I can't offer an assessment about the depth of our intelligence as it relates to this specific question. I can tell you that this is a challenge that our national security apparatus and our intelligence apparatus is very focused on, and it's why we're working so closely with our partners and allies around the globe to mitigate this threat.

Q On the other subject of immigration, if I could for a moment -- in June, there were 354 unaccompanied minors coming across daily, across the border in the United States from Central America. In the latest figures that are for August that came out, it's down to 104 a day. Is the crisis among unaccompanied minors over on the border right now?

MR. EARNEST: For now. But what we have seen, Jim, is that these numbers are very volatile and that there are important steps that this administration is taking to try to prevent those numbers from going back up. Unfortunately, we haven't gotten the kind of support in the form of resources that are necessary from the United States Congress. The President put forward a very detailed proposal for the kinds of resources that he would like to see that could be used to try to prevent those numbers from increasing again.

So this is a problem that, while the numbers have improved -- and we're certainly pleased about that -- this is a problem that we still remain very focused on, because this has been a very volatile situation, and those numbers have, without a lot of warning, on some occasions spiked. And so we're going to continue our diplomatic efforts to work with the home countries of these individuals where we're seeing this population moving toward the southwest border, to make sure they understand that they shouldn't try to make this dangerous journey.

We're still going to be focused on shifting resources from the interior to the border to make sure that we can continue our efforts to secure the border. The President is still using his own executive authority to devote additional resources to the immigration courts so we can make sure we can both respect the due process to which these individuals are entitled, while at the same time we're making the wheels of justice turn efficiently.

Q Josh, on those measures that you're talking about right now that you think have been successful to a point as of now -- I was just in --

MR. EARNEST: Let me say one other thing about that, which is -- I mean, the other factor here is the weather, that traditionally we have seen a decline in the numbers when the weather gets hotter. So I don't want to leave the impression that's only because of what the administration has done that we've seen these numbers go down. There are a variety of factors. But there's no doubt that the administration has made a substantial contribution to the reduction in those numbers.

Q And as far as the measures -- if I can finish that question --

MR. EARNEST: Yes, I apologize.

Q That's okay. I was just in Guatemala, and as recently as last week the Guatemalans continue to allow rafts to go across the Mexican border with unaccompanied minors, uninhibited by police. You say they have cooperation. Why aren't they stopping them? I just finished talking to the immigration judges, to the president of their union, who says the money that has been promised by the administration has not yet shown up, and they still have huge delays in the court system. If that's not happening, those two things aren't happening, what is working? What have you done that is actually stopping, or at least reducing the numbers?

MR. EARNEST: Well, I do think that the first place to start here is the numbers do speak for themselves, that we've seen these numbers dramatically lower for a variety of reasons. But it is clear that some of the steps that the administration has put in place have had an effect. As it relates to the government of Guatemala, there clearly is more work that needs to be done to ensure that they're playing as constructive a role as possible in stemming the flow of children or adults who are traveling with children to the southwest border.

What I would say is we have seen some important announcements over the last couple of months from the Mexican government, and that they have been playing an important role in preventing and tightening their borders in a way that is, frankly, clearly in the interest of the Mexican government and Mexican people and their own national security, but it has an intended benefit for the United States. And that's why we closely coordinate with them on these issues.

As it relates to resources for our immigration court system, there's no doubt that we'd like to see additional resources being deployed to reduce that backlog. That's why the President specifically asked for money from Congress to ensure that our courts could have the resources that they need to administer justice. And House Republicans were engaged in a pretty coordinated effort to prevent those resources from being provided.

So that's why the administration has had to resort to reprogram some funds to try to dedicate to this effort. But there certainly is more that can be done and more that would be done if Congress and Republicans in Congress weren't blocking it.

Stephen.

Q What was the calculation that went into the President's comments yesterday on Russia? They seemed -- although you say they were explicit, they were much less passionate than what Samantha Power had to say at the U.N. Is there some attempt to try and stop the clash of Ukraine becoming a direct U.S.-Russia confrontation? Or are there things that a U.N. ambassador can say that the President can't without sort of elevating direct tensions with Putin?

MR. EARNEST: Well, I mean, Stephen, I think the President's answer made clear a couple of things. The first is, the President did draw a distinction between the United States' relationship with our NATO allies and the Article 5 commitments that we have to those allies, and how that is different than the kind of commitment that the United States has to a nation like Ukraine, that while is a friend to the United States, is not a NATO ally

to the United States. However, because the United States does have an important relationship with Ukraine, the United States will, as the President said, stand shoulder to shoulder with the Ukrainian people and the Ukrainian government as they counter these destabilizing activities from the Russians.

But the President felt it was important, as a matter of policy and as a matter of giving the American people some insight into his thinking, to clarify that we're not trending toward a military conflict between the United States and Russia in this region over this issue. There's a lot that we can do to support the Ukrainian government and the Ukrainian people. There's a lot that we can do in acting in concert with our allies to impose costs on Russia for the tactics that they're employing right now. But people should also have a pretty clear understanding of where the President's head is on this, and I think that that's what he was trying to lay out last night.

Q Does the administration think that Russia appreciates that distinction between U.S. attitudes toward Ukraine, the new attitude -- U.S. intentions towards a NATO ally like somewhere in the Baltics? I mean, clearly, if that message isn't wholly understood that's a dangerous situation.

MR. EARNEST: You're talking about an administration that, when presented with photographic evidence that Russian boots were on the ground in Ukraine, stood there and denied that Russia had military in Ukraine. I saw -- according to one news report I saw, that the foreign minister suggested that maybe it was -- these were video game graphics that had been trumped up to try to frame the Russians. That sort of irrational explanation makes it hard to tell exactly what they're thinking.

Ed.

Q Josh, as you were speaking, we heard Marine One leaving here so the President can go raise campaign money in Rhode Island and New York. And I wonder what you think about the optics of the President from that podium yesterday saying he still does not have a strategy to deal with ISIS in Syria militarily, and the next day, without that strategy, goes out and raises campaign money.

MR. EARNEST: Well, the President did convene a meeting with his National Security Council immediately after leaving this podium yesterday to talk through with his top national security advisors, including top officials from the Pentagon, about our more broad comprehensive strategy against ISIL. That included a discussion about the military options that are available to the President for dealing with ISIL in Syria. That's the responsibility of the Pentagon. There are dedicated professionals there who are responsible and take seriously their responsibility.

Q Right. So they're handling it and he can go out and raise campaign money? Because I ask because last week when he made the statement right after James Foley's beheading, and within minutes was on the golf course. Is he detached? Does he feel like the critics coming after him, it just doesn't matter anymore? Why is he still raising campaign money, playing golf, when he's acknowledging he doesn't have a strategy to deal with this?

MR. EARNEST: Well, Ed, the job of any U.S. President is to be able to handle a lot of different responsibilities at the same time. That's why the President has a national security team in whom he has a lot of confidence. It is also why he works closely with his advisors on a range of issues to make sure that he is leading them in the right direction, that he is setting a vision for the future of this country. That's what allows him to handle a lot of responsibilities at the same time. And one of his responsibilities, as the head of the party, is to support Democratic candidates who are on the ballot. And that's why the President is also spending a little bit of time supporting their efforts.

But the President, there's no doubt -- anybody who has looked at the President's schedule understands that he is devoting significant more time and energy to the more important responsibility that he has to ensure the safety and security of the American people.

Q On the substance of his comments yesterday, so you today and the President yesterday are trying to make this broader argument that it was sort of the media pundits and others who sort of suggested we were inching closer to airstrikes against Syria. And I wonder if the President himself didn't help set that expectation on August 20th when he commented on James Foley's beheading and said, "This shocks the conscience of the entire world...when people harm Americans anywhere, we do what's necessary to see that justice is done and we act" -- he said -- "we act against ISIS standing alongside others." Was that just an empty threat?

MR. EARNEST: No, Ed, as we've discussed, the President ordered military action in Iraq in pursuit of --

Q But he had already been doing that before that statement. Before the beheading, there were already acting military in Iraq.

MR. EARNEST: That's right, and that's an indication of how serious the President takes this.

Q And then General Dempsey and others said we have to go into Syria if we're really going to take ISIS out. So my question is, is there a way to get justice -- as he told the American people and world he was going to do -- without military action in Syria?

MR. EARNEST: Ed, the President will get justice.

Q How?

MR. EARNEST: The President promised that he will do that.

Q How do you get to -- is there a way to get justice without military action is what I'm trying to get at. Is it working with partners?

MR. EARNEST: I know -- but, Ed, we just talked about the fact that the President has already ordered military action in Syria --

Q In Iraq.

MR. EARNEST: They've carried out --

Q Not in Syria.

MR. EARNEST: In Syria.

Q In Iraq.

MR. EARNEST: The President has ordered military action in Iraq to go after ISIL elements that are threatening Americans, and we've talked about how substantial and important those military actions have been in support of protecting American citizens in Iraq. So the President is not shying away at all, and he has already demonstrated that he is not going to shy away at all from using all of the elements of American power -- whether it's military might or diplomatic influence -- to represent American interests and to protect the lives of Americans in that region of the world.

Q Two other quick ones to get beyond the language of what he said, what he meant. Simple question: Why does he not have a strategy yet?

MR. EARNEST: Because the Pentagon is still developing military options for the President, for the Commander-in-Chief to use against ISIL in Syria. There are some who probably would make the case that it's okay to not have a formulated comprehensive strategy, but just as one pundit I know recently suggested, that we could just go drop some bombs and see what happens. That is not what the President believes is a smart approach. The President believes it's important for us to pursue a comprehensive strategy where military action is one component of that strategy.

Q How does the Pentagon still not have a strategy? You're saying the Pentagon -- it's the Pentagon's issue? They haven't put this strategy together yet? Is the Commander-in-Chief not saying, I want this plan on my desk tomorrow?

MR. EARNEST: What the President is saying is that he wants -- he is going to be deliberate about which components of our strategy can best be employed to protect the national security interests of the United States of America. He wants the Pentagon to be deliberate as they develop the kinds of options that may or may not be available to him. And the President will consider them, and he will act in a timely fashion as he assesses the best interest of the United States of America.

Q In terms of a timely fashion, last one -- August 2013 -- a year ago this month -- the President had a news conference here and Jon Karl of ABC asked a question about whether the President still believes al Qaeda has been decimated. And the President said, core al Qaeda, as he said many times, has been decimated but we're seeing these other groups metastasizing into regional groups that can still be dangerous. And the President went on to say -- he didn't name ISIS, but groups like ISIS -- and said, "So that requires us then to make sure that we have a strategy that is strengthening those partners so that they've got their own capacity to deal with what are potentially manageable regional threats." August 2013, he is talking about how we need to be putting together a strategy. One year later, how could he not have that strategy?

MR. EARNEST: Ed, as we've talked about quite a bit, the President has been very explicit about what the comprehensive strategy is. That comprehensive strategy --

Q You're saying that, but he said I don't have that strategy specifically for Syria.

MR. EARNEST: But, Ed, what I'm trying to -- if you'll let me answer the question here, the point of that statement -- and this is a sentiment, a strategy that the President has reiterated on a number of occasions. He reiterated this at West Point when he spoke there on May 28th of this year. He says, "I believe that we must shift our counterterrorism strategy, drawing on the success and shortcomings of our experience in Iraq and Afghanistan, to more effectively partner with countries where terrorist networks seek a foothold." He reiterated that strategy when he spoke to the nation over in the State Dining Room earlier this month, where he talked about how the core component of our strategy needs to be building up regional partners so that the United States isn't responsible for, in this situation, providing security for the people of Iraq.

We need to build up our partners and make sure that we have a cooperative government so that the Iraqi people can provide for their own security. That is the way that we will find an enduring way to deal with the threat that's posed by ISIL. If we rely only on America's military might, there is no question that because of the bravery and skill of our American servicemen and women, that they can have a substantial impact on the battlefield, that they could -- as the President said yesterday -- "route" ISIL on the battlefield, there's no question about that. But if we want to make sure that ISIL doesn't come back, we need to make sure that we have effective partners who can provide for the security of their country and prevent ISIL from making a return.

Now, there is a role for the United States to play, both diplomatically and even militarily, to support those efforts, but we're not going to be able to solve this problem for them. And I recognize that some of the President's critics don't agree. Some of the President's critics believe that the United States should act militarily, that we can go out and solve this problem for them. But that's going to require a substantial commitment of American military forces, an occupation of another country. And that's just not a strategy that the President believes succeeds. It certainly didn't succeed in Iraq last time around, and the President doesn't believe that's a recipe for success this time, either.

Kristen.

Q Josh, thanks. Following up on the military options, you said that during the meeting yesterday the President discussed possible options with his national security team. So just to be clear on this point, has the Pentagon presented any military options at this point?

MR. EARNEST: Well, I'm not in a position to -- as we've discussed a couple of times this week -- I'm not going to get into a detailed play-by-play of the back-and-forth between the President and his senior military advisors. But I will tell you as a general matter that the

President has been discussing with his national security team and with his senior team at the Pentagon the range of options that are or may be available to him for countering ISIL militarily, both in Iraq and in Syria.

Q So he has been presented with some options then?

MR. EARNEST: I will say that the President has discussed with his national security team some of the options that they're developing. I'm not going to, again, get into a play-by-play about whether or not they finalized their plans, whether or not the President has received them, whether or not he has reviewed them, whether he has gotten back to them about those finalized plans. I just -- I'm not going to provide that much insight into this understandably private process.

But I will tell you that the President has had a number of discussions with his national security team about military options that may or may not be available to him.

Q And going back to the discrepancy between the President's comments yesterday and Secretary Hagel, Chairman Dempsey last week, I know you're saying that they're on the same page right now, but does the President feel as though they got out ahead of him on this issue? Because they seem to be laying the groundwork for the strong possibility that there would be some type of military intervention in Syria.

MR. EARNEST: I continue to be confident, as I was earlier, that the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Secretary of Defense, and all the other senior members of the President's national security team are on the same page as the Commander-in-Chief. And if you have any doubt about that, you should ask them. But I'm confident they'll tell you the same thing.

Q Why the public discrepancy, Josh? Why do you have Secretary Hagel saying that this is a threat beyond anything that we've seen? Why are we seeing this discrepancy in the public comments?

MR. EARNEST: Well, I think it's important to differentiate, though, between a discrepancy about the policy and strategy that the President is pursuing, and the different words that the Secretary of Defense has chosen to describe this situation. He was offering up his honest assessment of what he perceives, based on his knowledge of what's happening on the ground. And I don't think it's particularly -- the words that he used were different than what the President has said about this, but the policy implications of that for securing the United States of America and our interests are completely consistent.

Q So you think they're on the same page? Does the President share that assessment that ISIS is beyond anything we've ever seen, the threat from ISIS?

MR. EARNEST: The President was asked a couple of times yesterday about his assessment of ISIL and the threat that they pose to the United States, so he has talked about this quite a bit, so I'd just refer you to his comments.

Q And does he -- in terms of the sense of urgency that he feels to come up with a strategy -- I mean, obviously he has dispatched Secretary Kerry to try to create an international coalition -- does he have a timeline? Is this something that he is going to have a strategy within a matter of days, within a matter of weeks?

MR. EARNEST: Well, again, Kristen, he has laid out a comprehensive strategy for dealing with ISIL. It starts with the formation of an effective, inclusive Iraqi government. It includes stronger support and a stronger relationship, and a more effective Iraqi and Kurdish security forces. It includes a greater engagement from regional governments who have a clear stake in this outcome. It involves the participation of countries around the world who are concerned about the threat that's posed by ISIL. And it includes the military actions that the President has already ordered take place in Iraq, in support of all of those goals.

So there are a range of components to the President's strategy. He has laid that out very clearly, and that's the strategy that we're going to pursue because the President believes it's in the best national security interest of the United States of America. It's also the only way we're going to get an enduring solution to this problem.

Q And, Josh, let me finally just get you to respond to something that the New York Times Editorial Board wrote yesterday. They wrote, "One problem is the administration's incomplete knowledge about ISIS or ISIL, its numbers and organization. This is alarming given the billions of dollars spent since September 11, 2001, in developing technologies and strategies for detecting and assessing terrorist threats." Is that a fair assessment? Does the administration not have a complete sense of ISIL at this point in time? And why isn't there a better understanding of this group so many years after September 11th?

MR. EARNEST: Well, for our assessment of ISIL's capabilities, I'd refer you to the Intelligence Community. But I can tell you that at the direction of the President, every element of the President's national security team is focused on making sure that we are putting in place the kind of strategy, and implementing and executing on the strategy the President has laid out for protecting the national security interests of the United States.

Peter.

Q Josh, when the Ukrainian people hear you saying we're not trending toward military action in Ukraine, and of course the comment that the President made flatly ruling that out, and when they see constant threats of increased notching up of sanctions which, again, we're hearing about that have only seen Russia take more robust action in their incursions, if that's what you want to describe it as -- why shouldn't they think their country is being written off?

MR. EARNEST: The people of Ukraine?

Q Yes.

MR. EARNEST: Because the President also in his news conference said that the United States stands shoulder to shoulder with the people of Ukraine. I believe that was the phrase that he used. That's a pretty strong signal of support from the United States, the one indispensable nation in the world, in support of their cause.

You've also seen the United States, acting in concert with our allies, impose significant costs on Russia for Russia's strategy in Ukraine. And those economic costs have taken a toll on the Russian economy. We've seen significant capital flight from Russia. There is a pretty clear indication that Russia -- that the global, investing public doesn't think that Russia is a pretty good place to park your money right now. In fact, there were --

Q But they also have artillery units rolling all through Ukraine now, too. It has no effect.

MR. EARNEST: They do. They also -- well, again, the sanctions have had an effect. They have taken a toll on their economy. Capital flight -- we've seen the Russian currency weaken so much that the central bank has expended significant sums of money to try to prop up the value of that currency. We have seen economic projections, as it relates to economic growth in Russia, significantly curtailed. We've seen Russia's credit rating downgraded by independent credit rating organizations. So there has been a toll that's been taken on the Russian economy, and ultimately it will be up to President Putin to determine exactly how he wants to respond to the situation. But the fact is -- and the President said this yesterday, too -- that for all of Russia's continued agitation in Ukraine, Russia is becoming only more isolated and more weakened.

Q Do you see that, though, having any effect on its military actions in Ukraine? No.

MR. EARNEST: Well, what we have seen is we've seen the Russians continue their efforts to transfer weapons and materiel and even personnel across the border from Russia into Ukraine. But, ultimately, those sorts of decisions are made by President Putin. But there's a significant cost associated with those decisions. We've seen the impact it has taken on the Russian economy. We've seen Russia become more isolated. And, in the President's view, Russia is weaker as a result. And so President Putin needs to make a decision about whether or not he is willing to significantly weaken his country just to destabilize a country that's on their border.

Q What do you think Putin is up to today with comments like reminding a young audience of Russia's nuclear capability?

MR. EARNEST: Well, as I mentioned I think in answer to Stephen's question, that when they're denying photographic evidence of Russia's military actions in Ukraine, it's pretty hard to tell what exactly they're thinking over there.

Zeke, I'll give you the last one. Then we'll do the week ahead.

Q So is it your assessment that -- or the administration's assessment that the threat level based in the United States from ISIS/ISIL is lower than that in Britain, and that's the reason why the threat level hasn't been elevated?

MR. EARNEST: Well, I wouldn't draw that clear of a line. I think what I would do is I would say the President has been clear about the threat that ISIL does pose in the form of these foreign fighters to the United States and our interests. That's something that we're concerned about, focused on, and actively working to mitigate. And we don't, at this point, however, see a reason to change the threat level in this country. But, again, for an official assessment of that, though, I'd refer you to the Department of Homeland Security that's responsible for making those decisions.

Q And to a follow up on that, I mean, in terms of the -- you said before you didn't anticipate a change in the threat level and just repeated that now. What would change that assessment? What is the trigger that the President and his administration would look for?

MR. EARNEST: Well, it would be the responsibility of the Secretary of Homeland Security to make that determination, and so what factors would play into that I'd refer you to the Secretary of Homeland Security.

So with that, why don't we do a quick week ahead and then we'll call it a day.

The President, as we all know, will be departing here tomorrow evening with his family to go to New York to participate in a private event -- to attend a private event in New York.

On Monday, the President is looking forward to celebrating Labor Day in Milwaukee. He will be traveling there for an event where he'll deliver remarks.

On Tuesday morning, the President will depart the White House for his trip to Europe. He will travel to Estonia. He'll spend Tuesday night in Estonia. He'll do a range of meetings with the leaders of the Baltic nations in Estonia before leaving Estonia on Wednesday night to travel to Wales for the NATO summit.

The NATO summit will take place Thursday and Friday, and the President will return on Friday evening back here to the White House.

Over the course of that trip, I do anticipate you'll have a couple of opportunities to hear directly from the President, and even ask him a question or two.

Thanks, everybody.

Q Presser in Tallinn and Wales?

MR. EARNEST: That's the current plan, yes.

END

12:55 P.M. EDT