

Press Briefing by Press Secretary Josh Earnest, 9/12/2014

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James S. Brady Press Briefing Room

****Please see below for a correction to the transcript, marked with an asterisk.**

1:21 P.M. EDT

MR. EARNEST: Good afternoon, everybody. Happy Friday. Let me just do a quick announcement at the top, Jim, and then we'll go to your questions.

On Tuesday, September 16th -- that's next Tuesday -- the President will travel to Atlanta, Georgia, where he will visit the Center for Disease Control and Prevention to receive a breaking -- I'm sorry, let's start over again.

The President will travel to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to receive a briefing on the outbreak of the Ebola virus in West Africa, discuss the U.S. response to that outbreak, and thank the scientists, doctors and health care workers who are helping those affected by the disease at home and around the world. The President will also receive an update on the respiratory illness that's been reported in several states across the Midwest.

That evening, the President will travel to Tampa, Florida, where he will remain overnight.

On Wednesday, the President will visit U.S. Central Command at MacDill Air Force Base in Tampa, Florida. As many of you know, Central Command's area of responsibility includes 20 countries in the Middle East and Central and South Asia, including Iraq and Syria. As we implement the President's strategy to degrade and ultimately defeat ISIL, it's the men and women of CENTCOM who will partner with others in the region to carry out our limited military mission in those countries. While at CENTCOM, the President will receive a briefing from his top commanders there, and thank the servicemembers for their continued hard work on these efforts.

We'll have some additional logistical details about the President's trip over the weekend and then again on Monday. So should be an interesting trip of the President at the beginning of the next week.

Jim, let's go to your questions.

Q Thanks, Josh. I wanted to ask you about Islamic State. Yesterday, Turkey didn't sign on to the communiqué in Saudi Arabia expressing support for confronting Islamic State. There have been concerns also about whether Kuwait and Qatar are doing enough to prevent fundraising for extremist groups. I'm wondering, is the White House satisfied with the level of commitment that it's getting from certain allies in the Middle East in dealing with and confronting Islamic State?

MR. EARNEST: Jim, I'm pleased that you mentioned the communiqué, because I do think that there are a couple of important things about it. The first is, it's important for people to understand that the communiqué was signed by ministers representing states of the Gulf Coast Cooperation Council -- or the Gulf Cooperation Council -- Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and, of course, the United States. And in the context of this communiqué, each of those organizations and countries declares "their shared commitment to stand united against the threat posed by all terrorism, including the so-called Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, to the region and the world."

Over the course of the communiqué, they lay out their commitment to "do their share in the comprehensive fight against ISIL, including" -- and then they list several things, and it ends with "as appropriate, joining in the many aspects of the coordinated military campaign against ISIL." That is an early indication of the interest that the United States is seeing from our partners in the region in presenting a united front to the terrorists in ISIL. There is a strong commitment from these countries in the region to working with the international community to deny ISIL the kind of safe haven that would pose a significant threat to countries in the region, but also countries around the world.

This will continue to be an ongoing effort to build support to identify needs and to identify the specific capabilities of countries where they could meet the needs of the broader coalition.

So this is difficult work, but the President, as he indicated in his news conference at the NATO Summit at the end of last week, has been pleased with the reception that we have gotten from our partners and allies around the world as it relates to their willingness to engage in the efforts of this international coalition to degrade and ultimately destroy ISIL.

Q But any disappointment that particularly Turkey, a NATO member, would not sign on to something like this?

MR. EARNEST: Well, as you mentioned, each country has their own specific set of interests that are related to this specific situation. There is no doubt -- and we have seen this both in private comments from Turkish officials, but also in public comments from Turkish officials -- that they are concerned, and rightly so, about the instability and violence that has been created by ISIL. This is obviously all occurring right on the doorstep of Turkey, and they are rightly concerned.

I understand that the Secretary of State is actually there today, I believe, to meet with Turkish officials and his counterparts. The President had the opportunity to visit with President Erdogan at the NATO Summit last week. The Secretary of Defense, Chuck Hagel, was in Turkey at the beginning of this week. So that's an indication of the thorough consultation that is underway between the United States and Turkey to discuss with them what role they can play and how they can contribute to this broader international coalition. We certainly welcome the partnership and alliance that we have with Turkey, and look forward to their efforts to join with the international community to meet this threat.

Q Yesterday you mentioned that one way that Congress could support the President's strategy in Iraq and Syria, and while you said it wasn't necessary, it could be by providing authority on a revised use-of-force agreement. Does the President intend to send Congress a revised authorization for use of force that Congress could act on to provide that kind of support, even though you feel it's not necessary?

MR. EARNEST: Well, at this point, we have not. And I don't know of any plan to do so at this point. As you pointed out, it is the view of this administration, and the President's national security team specifically, that additional authorization from Congress is not required; that he has the authority that he needs to order the military actions that he has to degrade and ultimately destroy ISIL. That will be done in coordination with a broader international coalition. It will not include U.S. troops being placed into ground combat in Iraq or Syria.

That all said, the President would welcome support from Congress for this strategy. There are a variety of ways that Congress could indicate this support and the President believes that this support -- or this indication of support -- would be beneficial because it would demonstrate to our allies and to our enemies that the United States stands united in pursuit of the strategy to degrade and destroy ISIL.

Q Finally, on immigration. The Associated Press is reporting that there has been a marked decline in deportations and the pace is fewer than it has been since 2007. I'm wondering if that's a deliberate effort by the White House or the administration to cut back on deportations, given the criticism that the President has received from the immigration community.

MR. EARNEST: Deportations are an enforcement action, and those enforcement actions are made by law enforcement officials at the Department of Homeland Security. So this is not something that is mandated by the White House. These are enforcement decisions that are carried out by law enforcement officials at the Department of Homeland Security.

However, I do think that these numbers do reflect something that the President has talked about a little bit, which is that as we confronted a situation at the border earlier this summer -- a situation that has abated -- but at one point earlier this summer, there was concern about having the needed resources to deal with a surge that we had seen along the southwest border as it relates to children who are attempting to enter the country who

were not traveling with an adult. And the President did indicate that we, as an administration, would shift resources from the interior of the country to the border to supplement our efforts to secure the border and to process the cases of those who had been apprehended at the border attempting to gain entry into the country.

The shifting of those resources may have something to do with those numbers, but that is not -- but, again, those numbers reflect the enforcement activities of law enforcement officials at the Department of Homeland Security.

Roberta.

Q On Ex-Im Bank. It seems that lawmakers are expected to extend the charter for nine more months, and I'm wondering whether the White House has concerns about the brevity of that extension.

MR. EARNEST: Well, Roberta, the thing that we have indicated is that it was incredibly important for Congress to reauthorize the Ex-Im Bank. The Bank plays a key role in creating jobs and stimulating economic growth. There are many businesses large and small all across the country that benefit from the activities of the Ex-Im Bank. And this is -- support for the Ex-Im Bank has traditionally been a bipartisan proposition. In the past, I've read quotes from people like President Reagan himself who signed legislation to reauthorize the bank. At the time, President Reagan articulated the variety of reasons why the Ex-Im Bank was beneficial for the American economy and important to American job creation. That is also why organizations like the Chamber of Commerce that don't often agree with the President's policies do in this case support the President's view that the Ex-Im Bank should be reauthorized.

Q But are you concerned about the brevity that Congress has -- are you concerned, though, about the brevity of the proposed extension?

MR. EARNEST: Well, this is -- reauthorizing the bank is the responsibility of the United States Congress. And I know that there have been efforts underway to pass legislation to reauthorize it.

It is the view of the administration that the bank should be reauthorized because of the important role it plays in stimulating economic growth and creating jobs. But as it relates to the length of time over which -- for which the bank is reauthorized, we have not taken a position on that. Our view is just that the Export-Import Bank does work that's important for the American economy and for American job creation, and it should continue to do that work.

Q And on the Russian sanctions announced today, how concerned is the White House about the financial impact these sanctions will have on U.S. energy companies?

MR. EARNEST: Well, Roberta, when it comes to sanctions, what the United States is focused on is acting in coordination with our allies, particularly our allies in Europe. The impact of these sanctions is always implemented in a way to maximize the impact on the Russian economy, to minimize the impact on the American economy, and ensure -- or at

least do our best to make sure -- that American businesses are not put at a significant disadvantage vis-à-vis their competitors in other countries that are not working closely with the United States on a sanctions regime.

So there is an element of coordination here that does play a role in the decisions that are made about sanctions regimes that are put in place. We believe that the sanctions regime that has been put in place, again, in concert with our European allies, will focus the impact on the Russian economy, will reduce the exposure that American businesses have to businesses that may try to game the system in a way that would give them an unfair advantage.

But we are certain at -- or we are confident that this new round of sanctions will have economic costs for Russia. And they are indicative of the international community's resolve to standing up for the territorial integrity of the people of Ukraine, and ensuring that all countries -- including Russia -- abide by generally accepted international norms that relate to the sovereignty of independent nations.

Let's move around a little bit. Justin.

Q I wanted to ask about the CR. I know we've talked a lot about adding to the CR, but it strikes me that since Republicans rolled it out earlier this week, we haven't heard from you guys whether you would sign the CR as presented by the Republicans -- the House Republicans.

MR. EARNEST: Well, Justin, the administration has been consulting with Democrats and Republicans on Capitol Hill about the continuing resolution. There are certain aspects of the continuing resolution that are important. We have indicated that we believe that the best way for Congress to act on the Title 10 authority to train Syrian opposition fighters is for Congress to add that authority to the continuing resolution.

So we're working closely with Congress. I don't believe that we've issued a statement of the administration position on the continuing resolution at this point, but it is part of the ongoing consultation that we are having with members of Congress in both parties.

Q Would the President sign something that overfunds his defense ask? It's like a tactic that House Republicans seem to be using so that they would have more leverage in the December round of budget negotiations. So if a CR is sent to the White House that overfunds the defense ask, is that something that you guys would consider signing?

MR. EARNEST: I'm not in a position at this point, Justin, to confirm which aspects of the CR are aspects that we support, and which are deal-breakers or which aspects --

Q Are there any deal-breakers when it comes to --

MR. EARNEST: -- of their proposals that they can live with.

So again, I'm not here at this point to issue a veto threat of any kind. I can confirm for you that there are some things that we care about being included in the CR -- Title 10 authority is one of them. And we're continuing to work with Democrats and Republicans on Capitol Hill to ensure that whatever continuing resolution is passed by the Congress is something that the President can sign.

Of course, the reason that we're having this conversation is because the President does believe that we should risk the traction that our economy has gained by shutting down the government. So we're confident that we can work through any differences of opinion and hopefully end up in a place where Congress can quickly pass a continuing resolution that includes Title 10 authority so that the President can pursue the national security priority that he discussed in his speech on Wednesday night.

Q And then just finally on the CR. I know that you had expressed some skepticism, and certainly some Democrats raising some money had expressed some skepticism that Republicans would pass a CR and prevent a government shutdown. So I'm wondering -- I know you guys have been talking to the Hill -- if you right now believe that Congress will pass a CR before the end of the month.

MR. EARNEST: I would hesitate to make predictions about the future, particularly when it relates to issues like this. But I would say that the kinds of conversations that we've been having with members of Congress over the course of this week about the continuing resolution have been constructive. And that is encouraging. I think both sides acknowledge that a government shutdown would have a very negative impact on our economy. And based on the constructive conversations we've had so far, we believe that we should be able to get this done in a timely fashion. It certainly would fall in line with the national security priority that the President has laid out.

Victoria.

Q Yes, a couple things. One is on the Arab states. They said that they would be prepared to do their share, and they talk about "as appropriate, joining in many aspects." But this language is a little amorphous. It's hard to get your hands around it. What are they actually saying that they would do, besides Saudi Arabia hosting the Syrian rebels for training? Will they provide troops, for example?

MR. EARNEST: Well, Victoria, each of these individual nations has their own calculation about what they're in a position to provide. And when they're ready to make announcements about what they're going to provide, I'm certainly not going to announce it from here; we'll allow these other countries to make their own announcements about their contribution to this international effort.

We are pleased by the initial reaction we've received from governments in the region and from our allies around the world as it relates to their willingness to participate in a robust fashion in this broad international coalition that the United States is leading.

So this will be an ongoing effort by the United States to cultivate this broader international coalition. But I can tell you that the first round of conversations that we've had have been positive, and we're going to continue to engage deeply with these nations as we determine what sort of contributions make the most sense for the success of the international coalition.

That's the other piece of this that's important for people to understand -- that we want to make sure that people aren't just making commitments in a way that isn't carefully integrated with the commitments that are made by other members of the coalition; that as we can sort of draw up a list of needs, as we've identified them, and then go out and seek commitments from specific countries based on their expertise or their capability to fill those needs, that will be a way for us to coordinate and integrate this international coalition in a way that will make it efficient and successful.

Q And the CIA is reporting that they've seen a surge in recruitment for ISIS, up to maybe 31,000 fighters now. Do you think you have sufficient Syrian rebel fighters to train to take them on?

MR. EARNEST: Well, Victoria, the intelligence community has assessed that ISIL can muster between 20,000 and 31,500 fighters across Iraq and Syria. And that's based on a new review of all-source intelligence reports.

They have indicated that the increase in ISIL fighters is an indication that the group has had some recruitment success after the battlefield successes that they demonstrated back in June. And it reflects some better insight that the intelligence community has been able to gain into the activities of ISIL.

We are confident that the strategy that the President has put forward and discussed in his primetime address on Wednesday night is sufficient to meet the threat that is posed by ISIL, even given the assessment that they may be able to muster a slightly larger force than was previously believed.

Q So you think you can get enough Syrian rebels who are trainable to take them on?

MR. EARNEST: Again, Victoria, there are a large number of components of this strategy, and we are confident that this comprehensive strategy that includes diplomatic intelligence and, yes, military components, is the right one to succeed in degrading and ultimately destroying ISIL.

Let's move around. Zeke.

Q Thanks, Josh. Just going back to a conversation we had earlier this week about immigration. I know that it's dropped a little bit off the front burner this week, but the President was supposed to announce his decision on the executive actions at the end of the summer, which is about eight or nine days away from now. But now he has delayed the announcement. But has the President made the decision about what he wants to do

after the election? Has he made a decision and is just not telling people because of the politically charged climate? Or has he -- or for some reason -- you've offered a reason why he is not announcing it now, but why hasn't he made a decision yet?

MR. EARNEST: Zeke, the President was asked this question in the interview that he did over the weekend with Chuck on "Meet the Press." And what he indicated is that he was still waiting to cross some t's as it relates to the implementation of that strategy. So I think you can conclude from that comment that the President is determined to take executive action within the confines of the law before the end of the year to address and reform as many aspects of the broken immigration system as he can using his own executive authority.

But there is still a little work to be done as it relates to implementing that strategy. So I wouldn't say that all of the needed decisions have been made, but there have been a number of consultations between the President and members of his team, principally the Secretary of Homeland Security, Jeh Johnson, who has been responsible for leading this review alongside the Attorney General of the United States. So there have been many conversations. A lot of the decisions have been made. There are still some additional decisions that need to be finalized, but what that indicates is that while there is a little bit more work to be done, most of the work has been completed and we are positioned to make an announcement about these decisions before the end of the year.

Q All that work was supposed to have been done within 10 days from now. So is that still on pace? Will the President have all -- with those t's be crossed and the i's dotted by the end of summer? And then the President will just hold it on his desk or in a shelf somewhere, waiting until after the election to announce it?

MR. EARNEST: I am not under the impression that this will all be finalized next week. I am under the impression that it will take some time to finalize some of these decisions but, again, we're in a position where the vast majority of the work has been done. This is something that Secretary Johnson and Attorney General Holder have been at work on for a couple of months now. They've had their teams working hard at this. There have been a number of conversations between senior White House officials and those teams. The President has had a number of conversations about these recommendations.

So a lot of the work here, the bulk of the work, you could even say, has been done. There does remain a little bit more to do but that work will be completed in sufficient time for the President to make a decision and announce it before the end of the year.

Q And one quick add. I know Denis McDonough was on the Hill yesterday. He had a rough reception at the Congressional Hispanic Caucus.

MR. EARNEST: That's not how the meeting was described to me, but go ahead.

Q So how would you characterize the response to the President's delay after saying at the end of summer, now after the election, from immigration reform activists? They've put out statements that have been fairly critical. What's your assessment of that community's response?

MR. EARNEST: Well, I think they can speak for themselves. I can speak for the President. In terms of our -- why don't I try to assess our relationship with them if maybe that's an easier way for me to answer your question.

As reflected by the decision of the White House Chief of Staff to travel to Capitol Hill to sit down with members of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus, there continues to be a strong commitment by the White House to working closely with members of Congress who have, like the President, made immigration reform a top priority.

We're going to continue to work closely with them. We're going to continue to work closely and consult closely with members of Congress who share this objective, and we'll continue to have those conversations. Yes, there are members of Congressional Hispanic Caucus, as they have made known publicly, who don't agree with the strategy that the President has laid out.

But that is not going to prevent the administration from continuing to work with them to accomplish the goal that we share. It also -- again, I'll let them speak for themselves. The readout that I got from that meeting is that many of them were heartened by the fact that the Chief of Staff was able to reiterate to them in person that the President would make a decision, the President had decided to act, that his determination to act using his executive authority had not changed, and that he would make an announcement about those decisions before end of the year.

So it was a constructive meeting. I'm not suggesting that everybody in there agreed with the President's decision -- of course they don't. But it was a constructive meeting, and the fact that the meeting occurred is an indication of the strong relationship that endures between members of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus, other top advocates for immigration reform, and senior White House staff.

Jared.

Q Josh, you said earlier that there are no plans at this time to send a revised AUMF to Congress. In the 16 months between the National Defense University speech and now, what, if any, progress has been made on revising, refining or repealing the 2001 AUMF?

MR. EARNEST: Well, Jared, I can tell you that there are obviously a number of members of Congress who have strong views on this topic, and I know that there have been some conversations that have occurred, particularly on Capitol Hill. There have also been some conversations between senior White House staffers and members of Congress.

Over the last 13 months, there have been a variety of other priorities that have cropped up, but this is an issue that the President has spoken about rather eloquently, and it does reflect a view that the President strongly holds.

Q So there have been meetings at the White House?

MR. EARNEST: I'm not going to detail all of the interactions on this topic. But it is something that remains on the radar screen of the White House, and you've, I'm sure, heard from many members of Congress who continue to keep this issue on their radar screen as well.

Q So the Iraq government is the lynchpin -- the new Iraq government, the inclusive Iraq government -- is the lynchpin in many ways of the President's strategy. That government is days old and potentially vulnerable. Is there a contingency plan to defend that government if the members of that leadership are threatened by ISIS? Is there any military contingency or other contingency if they are threatened?

MR. EARNEST: Well, Jared, the President has already ordered military action in support of efforts by the Iraqi security forces and the Kurdish security forces. And in the speech that the President delivered on Wednesday night, he indicated a willingness to ramp up the assistance and support that we're providing to the Iraqi and Kurdish security forces -- this includes both strengthening and enhancing the training and equipment that is being provided to them. It also means ramping up the kind of air support that the American military has already provided to Iraqi security forces and Kurdish security forces as they take the fight on the ground to ISIL in their country.

Q What about contingencies for if the government is internally not solvent? What if there's some kind of -- again, this is something -- Abadi became Prime Minister-designate about a month ago; the government officially a couple days ago. If this becomes something that's not the future government of Iraq, what is our contingency plan?

MR. EARNEST: Well, like you said, Jared, the government is just a few days old at this point. So we're going to continue to work closely with the Iraqi government. It's in the interest of the Iraqi government to work closely with this broader international coalition that's being led by the United States to help them defend their country.

And ultimately, there is a key principle here, which is that the United States cannot take responsibility for the security situation in Iraq. The Iraqi government, the Iraqi security forces, and, ultimately, the Iraqi people need to step up and take that responsibility. They'll do so with the support of the international community and the United States. Those are very powerful friends to have, but ultimately, this is a task that they must take on themselves.

Peter.

Q Josh, going back to the sanctions issue. We've seen this in a series of increasingly tough sanctions that the U.S. and the Europeans have enacted. But at the same time, today, we heard senior officials describing continuing, in their words, "illegal and destabilizing Russian actions in Ukraine." So can you point to any single impact on the military side -- not the Russian economy, which you talk about all the time -- but on the military side, that these sanctions have had to stop the Russians from illegal and destabilizing actions?

MR. EARNEST: Well, I'll say two things about that, but I'm going to start with the economic impact, because it's important that people not overlook that -- that there has been a significant toll taken on the Russian economy. It can be measured in a variety of ways -- everything from the significant sums of money that the Russian Central Bank has expended to try to prop up the Russian currency, to the tabulations of significant capital flight that we've seen from Russia. Russia relies on and values the kind of international investments that's been important to their economy. We've actually seen that private capital flowing in the other direction because Russia has become increasingly isolated.

The Russian financial markets are not performing at the same level as comparable economies. And we have seen international organizations roll back their projections for Russian economic growth in the future because of the sanctions that have been put in place. So there has been a tangible economic effect. The question you're asking, though, is a legitimate one, which is --

Q Does that translate into anything that has impacted at all on the military side?

MR. EARNEST: I would say that in two ways, that there has been an impact. The first is that, as Ukraine was engaged in an effort to elect a new President, Vladimir Putin, the President of Russia, was vowing to not acknowledge the results of that election, but yet, just a couple of weeks ago, Vladimir Putin traveled to Minsk to sit down across the negotiating table from that newly -- relatively newly elected President of Ukraine. That has been a pretty dramatic reversal, as it relates to the position of Russia and the elected leader of Ukraine.

The second thing is -- and in some ways this might be more important -- we have seen early indications that Russia is living up to the cease-fire agreement that was reached just last week, and that involves some troop movements and some other things. We have also seen those kinds of encouraging signs be quickly reversed. So I don't want to be irrationally exuberant about those early indications, but yet, they are an indication that -- at least preliminarily, that Russia is living up to aspects of that cease-fire agreement.

But I think the other -- this is the last thing I'll say about your question -- there are other things that we want Russia to do, and we believe that they should do, to demonstrate their respect for Ukraine's territorial integrity, and to demonstrate their respect for basic international norms about the sovereignty of other countries.

So I think everybody who has participated in the effort to impose sanctions on Russia would acknowledge that there is more that needs to be done by Russia. And that, by definition almost, means that Russia hasn't -- that the sanctions haven't yet had the desired effect.

But the United States, in coordination with our allies, has spoken pretty clearly with a united voice about the need for Russia to live up to these basic international commitments and international norms. And the international community -- the United States included -- is prepared to start to roll back these sanctions if we see Russia start to live up to the kinds of agreements that they have made.

Q You mentioned Putin. Does the President trust him on any level?

MR. EARNEST: Well, the President himself has described the kinds of conversations and the relationship that he has with President Putin I believe as “businesslike.” And I do think that is the kind of give-and-take that they have with one another; that the President is able to speak pretty bluntly with President Putin, and I believe that President Putin feels like he can speak pretty bluntly in return. That is a useful and constructive channel of dialogue between those two world leaders.

There are, despite our differences -- our strong differences -- with Russia about their behavior in Ukraine, there are other areas where we have been able to advance both of our nations’ interests on some other topics. The P5-plus-1 negotiations in Iran is probably the best example of that -- actually, the best example of that is probably the removal of Syria’s declared chemical weapons stockpile. That was something --

Q I don’t think you answered the question, though. Does he trust Putin?

MR. EARNEST: Well, I think what I’m trying to say, Peter, is that they do have a very businesslike exchange of ideas when they talk. And their relationship -- or the relationship between the two countries has yielded results that are positive for the United States and positive for Russia. That is an indication of at least a functioning relationship between our two countries. And that’s an indication that you have two world leaders who are able to interact in a constructive way.

Let’s see. Josh. How are you?

Q I’m good. How are you?

MR. EARNEST: Good. Thank you.

Q Can I follow up on Jim’s question about the comparison to a year ago and the resolution? At that time, not only did the President say in his public remarks that he wanted Congress to have a vote -- I don’t know if he said up or down, but some kind of a direct vote -- on the use of military force in that context, the White House actually sent a draft resolution to Capitol Hill, which I think Senator Mendendez or Senator Reid introduced to be considered. Events moved on, that didn’t happen. Why is the stance different now? Isn’t this in fact a more significant undertaking than a couple of -- what was reported to be a couple of nights of bombing of Syria versus what aids are indicating could be a two-year campaign, a three-year campaign against ISIL?

MR. EARNEST: I’ll say a couple things about that. I don’t, frankly, recall the provision of the working draft of a resolution, but I take your word for it. I don’t recall that. I do have the President’s language in front of me: “I look forward to engaging Congress and the American people in efforts to refine and ultimately repeal the AUMF’s mandate, and I will not sign laws designed to expand this mandate further. Our systematic effort to dismantle terrorist organizations must continue.”

Q Yes, I'm not talking about that speech. I'm talking about the Syria chemical weapons situation from just a year ago --

MR. EARNEST: I see.

Q -- where he said we should have an up-or-down vote, and -- why isn't he using that language in connection with this new effort that seems broader?

MR. EARNEST: I see. Because they're two different situations. The President, in this case, believes that he does have the authority that he needs under the statutory authority, under the 2001 AUMF to carry out the military actions that he has ordered thus far. Those actions, again, would not include the deployment of ground combat troops into Iraq or Syria, and all of this would take place under the rubric of a broader international coalition.

The situation last year was different. The goal here is to deny a safe haven to ISIL, and to degrade and ultimately destroy them. The situation that we were talking about a little over a year ago was related to the Assad regime's use of chemical weapons. And those are just two different circumstances.

Q But he did say in his speech a year ago that he thought he had the authority there, too, to do what he needed to do, but nevertheless he wanted a resolution from Congress. And if there are differences between this situation and that, don't they lean in favor of getting Congress more clearly on the record in this case? Because you're talking about a much more massive undertaking. It's not really a question of whether the law requires him to do it; he said it's healthy when Congress is explicit about these things and supporting him. Isn't it even more important in this case?

MR. EARNEST: Well, I think this is exactly why the administration would welcome a show of support from Congress for the strategy that the President has put in place here. There is, in the view of the President, a very clear national security interest about why the President has ordered the military action that he has, and we would certainly welcome a show of support from Congress.

At the same time, the President and his national security team have determined that it's -- that he has very clearly the authority that he needs under the previous AUMF to order that military action.

Jon.

Q So, Josh -- just to follow up on -- isn't it true that the President would like a vote from Congress on this, just as Josh was just asking about -- just like he wanted a year ago? And the reason why he is not explicitly asking for a vote -- although he's certainly implying it with that sentence you just read -- is that congressional leaders, Democratic congressional leaders, have said they don't want a vote right now -- isn't that what's really going on here?

MR. EARNEST: Jon, what's going on is that the President believes he has the authorization that he needs.

Q As he did a year ago.

MR. EARNEST: And in this case, he has -- for the reasons that I described earlier to your colleague's question, about why he has the authority that he needs under the 2001 AUMF. And I think the President has taken the reasonable position that's consistent with the policy that he laid out in his speech at the National Defense University a little over a year ago -- has said that he would welcome a show of support from Congress for the strategy that the President has put forward.

And I think that is the reasonable position that the President has pursued. And this is a position that the President and his national security team have discussed at length with members of Congress in both parties who are interested in this issue.

Q So let's put that in language that Congress -- describes what Congress actually does, shows of support and not a technical term of a congressional action here. The President would welcome a vote from Congress explicitly authorizing this, is that correct? Would he welcome such a vote?

MR. EARNEST: Well, it is true, Jon, that there are a range of ways that Congress could indicate their support. That would include a vote, and that would include the range of things that the President would welcome.

The President does not, however, believe that that's what he needs. What he needs right now is the specific Title 10 authority related to the training-and-equipping mission of the -- that he would like the Department of Defense to carry out to expand the capacity and strengthen the capacity of the Syrian opposition.

Q And Bill Clinton was here today, I believe I saw on the South Lawn.

MR. EARNEST: I noticed. Always nice to have him back, isn't it?

Q Sure thing. Did the President have some time to sit down with the former President?

MR. EARNEST: I do understand that they were going to visit a little bit before the event. I don't know that they were going to have a formal meeting of any kind, but I was not -- I did not -- unfortunately, I didn't have the opportunity to see the former President while he was here. But I would anticipate that they had a chance to visit a little bit before the event.

Q Because I know the President reached out to former National Security Advisors for some counsel and their views on the situation with the Islamic State. So has the President similarly reached out to former President Clinton or former Secretary of State Clinton for their views on how to handle this threat?

MR. EARNEST: Well, like I said, Jon, I'm not sure of the nature of the conversation that they had today. Even if I were aware of it --

Q Even other days. I mean, has there been any --

MR. EARNEST: -- I'm not in a position to read out any sort of -- any conversations between the President and his predecessors.

Michelle.

Q The administration hasn't wanted to call this a war on ISIS, but is it not a war?

MR. EARNEST: Well, that's a good question, Michelle. There are a couple things that I would say about that. I mean, the first thing that's important for people to understand is the President has made clear how the strategy that he is pursuing in Iraq and Syria to degrade and ultimately destroy ISIL is different than the strategy that was pursued in the previous Iraq war.

The President has been clear that American ground combat troops would not be deployed into Iraq and Syria. The President has indicated how serious he is about building a true international coalition, where you will have governments in the region and our allies around the world contributing to this broader effort to deny ISIL a safe haven in Iraq and Syria.

Q But that happens in wars as well.

MR. EARNEST: Well, but this is -- the reason that I say this again is, as the President and Secretary Kerry have described, this is consistent with the counterterrorism strategy that this administration has successfully implemented in a variety of other places around the globe. The question that you're asking, though, goes to sort of the central question that is important for people to understand.

This is not a situation where it's the United States against ISIL. The fact is, ISIL has indicated that they're ready to go to war against the world. And this President, as is expected of American Presidents, is stepping up to lead an international coalition to confront that threat and to deny ISIL a safe haven. And ultimately this international coalition will be responsible for degrading and destroying ISIL. So I think what you could conclude from this is the United States is at war with ISIL in the same way that we are at war with al Qaeda and its al Qaeda affiliates all around the globe.

Q Got it. And in Syria, we know now that it was sort of strange the way it came up but the Assad regime is saying that it would help in the effort to defeat ISIS in Syria but any unilateral action by the United States would be seen as aggression. So now U.S.-trained fighters -- I mean, there's a big risk that Assad's forces will just double down and be fighting them while they're trying to fight ISIS, right?

MR. EARNEST: Well, we've seen that they've been doing that already. And that is why the United States is looking to ramp up the assistance that we provide to Syrian opposition fighters to give them greater capacity to take on ISIL. And they will have, and what will impact the equation if not change it completely, is they will have the backing of

the United States military in the form of military airstrikes working alongside them and coordinating with them as they attempt to take the fight to ISIL on the ground in their own country.

Q But indirectly, these U.S. forces are going to be training them to not only fight ISIS but they're also going to be having to simultaneously fight Assad forces. I mean, it's not as if that's unexpected, but that's what they're going to be trained to do, yes?

MR. EARNEST: As many of you have noted, we have a longstanding policy as relates to the Assad regime. We believe that President Assad has lost legitimacy to lead that country. But what we're focused on and what this international coalition is focused on is confronting the threat that's posed by ISIL and making sure that the international community can act and support the Syrian fighters on the ground to deny ISIL a safe haven in Syria.

It's important for people to understand that the failed leadership of President Assad is the reason that we're in this situation. The reason that ISIL has a safe haven in Syria today is because of the failure of President Assad to lead that country in a way that would unite that country to meet the threat that's posed by ISIL.

So the international community is being forced to step in here. We're going to support the opposition fighters, we're going to build this broader international coalition. These Syrian opposition fighters will be backed up with military support and air support from the United States, and potentially other members of the coalition. And that will certainly enhance their capacity and their ability to take the fight to ISIL on the ground in their own country.

Q Okay, and very quickly, just because we heard late last night from Jim Foley's mother saying a lot of things. But one of the things that sort of stuck out was saying that the U.S. government told the family that they shouldn't raise a ransom. And we know the U.S. stance on paying ransoms in general, but she said that she was told that the family would be prosecuted if they tried to do that on their own. Did the government tell them that? And if so, why?

MR. EARNEST: Well, Michelle, let me start out by saying something that I've said before but it continues to be true today, which is the thoughts and prayers of everyone here at the White House are with the Foley family. The grief that they're experiencing right now is unthinkable and the sadness that they must be feeling is devastating. And our thoughts and prayers are with them in this very difficult time.

The President is very concerned about Americans who are in a situation where they have been taken hostage by violent extremists and there are a number of examples of the President using every tool at our disposal to try to secure the release and safe return of those individuals. That was true in the case of Mr. Foley as well.

The United States was in contact with more than two dozen countries to try to gather information or intelligence that could lead to the rescue of Mr. Foley. Representatives from across the government, including the FBI, the intelligence community, the State

Department, and even officials here at the White House were in regular touch with the Foley family to provide them updates about the situation and to communicate to them that his return and his rescue continued to be a priority of this administration.

The other thing that I will say is that the President was so convinced that this was a priority that he ordered a high-risk mission that was successfully executed to try to secure the release and rescue of Mr. Foley. Unfortunately, and despite the way in which that mission was executed -- that is to say, successfully -- it did not end in the release of Mr. Foley. But it is an indication that elements of the U.S. government were willing to take a significant risk and expend significant resources to secure his release.

Q Did the U.S. tell them that they would be prosecuted if they tried to raise a ransom?

MR. EARNEST: Michelle, I'm not going to be in a position to detail the kinds of conversations that took place so often between members of the administration and the Foley family. It is the longstanding policy of this administration, it was the policy of previous administrations that ransoms should not be paid to terrorist organizations. We have found that terrorist organizations use hostage-taking and ransoms as a critical source of financing for their organization, and that paying ransoms only puts other Americans in a position where they're at even greater risk. So it is the policy of this administration, and it's consistent with the policy that was in place in other administrations as well.

Q But theoretically, if someone did pay a ransom to ISIS to get their loved one back, would the U.S. government try to prosecute that person?

MR. EARNEST: Well, Michelle, I'd refer you to the Department of Justice about how that law is implemented. But it is -- we've been very clear about what our policy is and we've been clear that that policy is in place both to try to prevent extremist organizations from having access to regular sources of funding but also to try to enhance the safety of American citizens around the globe.

Wendell.

Q In the effort to defeat ISIS, would the U.S. conduct an attack that had the indirect effect of aiding Bashar al-Assad?

MR. EARNEST: Wendell, that is a -- our actions in Syria are taking place, or would take place, in the midst of a rather difficult situation in Syria. There are a lot of different factions that are on the ground there.

But the policy that this administration has put in place has very clear guidelines. Our priority is to deny ISIL a safe haven from which they could plot and execute a significant terrorist attack against the West, including the U.S. homeland. That is a -- Osama bin Laden exposed how dangerous it is for a terrorist organization to have a safe haven, and this President has indicated that it is a clear principle of his presidency that he will take action to deny a safe haven to those organizations that seek to do harm to the United States.

Q Is part of the policy also, don't help Assad?

MR. EARNEST: Part of our policy is also that we believe that President Assad has the legitimacy to lead his country. And as I mentioned to Michelle, it is our view -- and I think this is pretty clear -- that the consequence, the clear consequence of President Assad's failed leadership and failed governance is the kind of vacuum that ISIL has stepped into and filled with their brand of violent, despicable extremism.

And it is only because of that failed leadership on the part of President Assad that ISIL is in a position to try to capitalize on a virtual safe haven in Syria that would allow them to expand their scope and potentially do the necessary planning and plotting to strike the U.S. homeland. The President is determined to use every element of American power to make sure that that doesn't happen.

Q And is the idea that we're not in a war with ISIS or ISIL aimed at American voters, or potential Middle East allies, or congressional representatives who say the President needs to go to them for authorization? Is it aimed at any of those people?

MR. EARNEST: Well, Wendell, I think what our aim here is, is to be as clear as possible about our strategy. And the strategy that this administration has put in place is a counterterrorism strategy that has been successful in other areas where there are extremist groups seeking a safe haven to do harm to the United States of America.

So the United States -- this counterterrorism strategy includes building up the capacity of local forces to take the fight to these extremist groups on the ground in their country. This strategy includes the deployment of American military assets, principally airstrikes that could be used in support of those ground forces to aid their effort to take the fight to these extremist organizations. And it includes building the kind of international coalition that can powerfully support local governments and national governments as they take the fight to these extremist organizations. This is a strategy --

Q But it's not a war.

MR. EARNEST: This is a strategy that's worked in other places, and it's a strategy that we anticipate will be successful in Iraq and in Syria. Let me just be clear about this: what the President has said is that this is not a situation of ISIL against the United States.

ISIL is waging a war against the broader international community. And the President is determined to build and lead an international coalition to take the fight to them. So in the same way that the United States is at war with al Qaeda and its affiliates around the globe, the United States is at war with ISIL.

Mike.

Q Yes, sir. Two questions. First, in a very general sense, does the President as a constitutional scholar believe that the War Powers Act is constitutional?

MR. EARNEST: The President is a constitutional scholar; I am not. And so I would be hesitant to sort of opine on the legal merits and strengths and weaknesses of a particular -

Q I'm not asking you to. I'm asking if the President believes that it is.

MR. EARNEST: I haven't had that conversation with him so it would be hard for me to talk about that from here.

I will say that the administration has repeatedly demonstrated our willingness to comply with the requirements of the war powers report -- or the War Powers Act. We have filed numerous war power reports with Congress related to the movement of troops and military activities.

Q But that doesn't start any sort of clock for congressional action. I believe a notification would start a 60-day clock.

*MR. EARNEST: And there are a number of notifications that have been filed in the context of the current conflict in [Iraq]Syria. Again, that was related to some ground troops that have been deployed specifically to strengthen protections of the embassy, to serve in the joint operation centers with Iraqi security forces, and some forces that are related to an advise-and-assist mission.

But let me get to this other part of it, which is that -- so we have demonstrated a willingness to comply with the requirements of the War Powers Act. That said, as we enter this next phase of the conflict, this more offensive phase of the conflict, as the President described it, the President believes he has the statutory authority that he needs to order military operations to deny ISIL a safe haven, and ultimately destroy that organization.

Q One more piece of statutory authority that he needs is Title 10 authority.

MR. EARNEST: That's correct, and that's a priority.

Q Is that a precondition for expanding the air campaign into Syria?

MR. EARNEST: Well, no. It is a core component that compliments this element of our strategy.

We've indicated -- or at least -- we haven't indicated -- Democrats and Republicans on Capitol Hill have indicated that they support giving the administration this authority. I believe somebody asked me yesterday if the completion of the training mission of Syrian fighters would be required before the President would authorize airstrikes in Syria, or begin to carry out airstrikes in Syria. And what the President has said is that he's still reviewing the materials that have been prepared for him by the Department of Defense, but that he is ready and prepared to act but will do so at a time and place of our choosing. And it's unlikely that's something that we would announce too far in advance.

Q But that brings us back to -- the central question is, assuming that the campaign is successful in pushing them back from the Syrian strongholds, if that moderate vetted opposition, as the administration terms it, is not trained to move into that space, who moves into that space?

MR. EARNEST: Well, it certainly won't be U.S. ground combat troops. That's for sure. There are elements of the Syrian opposition that have already been receiving both military and non-military assistance from the United States for more than a year now.

It's been widely reported that there are other regional governments that have been seeking to assist the -- or offer assistance to the Syrian opposition. But ultimately, the responsibility for taking the fight to ISIL on the ground in Syria can and should be Syrian fighters. And the question is, what kind of support can we offer them? And in the President's view, the international community can provide support to them in two ways.

One is ramping up our training and equipping mission. And two is the deployment of American and allied airstrikes in support of their efforts on the ground; that that will have an impact, and alter the equation on the ground as they take the fight to ISIL in their country.

Chris.

Q Thanks, Josh. I just want to clarify what you said about the distinction between counterterrorism and war because earlier today, Rear Admiral John Kirby at the Pentagon briefing said something almost identical to what you said -- I'm going to quote him -- "This is not the Iraq war of 2002, but make no mistake, we know we are at war with ISIL in the same way we are at war and continue to be at war with al Qaeda and its affiliates." Can you speak to, since it seems to be almost direct wording, is this a message from the administration that we are at war with ISIL or ISIS? Semantics do seem to matter here.

MR. EARNEST: Semantics matter in our line of work, both yours and mine, Chris. And I think what -- Admiral Kirby's comments are an indication that the administration at the Department of Defense, here at the White House, and I expect that my colleagues at other agencies will be asked as well, it is important for people here in the United States and around the world to understand that the strategy that the United States is pursuing at the direct order of the President of the United States is different than the strategy that was previously pursued in Iraq.

We are not contemplating a significant commitment of ground troops to Iraq. We're certainly not contemplating the deployment of ground troops into combat in Iraq or in Syria. But the strategy that we've laid out is consistent with the counterterrorism strategy that we've pursued in places all around the globe.

And our intention and our determination to build an international coalition to degrade and ultimately defeat ISIL is a top national security priority of the United States. That's because it's in line with a core principle the President has laid out to deny ISIL and other terrorist organizations that seek to do harm to the United States a safe haven anywhere in the world.

And so in the same way that we are at war with al Qaeda and its affiliates around the globe, we are at war with ISIL. But make no mistake, when I say “we,” I’m not talking just about the United States. I’m talking about this broader international coalition that includes Sunni-led governments in the region and our allies around the world who are united in confronting this threat.

Q So the definition of war does not need to include ground troops?

MR. EARNEST: Well, I’ll let other people determine what the precise legal or academic definition of war may be. What it’s important for people to understand -- setting aside the specific definition -- is, A, how this strategy is significantly different than the strategy that was pursued in the previous Iraq war; B, they need to understand that we’re talking about a broad international coalition; C, they need to understand that this is consistent with the counterterrorism strategy that the President has employed in other places in a way that has made the American people safer; and, D, they need to understand that this strategy is one that is being pursued not just by the United States alone, but by a broad international coalition that’s being led by the United States of America.

Q And in believing that and in deciding that the AUMF covered this latest round, did the Justice Department provide a written analysis for the President, a legal analysis?

MR. EARNEST: I’ll be honest with you, Chris, I don’t know the answer to that question. You should check with the Department of Justice. I mean, I will say that even if they have, I don’t know if they’d be in a position to provide private legal advice to the President, to the public. But you should check with them and find out.

Q And if I can ask another question to follow up on what Michelle was asking about the Foley family because -- and this concern that they had that they said that they were told by the government that they would be prosecuted if they tried to raise a ransom. You stated, as you’ve stated many times before, that it is the policy of the U.S. government not to pay ransom. But you referred us and said, “how that law is implemented, you should check with Justice.” Obviously there is a difference between policy and law. Is there a law that suggests that someone could be prosecuted if they paid ransom to what the United States might deem a terrorist organization?

MR. EARNEST: I think what I was trying to clarify is I can speak to our policy, and our policy for a good reason, and for a reason that involves the safety and well-being of Americans across the globe, is that we do not pay ransom to terrorist organizations that take hostages.

But as it relates to the law, I’d refer you to my colleagues the Department of Justice. It’s their responsibility to understand what the laws are and how they’re enforced. I can’t speak to that from here.

Q Well, would it have been the Justice Department folks who spoke with the Foley family about this issue?

MR. EARNEST: I do believe that there were some Justice Department officials who were in touch with the Foley family. But I can't speak to the nature of their conversations.

Q The Foleys said -- the Foley family says the military officials told them of this.

MR. EARNEST: Well, again, I'm not going to get into who said what in the context of these individual conversations. As I described earlier, there were a range of officials in the administration who were in touch with the Foley family. It was the Department of Defense, the Department of Justice, the FBI, and even some officials here at the White House. But I'm not going to detail the nature of those conversations.

Q They said specifically military officials warned them of prosecution if they paid ransom money.

MR. EARNEST: Again, Wendell, I'm not going to detail the specific conversations that they may have had. I will observe, however, that the large number of conversations that were -- that occurred between a variety of officials here in this administration is indicative of the resources that were dedicated to trying to secure the safe return of Mr. Foley.

Q Thanks, Josh.

MR. EARNEST: Lalit.

Q Thanks, Josh. In Afghanistan, the auditing of ballots is over. And in Kabul today, supporters of Abdullah Abdullah, one of the presidential candidates, had a large demonstration in which they alleged that the U.N. and the U.S. helped in rigging of votes in the presidential election. My question is, to what extent are you hopeful that there will be a stable, unity government in Afghanistan, given the two candidates are still fighting among each other?

MR. EARNEST: Well, Lalit, as you know, the President spoke with Afghan presidential candidates Dr. Abdullah Abdullah and Dr. Ashraf Ghani on Saturday. He emphasized the importance of concluding a deal on the national unity government as soon as possible, in the interest of shoring up international support for Afghanistan and for preserving Afghan stability. The President reaffirmed the United States' commitment to support Afghanistan, its people, and efforts to form a new unity government.

In addition to the President's conversations, the United States is continuing to engage with the candidates at the highest levels, including Secretary Kerry and Ambassador Cunningham, both of whom have been intensively involved in the situation.

Everyone across the United States government that's been speaking to both candidates has encouraged them to abide by their commitments to the political process and to the formation of a unity government that helps secure the prosperity and stability of Afghanistan. That's been our policy for some time. That's been the policy that's been communicated by the President to them. The President has had a number of telephone conversations with them throughout this process.

And our policy hasn't changed. They've made specific commitments to a political process and to the formation of a national unity government. And despite the challenging situation that they're operating in right now, we expect them to uphold the commitments that they've made because it's in the best interests of their country and their people.

Q And if there is no unity government, what impact would it have in terms of U.S. financial and military assistance to Afghanistan?

MR. EARNEST: Well, the key thing here, as everybody knows, is the signing of a bilateral security agreement. Both of these candidates have indicated a willingness to sign that agreement, but we'll need the President of Afghanistan and the senior members of the government to sign on and officially agree to that bilateral security agreement. So that's what we're watching.

I think there are a host of other organizations that are watching to see what sort of security agreement Afghanistan has with the United States. And I do think that that will have an impact on the decisions that international organizations in other countries make about the presence they'll have in Afghanistan. And that's why it's so important for these candidates to keep the commitments that they've made to the political process -- because it is important to shoring up international support for Afghanistan and preserving Afghan stability.

Cheryl, I'll give you the last one, then we'll do the week ahead.

Q Thanks. Real quick, I just wanted to know about the status of funding for the southwest border. I don't believe there's any new funding in the CR. So I'm wondering if that's something you're going to look for later? Or if that need has been -- I don't know -- abated.

MR. EARNEST: Well, we have seen that the situation at the southwest border has significantly improved since the President announced some steps earlier this summer to deal with that challenge. Those steps included shifting additional resources from the interior of the country to the border. There are a number of intensive diplomatic efforts underway with Mexico and with countries in Central America where these -- many of those seeking to travel to this country originated.

So there was also a strategy that was put in place to open up detention centers, to hire additional judges and prosecutors and asylum specialists to preside over and participate in the proceedings that were related to processing these cases.

So there was a lot of work that went into trying to deal with this flow. And the situation is much better. It's ironic that you asked me about this -- the last couple of days I've actually brought slides in to illustrate this situation. And of course, today I said, no, don't worry about the slides anymore, no one has asked about those in two days. So maybe on Monday somebody can ask me about it and I can -- wouldn't you like to see? Look, I'm not even exaggerating it. There's even a little PowerPoint thing that they gave. But no one had ever -- no one had asked. So we'll do that on Monday. That's something to look forward to on Monday.

Q Week ahead, Josh.

MR. EARNEST: But the point is that there are additional resources that the government would like to deal with --

Q Thank you. (Laughter.)

MR. EARNEST: There are additional resources that we would like. Congress has thus far failed to provide them. But we certainly would like to see additional resources to deal with this challenge.

Q Josh, one more, please?

Q Week ahead.

MR. EARNEST: I think we're just going to go to the week ahead, Goyal.

On Monday the President will award the Medal of Honor to Army Command Sergeant Major Bennie G. Adkins and to Army Specialist Four Donald P. Sloat for conspicuous gallantry.

In the evening, the President will attend a DSCC event in Washington, D.C.

As I mentioned at the beginning of the briefing, the President will travel to Atlanta, Georgia to visit the headquarters of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, where he'll receive a briefing on the outbreak of the Ebola virus in West Africa, discuss the U.S. response, and thank the scientists, doctors and health care workers helping those affected by the disease at home and around the world.

The President will also receive a briefing while he's there on the respiratory illness reported in several states in the Midwest. That evening, the President will travel to Tampa, Florida where he'll remain overnight.

On Wednesday, the President will visit U.S. Central Command at MacDill Air Force Base in Tampa. And we talked through the things that he'll do there.

On Wednesday evening, the President will return to the White House where he'll host a picnic for members of Congress. That should be interesting. (Laughter.)

On Thursday, the President will --

Q Is that the annual one?

MR. EARNEST: That is the annual. That is the annual one. So -- this is something that we've traditionally done in the summertime. We moved it to the fall to make it -- there were a couple of times, you'll recall, earlier in the administration where we canceled the picnic because it was so hot outside. So we decided we'd move it to a time when the weather might cooperate a little better.

On Thursday morning, the President will participate in an ambassador credentialing ceremony in the Oval Office. At this event, the President will receive the credentials from foreign ambassadors recently posted in Washington. The presentation of credentials is a traditional ceremony that marks the formal beginning of an ambassador's service in Washington.

In the afternoon, the President will host President Petro Poroshenko of Ukraine at the White House. The visit will highlight the United States' firm commitment to stand with the Ukraine as it pursues democracy, independence and stability. President Obama looks forward to discussing with President Poroshenko efforts to pursue a diplomatic resolution to the crisis in eastern Ukraine, as well as our continued support for Ukraine's struggle to defend its sovereignty and territorial integrity.

That evening, Thursday evening, the President will attend a DNC event in Washington, D.C.

And then on Friday, the President will wrap up a very busy week by participating in an event with the DNC's Women's Leadership Forum here in Washington, D.C.

With that, I wish you all a good weekend.

END

2:34 P.M. EDT