

Press Briefing by Press Secretary Josh Earnest, 9/8/2014

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MR. EARNEST: Good afternoon, everybody. I apologize for the lengthy delay in advance of today's briefing. A lot of news to get through. So since there's so much going on, Julie, why don't we just go straight to questions?

Q Great. Thanks, Josh. The President said in his interview over the weekend that the strategy that he'll announce for going after the Islamic State is going to look like a counterterrorism campaign. Can you explain a bit more what that means?

MR. EARNEST: Well, what the President also mentioned in his interview is his intention to give a speech on Wednesday to discuss some of these issues. So I don't want to get ahead of that speech. But let me try to give you a sense of at least what the President is thinking when he says something like that.

As the President confronts the situation and the threat that's posed by ISIL, he puts the safety and security of the American people at the top of his list of concerns. And the actions that he has ordered thus far in Iraq to strike ISIL is principally motivated to protect American personnel, including at our embassy and our consulate in Iraq. That's the focal point of our operations.

Now, there are some other objectives that we're also pursuing in terms of providing some humanitarian assistance to those religious and ethnic minorities that are being targeted by ISIL. There also are some specific counterterrorism operations that we're engaged in there, as we have been for some time.

But when the President is making these decisions, particularly as it relates to an organization like ISIL, what he's focused on is the safety and security of the American people. And the threat that this extremist organization principally poses to the homeland is in the form of foreign fighters, individuals with Western passports that have traveled to

the region and taken up arms to fight alongside ISIL. There is significant concern about the idea that some of these individuals may try to travel back to the West using their Western passports and carry out acts of violence or engage in terrorism here.

So as it relates to our principal concern about the threat that's posed by ISIL, the President is concerned about the threat of terrorism. And that is why the other counterterrorism operations that this administration has carried are a relevant reference point.

One of the other things that the President mentioned in his interview is that we have seen the United States effectively, under the leadership of this President, and thanks to the courage and service of men and women in uniform and the intelligence agencies, we've worked very effectively to defeat terrorists who pose a threat to the United States. That is true of the success of our efforts to decimate al Qaeda core in the border region and along the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan. It's also true in some of the counterterrorism efforts that you've seen the administration and the President order in Yemen, in Somalia and other places.

So what the President is trying to do is trying to illustrate that there is a track record here that people can evaluate. And each of these situations is different, and we'll have to consider each of them differently. But in terms of evaluating what the President's chief concern is and what our solution looks like, it is similar to some of these other counterterrorism missions that the President has ordered and have been successfully executed by the United States military and with the support and in conjunction with our allies around the world, and of course the support of American intelligence agencies.

Q You mentioned some of the counterterrorism missions. People often think about this in the context of Yemen, Pakistan, Somalia, which tend to be missions that are kind of shrouded in secrecy. The administration in some cases doesn't even acknowledge that these are happening. That's not what the President is talking about here, though, when he talks about counterterrorism, right?

MR. EARNEST: Well, the President has been engaged in an effort -- and he gave a speech on this earlier this year -- his desire and our collective effort to try to bring some more transparency to some of these issues.

Q But you get my point. I mean, that's one type of counterterrorism mission. That's not the type of mission he appears to be talking about here, though, right?

MR. EARNEST: Well, each of these situations is a little bit different, and each of them has their own unique threat. I mean, I guess what I would say is the President has been pretty clear about what he's contemplating. The President is not contemplating the deployment of combat boots on the ground into Iraq or Syria to deal with this situation. He's talking about building a broader, international coalition, engaging regional governments, looking for the support and the effective governance of the Iraqi central government to confront this threat.

Is it possible that there might be some clandestine efforts that are also underway here? I'm sure that that's the case, and I'm sure that's something that I won't be in a position to talk about if they do occur. But what the President is talking about is something that he's laid out a couple of time and will have the opportunity to talk about at more length on Wednesday.

Q Has he made a decision on whether airstrikes should extend into Syria?

MR. EARNEST: What the President has said is he -- and he said this, again, in the interview that he conducted over the week -- is his willingness to go wherever is necessary to strike those who are threatening America. And that has been true in a range of other circumstances. To the extent that there are parallels here, the President ordered this military to go after Osama bin Laden in Pakistan. And that was sort of the President fulfilling a campaign promise that he made in a speech -- I believe was in the summer of 2007 -- where he talked about his commitment as Commander-in-Chief to deploying American resources wherever necessary to protect the American people. And I think that is a useful guideline as you try to assess the President's thinking about some of these issues.

Q To play that out -- if he's willing to go after groups that threaten Americans wherever they are, and you say ISIS could pose a threat to Americans, and they're in Syria, has he then made a decision to go after them inside Syria?

MR. EARNEST: Well, if the President has made a decision along these lines, I'm sure that's a decision that would rise to the level of the President making the announcement about that decision. But what I'm trying to do is provide you some insight into the President's thinking on this issue. And I don't know if I was successful in that effort, but it certainly was a valiant effort.

Jeff.

Q Josh, the President also said in his interview that he did not believe he needed further authorization for action on this plan, but he's also been very clear that this is a long-term thing. So how do those two elements jive? If this is going to go on for more than just a couple months, what does he need from Congress?

MR. EARNEST: Well, the administration has demonstrated in a pretty transparent way our commitment to closely consulting with members of Congress as we pursue these kinds of foreign policy/national security priorities. The President has convened a couple of meetings with leaders in Congress to discuss these issues before they went away on their August recess six weeks or so ago.

The President has invited the four leaders of Congress -- the Democratic and Republican leader of both the House and the Senate -- to come to the White House tomorrow to discuss some of these issues and to follow up on the very successful NATO Summit that the President attended in Wales at the end of last week. So the President is committed to intensive consultations between the administration and Congress as we consider some of these very difficult and very high-stakes questions.

In addition to that, I think the President has long believed -- and this is something that the President has articulated in different -- as he's confronted different national security questions. The President believes that when the American people, through their elected representatives, can demonstrate a united front across party lines, that that's beneficial to our foreign policy; that that sends a clear signal to people all around the world that the American people are united in pursuing and accomplishing a specific foreign policy or national security priority.

So the President, in his interview with Chuck Todd at NBC, was clear that he does believe that he has the authority to "do what's necessary to protect the American people." But he went on to say, "I do think it's important for Congress to understand what the plan is, to have buy-in, to debate it, and that's why we've been consulting with Congress throughout."

So there will continue to be an effort to keep an open line of dialogue between the administration and leaders in Congress as we move on this important foreign policy priority.

Q So dialogue, but no need to ask for authorization. Is that a correct understanding of that?

MR. EARNEST: Well, I think the way the President described it is he believed that it was important to understand what the plan is, to have buy-in, to debate it, and engage in the kinds of consultations that this administration is leading right now. And that --

Q Debate it does not mean vote on it. I'm just clarifying if that's what that means.

MR. EARNEST: Well, the President is not in a position where he sets the legislative floor calendar for either the House or the Senate.

Q But he's in a position of asking for them to authorize or not authorize.

MR. EARNEST: Well, he's not just in a position of asking, he's also in a position of consulting and trying to be as candid as possible with leaders in Congress about what he's contemplating and what the policy implications are of some of the decisions that he is prepared to make. And it's important in the mind of the President for Congress to be a partner in these decisions. They have a solemn responsibility as the elected representatives of the American people to be engaged in this process. But ultimately, it is the responsibility of the Commander-in-Chief to make the kinds of decisions related to our military that rest on the shoulders of the President.

Q He also said that there might be a need for more resources. Can you address what kind of money request or funding request he might end up submitting to Congress as well?

MR. EARNEST: I don't have any sort of any funding request to preview at this point. I would remind you in a speech that I believe that you covered, Jeff, when the President traveled to West Point, he talked about his interest in the creation of this

Counterterrorism Partnership Fund. And this is a core component of the President's strategy for dealing with this and other issues like it around the globe. That is additional resources that can be used by the United States to build up effective partners so that when the United States has to confront threats like this, that we have well-trained, well-equipped, effective partners that we can work with to confront these problems.

Ultimately, we need to get into a position where the United States is not solely responsible for dealing with these kinds of emerging threats; that we want to be able to work closely with partners around the globe, partners who have better knowledge of the local politics, who have better knowledge of the local terrain, who in some cases can prevent some of these situations from becoming so urgent and so severe. And that is one example of a funding request that the President has made to members of Congress that I think that members of Congress have talked about but have not voted on. And the President would certainly like to see those kinds of resources be provided because it would strengthen the hand of this President and future Presidents for dealing with urgent situations like this.

Let's move around just a little bit. Zeke.

Q Thanks, Josh. You mentioned earlier the President's longstanding commitment to counterterrorism operations -- one of them, but one the administration doesn't like to talk about a lot was the assassination of Anwar al-Awlaki. And given the administration talks a lot about the 100 American citizens who are fighting alongside ISIS and potentially could come back here and pose a threat here, I was wondering whether the President has sought out any sort of legal justification like he did in that case and is considering the use of -- using whether drone strikes or direct airstrikes on potentially American citizens?

MR. EARNEST: Well, Zeke, I don't have any sort of policy announcement to make along these lines. I would point out the administration has sought, at the President's direction, to try to provide additional insight to the American public and to working journalists about the legal justification and the decision that was made to strike threats in Somalia and Yemen.

But as it relates to ISIL more generally, we are concerned about the threat that is posed by these foreign fighters. There are -- it is believed by some analysts that there are dozens of individuals with American passports who have traveled to the region and taken up arms to fight alongside ISIL. Now, there are some reports that indicate that there is a risk that those individuals could return to the West, whether it's the United States or one of our allies, using their Western American passport to travel either completely unimpeded or relatively unimpeded in a way that poses a threat to the American people. And the President will not hesitate to take the actions that he believes are necessary to protect the American people.

Q And following up there, there's potential legislation on Capitol Hill in terms of either stripping citizenship or taking action on passports of Americans who are serving -- who are fighting alongside ISIL. Is that a measure we can expect to hear more from the President about on Wednesday? And is that something he would support?

MR. EARNEST: I've read about some of those proposals; I haven't looked at them specifically. I don't think that we've taken a position on them at this point. But as I mentioned to Jeff, the administration certainly is interested in working in a partnership with members of Congress, Democrats and Republicans, as we confront this threat.

Viqueira.

Q Thank you, Josh. The President wants to degrade and destroy ISIL, but he doesn't want to put boots on the ground.

MR. EARNEST: American combat boots on the ground.

Q American combat boots on the ground. Yesterday, in response to Chuck Todd of NBC News --

MR. EARNEST: I've heard of that guy.

Q -- the President -- Chuck asked him, well, who is going to go into Syria, and the President said Syrians like the Free Syrian Army are going to occupy that space -- assuming the President is successful in pushing ISIL back from its Syrian strongholds. The Free Syrian Army, the administration has been reluctant to arm them all along; you've been reluctant to allow countries like Saudi Arabia to send them shoulder-launched ground-to-air missiles, the MANPADS. Some of the equipment that has been transferred to them has reportedly shown up in ISIS hands in Iraq, fighting against American, Kurdish and Iraqi forces. Why is the Free Syrian Army now a more viable and trustworthy fighting force than it was just a few months ago?

MR. EARNEST: Well, there is one aspect of your question that I want to quibble with just a little bit, which is that we have for more than a year now been providing both non-military and military support.

Q Lethal military support?

MR. EARNEST: We've been providing military support is the term of our --

Q But I'm assuming now you're going to provide them with lethal military support if they're going to be actually carrying a fight as a proxy for this coalition.

MR. EARNEST: Well, I'll get to that. Let's start with that it's important for people to understand that support from the Obama administration has been flowing to the moderate Syrian opposition for more than a year now, and that includes military support. The President has sought -- and this was in the context of the West Point speech that I mentioned in response to Jeff's question a little bit earlier -- the administration has sought additional resources, using our Title 10 authority, to ramp up that assistance to the Syrian opposition. And that certainly would, we would hope and expect, improve their capacity and success in taking the fight to the Assad regime and to ISIL to essentially -- or

to effectively wage that battle on behalf of the citizens of their country to try to retake their country. So there is an effort that has been underway for some time. We have, as you point out, sought to increase or ramp up that assistance.

Now, the question you're asking though is a somewhat more complicated one, which is the question is, why? Why them, right?

Q And why now?

MR. EARNEST: And why now.

Q And who else?

MR. EARNEST: And who else. So I guess you have three complicated questions. (Laughter.)

Q Well, I mean, you were just -- to point out there are no American boots on the ground. So who are the boots on the ground?

MR. EARNEST: I was, I was. I'm not suggesting -- it's complicated but not illegitimate. Why them? It's their country. Again, the President -- I think the President, again, in the interview that we're all citing, described it as a profound mistake to commit American combat boots to being on the ground in Syria. This is not a fight that the United States can take on for them. The United States is willing to be supportive of the Syrian opposition as they try to put in place a government that reflects the will of the Syrian people, and we're going to continue to support them.

Q It was their country three years ago. Three years later, 162,000 people are dead, there are millions of refugees all over the region. Again, why not then? Why wasn't it effectuated back then?

MR. EARNEST: Well, I would say, again, a couple of things about that. The first is the United States has been engaged in an effort to support them, and we have been for some time -- for more than a year, at least. Separately, the concern that was expressed by the administration at the time and has been -- is something that's been often repeated, is a concern that we didn't want to provide assistance to every individual who said that they were fighting Bashar al-Assad. Had we done that without thoroughly vetting them and building the kind of relationship that's necessary to understand who we're providing weapons to, we would have inadvertently provided weapons to the very people we're now fighting in Iraq.

So there was a question of who exactly was included in the Syrian opposition, and which of those elements were interested in putting in place a government that actually reflected the will and diversity of the Syrian people, and which of those were members of the opposition who were actually extremists, who were hoping to use the power vacuum that's been created by this civil war in Syria to try to carry out their own vision of an Islamic caliphate in this region.

So the reason that the administration was interested in carefully vetting the individuals who were part of the Syrian opposition is because we wanted to make sure that our assistance was landing in the hands of the people who were trying to create a government that reflected the will of the Syrian people and not to create an Islamic caliphate that was carrying out acts of violence throughout the region.

So this challenge of vetting the opposition certainly contributed to the policy of this administration to ramp up our assistance to that opposition over time after we had established some relationships and had the opportunity to vet these individuals and get a better sense about what their intentions actually were.

Jon.

Q Josh, Jeff asked you a series of very direct questions and I didn't hear a direct answer. So can you just --

MR. EARNEST: I'll try again. (Laughter.)

Q Please help me with a yes or no.

MR. EARNEST: I'll try.

Q Does the President intend to ask Congress for authorization to expand his campaign against ISIL? Just a yes or no?

MR. EARNEST: The President was asked this direction question and he --

Q Didn't give a direct answer either. (Laughter.) So I'm asking if you can give me, seriously, a yes or no. Because I don't know what buy-in -- I covered Congress for years; I don't know what you mean by you saying you want to have congressional buy-in. Buy-in, it seems to me, would imply a vote of some kind, either a vote on appropriations or a vote on an authorization or a sense of Congress resolution, but some kind of a vote. Is that what you want from Congress -- a vote on this? Yes or no?

MR. EARNEST: Well, again, if you want to get some insight into the President's current thinking about this, then I would refer you to the answer that he gave to Chuck in the interview 48 hours ago. But the other thing that I would point out that's also part of your question is if the President decides to expand the operation. And these are the kinds of questions that are best answered after the President has made some fundamental decisions about what he wants to do there -- that if there is an expansion in the operation that takes place, what consequences are there for a whole range of things: for our diplomatic relationships, what kind of assistance are we going to seek from our partners; what kind of assistance would we seek from regional governments in terms of the role that they could play here; and what role does Congress have.

So it's hard to -- unless we're talking about a very specific order from the President, it's hard to talk in very specific terms about what we want Congress to do.

But as a general matter, what I can say is that the President is interesting in their buy-in, is interested in a congressional debate, and is interested in consulting closely with the leaders in Congress so that they feel bought into this process and they feel like the partners that they actually are, as the elected representatives to the American people.

Q Because we remember that the President did make a decision on airstrikes on Syria under very different circumstances but previously, and his decision at that point was that he needed congressional authorization or that he wanted congressional authorization. If he were to go in that direction again and decide that some kind of an extended air campaign against ISIL targets in Syria were necessary, is it safe to assume he would have the same view that he would need, want congressional authorization?

MR. EARNEST: Well, the situation from last year is a little bit different than the situation this year; that the situation from last year was related specifically to this issue of chemical weapons being used by the Assad regime against the Syrian people. The situation right now is related directly to the protection of American citizens in the region. The President does believe that he has all the authority necessary as the Commander-in-Chief of the United States to order the kind of military action that's necessary to protect American citizens.

Q Including strikes in Syria?

MR. EARNEST: But again, if there is an expansion of the President's military orders, or if there is an expansion of the scope of operations that the President is willing to consider, at the point that the President has made that decision we can start making decisions about what sort of congressional role or authorization is required, if any.

Q Give me a sense on the timeline for a decision on this. Is this something the President is considering right now? I mean, is this something we should expect in the next day or two, or is this something over a course of weeks?

MR. EARNEST: When you say "this" --

Q The decision on whether or not to expand military operations that you just referred to.

MR. EARNEST: Well, the President has been regularly consulting with his national security team for weeks now. And when they are having these meetings, they're talking about our broader strategy for confronting the threat that's posed by ISIL. And there are a range of elements that we've discussed quite a few times here in terms of our diplomacy with the Iraqis trying to form a central government. They've made tremendous progress on that over the next last couple weeks, and we're hoping that this week they'll make some additional important progress in forming a cabinet.

There's important work that's being done by the Secretary of State. He's traveling to the region this week where he's going to be consulting with regional governments. I think the President was pretty powerful in explaining the role that these governments in the region have and the stake that they have in resolving this conflict.

The President highlighted that so often these Sunni-dominated governments perceive Shia-led governments as the principal threat to their ability to lead their country and to remain in power. It's the President's view -- and I think that there is some justification for this based on the facts that we see on the ground there -- that they actually face a great threat from more extremist Sunni elements that have demonstrated significant capacity to wreak havoc in their region.

There's also a diplomatic effort to engage the international community here. There are a number of intelligence efforts that the President has already ordered. We've talked quite a bit about how the President at the beginning of this situation ordered an increase in intelligence assets to get a better sense of what sort of -- to get a better sense of what actually was happening on the ground and to better assess the capability of both ISIL but also the Iraqi security forces. But also, as you point out, the other element of this strategy is the use of military force. That is part of the strategy.

But the reason I'm running through this long list here is to illustrate to you that there are -- that this broad strategy that the President has put in place to deal with this is something that is regularly discussed among his team. And they're discussing every element of this strategy at each of these meetings.

Q But in his speech on Wednesday -- and first of all, is this a primetime address or a daytime speech?

MR. EARNEST: We're still working through the logistics of the speech that the President wants to give. And so once we have some more details on that, we'll let you know.

Q But is the purpose of the speech to announce a new phase in this military operation, or to outline what he has already outlined in different venues -- the interview over the weekend, the press conferences on his last trip -- what his strategy is vis-à-vis ISIL?

MR. EARNEST: Well, the speech isn't written yet, so I don't want to get ahead of describing a speech that hasn't been written yet. But generally --

Q But trying to go forward, is the purpose to explain what he's already doing or to announce something new?

MR. EARNEST: Well, I wouldn't rule out that there might be something new in the speech. But the principal goal here is to make sure that people understand what the clear stake is for the American people and our nation in this ongoing violence that we're seeing in Iraq and Syria. He also wants to describe what sort of tools are at the disposal of the American government as they try to protect our interests and our people in the region.

And the President wants to try to lay that out pretty clearly. Does that mean the President may have something new to say in the speech? He might. But I'll wait until the speech is written before I start guessing about where he's going to end up.

Major.

Q Josh, when you were asked a moment ago, has the President decided to expand the air war into Syria, you said the President said he will go wherever is necessary. That sounded like a very near confirmation that he has decided that. Should that be interpreted that way?

MR. EARNEST: No -- because if the President has made a specific decision like this to expand our military operations, then you can expect that the President himself would announce a decision like that, not just little old me here.

Q How should we interpret your answer that he'll go wherever is necessary?

MR. EARNEST: That is a statement of the President's view in terms of what sort of authority he has as the Commander-in-Chief to confront these challenges. And the President is determined to act where necessary to protect American citizens both in the region, but here in the homeland. And the President has demonstrated a willingness to do that on a number of occasions already, and that principle continues to apply in this situation, as well.

Q So it's not a matter of whether, it's just a matter of timing?

MR. EARNEST: Well, again, if and when the President has made a decision along these lines, it will be something that the President will announce.

Q Is that the purpose of Wednesday's speech?

MR. EARNEST: No, the purpose of the President's speech on Wednesday is broader than that. Again, military action is one element of our strategy, and the President does have this integrated strategy that relies very heavily on America's forceful diplomatic might and a range of other assets that we have at our disposal. And the President is going to use all of them to deal with this specific challenge.

Q So let's just say, for the sake of argument, I was an American who watched the President's press conference at the end of the NATO Summit and watched the interview yesterday. After seeing Wednesday's speech, will I say to myself, wow, there's like 70 percent brand new? Or is it going to be like -- (laughter) --

MR. EARNEST: That is a particularly creative way to ask that question. I think what I would say is I would encourage that American citizen that you're describing to tune into the speech and evaluate for themselves to see how surprised they are by the President's remarks.

Q Come on, you can give us something better.

MR. EARNEST: At this point, I can't. It's a little early for that.

Q I mean, you more or less said to Jonathan it's mostly going to be what we've heard before; there might be something new. I mean, is it to try to gather the American people's attention and say, in case you haven't heard -- (laughter) -- here's what I'm thinking about, here's the context, but this isn't the declarative speech on how I'm going to ratchet

up this conflict to a higher military level, and I need Congress to approve it, and here's how much it's going to cost, and here's the timeline I've sort of put together to envision achieving goals X,Y and Z?

MR. EARNEST: We're still a couple days away from the speech, and so I'm not in a position to provide additional guidance to you right now of what the President may or may not say. So we'll have the opportunity to try this again tomorrow and maybe I'll be prepared with a little bit more to say about this.

Look, the President and his team are working on the speech as we speak. So as we get some more details locked down, I will try -- I'm probably over-committing myself now -- but I will try to provide at least a little bit greater insight for you and your viewers about what the President intends to talk about on Wednesday.

Q I want to follow up on immigration for a second, because I just want to be clear -- what the President decided Saturday was that he wouldn't take any executive action until after the November election, right? Or has he decided to revisit the entire question of taking executive action until after the election? Because to my mind, and many advocates who have been pushing for this, they are very different things.

MR. EARNEST: I appreciate you giving me the opportunity to clarify this -- to the extent that there is any ambiguity here. The President has decided that he will take executive action within the confines of the law to fix those aspects of the broken immigration system that he's able to fix before the end of the year. And that is a decision that he has made, and that is something that will occur.

Now, some of the static that you might say in the media over the weekend was related to the President's earlier commitment to acting before the end of the summer. What the President has decided is that he will act now before the end of the year. The President has not in any way altered his commitment or interest in taking executive action -- again, within the confines of the law -- to solve to act where Congress hasn't, and more specifically, to act where congressional Republicans have blocked congressional action. And the President's commitment to acting on this before the end of the year has not changed.

Q He said yesterday that the reason for that is he needs to explain it to the American people. Why does he need until the end of the year to explain something? Isn't it true that the dominant factor -- if you want to call it static -- was static from Senate Democrats saying this is a -- maybe you think it's a good idea, but it's terrible politics for us and we want you to wait until after the election? The President clearly doesn't need nine weeks to explain this to the American people. If he wanted to explain it, he could explain it -- just like he's going to try to explain the strategy on Wednesday. It seems to me the only rational explanation for this is an intervening midterm election and fears from Senate Democrats that they did not want to take this issue on in the teeth of an already tough political environment.

MR. EARNEST: Major, the reason that the President has made the decision to delay his announcement about executive actions that he's going to take is specifically because he is concerned mostly about ensuring the solution that he offers is both sustainable and enduring.

Q But if it's an executive action, it is sustainable by definition until the end of his presidency. He doesn't have to worry about Congress. That's the whole point.

MR. EARNEST: What the President wants to do is he wants to ensure that all of the work that has been done over the last several years to build this powerful bipartisan coalition in support of immigration reform is sustained. And by injecting an executive action in the midst of this hyper-partisan, hyper-political environment shortly before the midterms, that will have a negative impact on the broader public support and on the sustainability of immigration reform.

So I guess the short answer to your question is, the President is willing to take a little political heat from the pundits, from some of the advocates in the Hispanic community in particular, in order to ensure that the policy that he puts forward is one that can be sustained. And the fact is we haven't seen a similar willingness from congressional Republicans to take a little heat to do what's in the best interest of the country. In fact, we've seen congressional Republicans do exactly the opposite. They've been in a situation where they don't want to take any political heat, even though they know that acting on bipartisan immigration reform would create jobs, it would expand economic growth, it would reduce the deficit. That's why it's strongly supported by the faith community, by the law enforcement community, by the business community, by the labor community.

These are all reasons why comprehensive immigration reform should move forward. That's why it passed with bipartisan support in the Senate. But there is a small but vocal group among congressional Republicans in the House of Representatives who are blocking this kind of reform. And that's the only reason we're having this question right now.

Q So not doing what he said he was going to do on the timeline, he said he was going to do it as an act of courage.

MR. EARNEST: Well, what the President has done -- I mean, look, Major, it's a not a surprise to anybody at the White House, or it certainly isn't a surprise to me -- I won't speak for my colleagues -- it's not a surprise to me that there were some people in the newspaper over the weekend who were critical of the President's decision to announce these executive actions before the end of the year as opposed to the end of the summer. That criticism was not a surprise; that criticism was anticipated. But the President is willing to take on that criticism so that we can ensure that the executive action that the President takes is sustained, that it's enduring, and that we continue to have public support for it.

Look, for all the disagreement that there may be around this one issue, there should be no disputing the fact that injecting this issue into the current political environment would be really bad for the issue. There's some disagreement about whether or not, well, maybe it would help some Democrats, maybe it would hurt some others, maybe it would galvanize base Democratic voters, maybe it would energize Latino supporters, maybe it would provoke Republican candidates into doing outrageous things like shutting down the government in a way that would benefit Democrats. There are a lot of people with a lot of different views about what possible impact this could have on individual races. But there is no arguing about the fact that injecting this issue into this sharply political, polarized environment would be bad for the issue.

And the President believes ultimately that that's the most important thing -- that making progress on this issue is the most important thing. No one in Washington, D.C. has invested more in trying to get this done than President Barack Obama. And if that means the President has to take on a little bit more heat here for a few weeks until we announce our decision in order to make it more likely that these solutions will be enduring and sustained and successful, the President is happy to take on that heat in order to get that done.

Let's move around a little bit. Justin.

Q I guess I wanted to just follow on that and maybe argue with the idea that --

MR. EARNEST: That's why we're here. (Laughter.)

Q -- that injecting that into the current political climate is bad for the issue. I mean, we just went through a year of you guys saying time and again that House Republicans haven't moved on the issue, it seems legislatively dead in every possible way. And so the only X factor out here seems to be control of the Senate. So I'm wondering if you can maybe explain explicitly why an executive action would make -- if it were to come this week, would be less enduring than one that happens five weeks from now -- if it's not what I think we're all dancing around, which is that it helps Senate Democrats to retain control of the chamber.

MR. EARNEST: The reason that immigration reform over the last five years has made so much progress --

Q Has it made progress?

MR. EARNEST: Well, it passed the Senate with bipartisan support. We got 14 Republicans to vote for it, and every single Democrat in the Senate voted for it. We also know -- although we haven't tested the proposition -- but I think everybody in here -- let me know if you disagree -- but I think everybody is willing to stipulate that if this legislation that passed through the Senate in bipartisan fashion were put on the floor of the House of Representatives, that it would also pass with bipartisan support, with a bipartisan majority, the President would certainly sign it.

That's evidence of significant progress. I mean, it's not ancient history to cite the experience of 2006 where you had Democrats and Republicans on both sides of the issue reluctant to engage in a debate about it, let alone reluctant to vote for it.

So we have made a lot of progress over the last five years. The reason for that I think is twofold. The first is, it's become clear what the facts are. The facts are that it would be good for job creation. It would be good for economic growth, it would reduce the deficit. So the facts are clear about why Congress should take action on this.

The second thing is, a lot of very difficult work was done between Democrats and Republicans to try to find some common ground. That is harder than it's ever been in this town. But thanks to the dutiful efforts of members of this administration, Democrats and Republicans in the Senate, they brokered some common-sense common ground and cobbled together a legislative proposal that would do a lot of good for the country. It meant that neither side got every single thing that they wanted, but they were able to arrive at a piece of legislation that everybody acknowledges would be really good for the country.

So there is painstaking work that was put into striking that compromise. Now, what we have also seen in the context of these midterm elections is a pretty gross distortion about the facts of our immigration system.

Q So that's going to change after the midterm elections?

MR. EARNEST: Well, what will change is that we'll be past it. I don't think any of the Republican candidates --

Q (Inaudible.)

MR. EARNEST: Well, but listen -- think about it, Justin. I don't think any of the Republican candidates right now are contemplating a six-figure ad buy the third week in November. Are they? If they are, I hope they'll spend their money that way, but they're not going to. So the tone and heightened nature of the debate will just be different. Will there still be Republicans who are against common-sense immigration reform? Yes. I readily concede that that's the case. But will they be in less of a position to distort the facts about what that position actually is? Yes, I think they will.

Q Well, why does that affect the sustainability of the President's eventual --

MR. EARNEST: Because the reason that the President feels confident about -- well, let me take that in two ways. The first is we want to preserve the strong public support that currently exists for immigration reform; that we have worked hard in painstaking fashion to cobble together this coalition of Democrats and Republicans in Washington, D.C. and business leaders and labor leaders and faith leaders and leaders in the law enforcement community all across the country in support of this proposal.

But by injecting it into the highly charged political debate six or eight weeks before the midterm elections is to subject this issue to gross distortion and partisanship that could alter that balance. And we don't want to do that. And that means the President is willing to take on a little heat and be criticized by -- certainly by Republicans, but even by members of his own party in order to protect the issue -- because ultimately that is the goal. We've said for quite some time that the President's goal here is solving problems and not playing politics.

Q Just to square the last circle in this maybe, why is this diffused as an issue if, as you just said maybe 15 minutes ago, you're pledging to take this executive action by the end of the year? Why aren't we going to see a six-figure ad buy from a Republican going up against a vulnerable Democrat, saying the President not only is still going to do this but now he's playing politics to hook the issue. Have you really diffused this or taken this out of the political discussion? Or have you just kind of punted it and kept it alive as an issue but now people aren't kind of getting the relief that they would otherwise?

MR. EARNEST: I think there is a difference between the President indicating a willingness to act and -- or a commitment to act even, and actually announcing what that action is. I think that there is a tangible difference there in a way that will reduce the amount of incoming, if you will, that the issue will take. And I think that's ultimately what's driving this decision.

Olivier.

Q Thank you, Josh. I've got a couple for you. The first is that the last sentence in the latest War Powers letter that the President sent to the Congress says, "I appreciate the support of the Congress in this action." How and where was that support here expressed?

MR. EARNEST: Well, I think that we've seen a number of public comments from Democrats and Republicans indicating that they support the decisions that the President has made to order military action in Iraq to protect American citizens there.

Q But that's not Congress speaking as -- I mean, he didn't say, I thank some Republicans and Democrats. He is explicitly assuming full congressional support for what he's done, right?

MR. EARNEST: I don't have the War Powers report notification in front of me. If you want to read it to me again, I --

Q "I appreciate the support of the Congress in this action." Does he consider the leadership to be sufficient? I mean, I'm getting back to this whole notion of a vote or not a vote, obviously, but he seems to be assuming it.

MR. EARNEST: Well, we have seen public comments from rank-and-file Democrats and Republicans as well that indicate their support for the President's decision to order military action to protect American citizens in Iraq. But I'm willing to stipulate that, yes,

they have not voted on this at this point, and voting on it is different than them talking about it. But in terms of them articulating support that the President appreciates, we've seen many Democrats and Republicans do that.

Q So in the past couple weeks we've had senior officials say -- I think one on CNN and some elsewhere -- that this conflict to degrade and destroy the Islamic State could run three years or more. And we had news over the weekend of airstrikes on targets that I don't understand how it fits the President's contention that this is a mission about safeguarding the security of American personnel and installations in Iraq when you're striking targets like IS around the Haditha Dam, for example. It seems like the President, for all his public comments about mission creep, is overseeing a fairly steady expansion of a conflict in scope and now in duration as well. Is that an incorrect assessment?

MR. EARNEST: It is. The reason for that is that there is a direct threat that's posed by ISIL taking control of the Haditha Dam to American personnel in Iraq. There also is this broader effort to support the Iraqi security forces as they are engaged in taking the fight to ISIL. That's an example of our efforts to try to support them in a way that, again, safeguards the American citizens who are already there.

Q What's the direct threat to American personnel from --

MR. EARNEST: Well, the way that it's been described to me is that there is a threat that if ISIL decided to destroy the Haditha Dam, that it could threaten -- or would threaten the airport downstream from the dam. I'm told that that was true of Mosul Dam, as well, and is true in this case.

Move around a little bit. Jared.

Q Josh, when you're talking about the -- and I want to follow up on Olivier -- because the buy-in phrase sounds squirrely. When you're talking about buy-in, it sounds like you're going to give Congress just enough authority, just enough of a role to agree with the administration's position but not enough to say no. Does the administration intend to give Congress a role to shape policy about ISIS, to shape policy and action? Or is it just to buy into the administration's position?

MR. EARNEST: Well, I would say, Jared, that the level of consultation that this administration has demonstrated a commitment to indicates our genuine interest in a dialogue with members of Congress about our policy in Iraq and Syria, and our policy more broadly for confronting ISIL. I think that is evidenced by the fact that we're having continuous conversations. Some of the conversations have occurred before the President has made important decisions. There have been regular consultation from the Department of Defense and the Department of State, other senior members of the President's team here at the White House.

So there has been intensive consultation, and that is evidence of our genuine interest in members of Congress partnering with this administration as we develop a policy to degrade and ultimately destroy ISIL and to protect American citizens in Iraq.

Q But when you're talking about buy-in, buy-in kind of exists in this rhetorical gray area, where it's not quite a vote so you don't have them shaping policy -- at least, again, you haven't clarified it, despite getting several questions about it. It doesn't seem like it's quite so far as negotiating on policy, negotiating on strategy and voting on it. So it's just enough responsibility for Congress to maybe share some of the blame if something were to go wrong or if something were to happen, but not enough to actually say no to the President's policies. Is any member of Congress going to get the ability to say no to the President's policy to fight ISIS in Syria or Iraq?

MR. EARNEST: Jared, it is the responsibility of the Commander-in-Chief to make decisions about the use of our military to protect American citizens. The President believes that he has all of the authorization that is required to make those kinds of decisions.

That said, we welcome Congress as a partner as we confront some of these very difficult and high-stakes national security issues. And if Congress wants to participate in this process, we certainly would welcome their participation in a constructive way. But our level of engagement indicates our legitimate interest in congressional consultation and in congressional action that is contributing to this broader effort.

Q But when you're talking about if Congress wants to do this, it's not like there's a sign-up board. They have a constitutional role here. And obviously depending on whether it's authorization or appropriations -- there are different rules for each aspect of this -- but you're talking about something that sounds volitional. Congress has a duty here. Is the President trying to limit their duties as it goes against authorization or appropriation?

MR. EARNEST: Of course not. I'm merely stating the fact that the President is the Commander-in-Chief, and that means he is the one that is ultimately responsible for making decisions about ordering military action. But you are right -- you're saying something that I said early on in this briefing, which is that there is a role for Congress to play here. And how they choose to play that role is obviously up to them. They are a separate branch of government. As I mentioned earlier, the President doesn't make decisions about what pieces of legislation find their way to the floor of the House of Representatives. It certainly would be a good thing in our view if the President did have some authority over that, but he doesn't. It certainly would allow us to confront some of the other problems that House Republicans have refused to vote on.

But at the end of the day, we are interested in careful and close consultation with members of Congress in both parties, in both Houses of Congress, and we are interested in their buy-in, as the President described.

Q But there's no opposite to buy-in.

MR. EARNEST: Excuse me?

Q There's no way for them to say no. When you talk about buy-in, it's one-directional.

MR. EARNEST: Well, I guess I don't understand what you mean, Jared. I mean, again, if members of Congress want to put forward a piece of legislation saying the President should not act or should not order military force to protect American citizens in Iraq and Syria, they're welcome to vote on that. Again, the President won't have a vote and the President doesn't determine whether or not that goes onto the floor of the House of Representatives. So Congress does have some volitional aspect to this.

We've been clear about what we would like them to do -- or at least a little clear. But ultimately they're allowed -- they obviously -- there are a variety of ways for them to demonstrate their support or opposition to this policy, and that can range from everything from an interview or a piece of legislation that they vote on, and a range of things in between, as you pointed out.

So what I'm willing to say at this point is we are interested in members of Congress and Congress as an institution working closely with the President as he confronts these difficult challenges. And the reason for that is really simple, Jared. The reason is the President believes that our foreign policy is more forceful, it's more impactful when we can demonstrate to the world that the United States of America is united in support of this priority.

Ed.

Q Josh, a quick sidebar issue since the briefing started. The Baltimore Ravens have announced they've terminated the contract of Ray Rice. I realize you did not know that, but probably have seen or heard about this pretty dramatic, horrific video of him beating up his wife. The President has spoken out on this issue a lot. The Vice President I think today is having an issue -- an event about the passage of the Violence Against Women Act. What kind of comment could the White House offer about this situation?

MR. EARNEST: Well, I haven't seen the news because of what you just said, but let me say it this way: This administration and this President do believe strongly that the scourge of violence against women is something that needs to be aggressively combatted. And I don't want to comment on the individual decisions that are made by, in this case, an individual NFL team, but you have seen the President and the Vice President make very forceful public comments in talking about how important it is for men, in particular, to step up and step forward and make clear that violence against women is something that is not and cannot be tolerated, and that the most important thing -- or one of the most important things that we can do to try to end the scourge of violence against women is for men to ban together and to send a very clear signal that it is unacceptable for men to perpetrate acts of violence against women. And we certainly welcome any strong signals by anyone in this country in support of that value.

Q I want to go back to ISIS. To try to put a finer point on what you've been asked several times, rather than trying to confirm if he is going -- get ahead of the President of what he's specifically going to say, will he make decisions by Tuesday and Wednesday about

expanding this campaign against ISIS so that he can present a plan first to the congressional leaders on Tuesday and then a plan, a strategy to the American people on Wednesday?

MR. EARNEST: Well, I don't want to foreshadow any specific presidential decisions, but the President is interested in having a genuine consultation with the congressional leaders who will be here tomorrow about what he believes is the best path forward for confronting the threat that's posed by ISIL. The President is interested in having a conversation with the American public about what sort of tools are at the disposal of the United States of America to confront this threat. Those tools include intelligence tools. Those tools include the powerful diplomacy of the United States of America. Those tools also include the potent arsenal of the United States military. And all of those things can be brought to bear to confront this situation.

What's most important for people to understand -- both the American people and for congressional leaders to understand -- is the President is steadfastly committed to ensuring that the United States is not taking this one alone. And the President is going to use all of the tools of our diplomacy to ensure that we have a central Iraqi government that's standing up and uniting that country to take the fight to ISIL in their own country; that we're engaging nations in the region, particularly the Sunni-led nations in the region who have a very clear stake in this outcome. And the President spent a lot of time at the NATO Summit at the end of last week talking to our allies in NATO about what role the international community can play to support this broader effort to confront, degrade, and ultimately destroy ISIL.

Q A couple specifics. A couple weeks ago, Peter asked you a question and you said the President was not referring to ISIS when he dismissed some terrorists in *The New Yorker* magazine as the JV squad. *The Washington Post*, I believe last week, gave you four Pinocchios for that.

MR. EARNEST: I saw that.

Q The President yesterday went ahead -- glad you saw that -- the President yesterday went ahead and doubled down on it and said, I was not referring to ISIL, he said. Why do you and the President continue to say something that has been proven to be false?

MR. EARNEST: It's not proven to be false. I'm just going to go back to the -- I did this when Peter asked it, too, but let me just read what the President said. The President was drawing distinction between core al Qaeda and a range of local groups. What the President said is, "There is a distinction between the capacity and reach of a bin Laden and a network that is actively planning major terrorist plots against the homeland, versus jihadists who are engaged in various local power struggles and disputes, often sectarian."

The point is the President was describing the wide variety of extremist groups that have sprouted up over the last several years in this region of the world. Some of them have greater capabilities than others. Some of them do not pose a threat to the homeland, or at

least don't have the capacity to plan what the President described as "major terrorist plots against the homeland."

Q Okay. But David Remnick told PolitiFact -- the interview took place on January 7th -- that the President was referencing a specific event that had happened just days before -- January 3rd, when Islamic State raised this flag, took over Fallujah. So in that interview, in that context, the President was referring to something -- I understand you're making this more general. But according to David Remnick, was saying -- he was referring in the interview to something that specifically happened four days before -- Islamic State taking over Fallujah. So that sounds like a direct -- whether he used the name ISIS/ISIL, he was referring to an event from four days before where Islamic State took over Fallujah.

MR. EARNEST: Ed, what the President was referring to was he was referring to jihadists who were engaged in various local power struggles and disputes, often sectarian. The President was not singling out a specific group -- that's why he described jihadists, plural; power struggles, plural; disputes, plural. He is talking about the wide variety of groups and indicating that we don't have to be worried about every single one of these groups. Many of these groups aren't particularly sophisticated, don't have designs or the capability of attacking the United States homeland. Some of them are more influential, some of them do have greater capacity, and some of them have built up and demonstrated that capacity over the last several months, like ISIL has.

But the fact is, at the time what the President was talking about is drawing a clear distinction between core al Qaeda and the wide variety of groups that are extremist organizations that are operating in this area. Even ISIL, which has demonstrated some substantial military capacity as we've talked about, there are not indications right now that they are actively planning or that they have the capacity to carry out a widespread conspiracy along the lines of the plot that was organized by Osama bin Laden about 13 years ago this week. Their capacities are different, and that's the point that the President was trying to make. It means that our policy for dealing with them needs to be different.

And the President is putting in place a strategy to deal with the threat that is posed by ISIL before they can find the kind of safe haven that would allow them to eventually build the capacity to carry out the kind of terror attack that we saw that was carried out by Osama bin Laden.

Q Janet Napolitano, the President's former Homeland Security Secretary, said this morning that when she was in office, ISIS was on everybody's radar screen. She left office a year ago this month -- September 2013. So was ISIS on the President's radar screen at least a year ago? And if so, why is he giving a big speech this week? Why didn't we get a strategy a year ago? Six months ago?

MR. EARNEST: Well, let's talk about a couple of things. The first is ISIS is essentially the inheritor of al Qaeda in Iraq. And these extremists have been wreaking havoc in this region of the world for a long time, so they've certainly been on the radar screen of the national security professionals, national security leadership of this administration for five years.

Q So Janet Napolitano was right that they've been on the radar screen --

MR. EARNEST: They were also on the radar screen of the national security officials in the previous administration because there was concern about the threat that al Qaeda and Iraq posed to Americans in the region.

Now, this is an organization that has evolved, but that essentially is where they evolved from. So this is something that the President has been focused on. And the reason that the President is giving this speech now is that over the last couple of months we have seen this organization make substantial gains in Iraq and threaten Americans in Iraq. And the reason for that is that the Iraqi government -- the core reason for this is that the Iraqi government was governing along sectarian lines in a way that ruptured what had been a united country.

And so what we have been actively engaged in for quite some time at a diplomatic level is encouraging Iraq's political leaders to unite that country behind a central government that demonstrates that they are committed to advancing the interests of every citizen of the nation of Iraq. That's a diverse country, and they need a central government that reflects that diversity and demonstrates a commitment to representing the interests of that diverse population.

April.

Q Josh, I want to ask you a couple of questions. Back on your talking point today -- buy-in and also partnerships -- would you say that if you're saying buy-in and partnerships you mean that executive -- well, the White House and Congress will either succeed or fail together, no matter what happens?

MR. EARNEST: What we would like to see is we would like to see Congress be united and to be a partner with this administration as we confront this threat -- for all the differences that I do not want to be in a position of papering over. There are differences between Democrats and Republicans, particularly the Republicans on Capitol Hill, and the Democrats in the administration are substantial, that we have a difference of opinion about a range of things.

But when it comes to protecting the American people and putting in place a strategy that makes good use of our intelligence capability, our diplomatic authority, and our military might, that we should be able to unite across partisan lines in support of that policy and in support of that strategy. And we seek that kind of cooperation, consultation and partnership with everybody in Congress.

Q So even with uniting across party lines, no matter what happens, successes will be shared evenly and failures will be shared evenly?

MR. EARNEST: Well, the President is undertaking this effort with the intention to succeed. And the President is willing to share credit with those individuals in Congress who are going to partner with this administration to accomplish these goals.

Q Also, in the ramp-up to 9/11, as we are looking to this next anniversary, there are concerns by many in the national security field that with the threats of ISIL that something could possibly happen here. What is the mindset of this administration in the lead-up to 9/11? And is there a possibility of increasing the threat level in this country?

MR. EARNEST: Decisions about increasing the threat level are made by the Secretary of Homeland Security, so you should consult with them about whether or not they are planning to increase the threat level. I'm not currently aware of any plans to increase the threat level.

The second thing that's important for people to understand is the intelligence community continues to assess that there is no active plotting underway by ISIL for an attack against the homeland of the United States of America.

The third thing I want to point out here is that we are concerned and remain concerned about the threat of violence that is posed by foreign fighters. And again, they're ironically named foreign fighters because we're principally talking about Americans with American passports who have traveled to Syria and taken up arms alongside ISIL. And there is a threat that those individuals pose because they have an American passport. They can freely travel back to the United States, and would therefore be in a position to potentially carry out acts of violence here in this country. That is something that we're concerned about and something that we're monitoring very closely.

We're working with the international community to try to monitor the travel of those individuals so that we can try to limit the threat that they pose.

Q The concern of those several dozen Americans who have those passports back and forth to Syria, that doesn't make you think about increasing the threat level here at all?

MR. EARNEST: Well, again, I'll say a couple things about that. The first is we're constantly recalibrating our security posture here in this country to try to meet the threats that we perceive. And some of the changes to that security architecture are perceptible and some of them aren't. But we are constantly making sure that we have in place a strategy for protecting American citizens and protecting the homeland.

I'll do a couple more. Michelle.

Q Do you feel like you have a handle on who all these foreign fighters are? We've heard a number between 100 and 200, and that always kind of comes through other channels. So what can the White House say specifically about how closely you are now able to track the foreign fighters?

MR. EARNEST: The effort to monitor these foreign fighters is something that is the responsibility of the intelligence community. And it's difficult from this vantage point for me to spend a lot of time talking in detail about the actions of the intelligence community.

But what I can tell you is the United States and this administration are very aware of the threat that is posed by these individuals. We have been engaged in an effort both at a diplomatic level, at a law enforcement level, but also at an intelligence level to mitigate this threat. And that means working closely with our partners in the region, but also with our allies in Western Europe.

We talked a little bit earlier last week about how there are -- there's an even larger number of so-called foreign fighters that have originated from Western Europe. So the threat to these Western countries is, if you just look at the numbers, even larger than the threat that currently is facing the United States.

But we're going to work in united fashion, in coordinated fashion and united with our allies to confront this threat. And I would also say something that I have been meaning to say for some time but haven't, which is that the President is actually going to convene a meeting of the United Nations Security Council to discuss this issue and to talk about what sort of role the U.N. and our Security Council partners can play in trying to mitigate this threat that faces not just the United States, but to our allies and interests around the globe.

Q But is there a confidence that we generally know who all these people are at this point and where they are?

MR. EARNEST: Well, there are significant resources that have been dedicated to this effort. I don't think that I would be in a position to say a whole lot more about this, but other than to say we recognize the severity and the seriousness of this threat, and we have responded accordingly by putting in place the kinds of policies and procedures that we feel mitigate this threat. But it remains something that we're concerned about.

Q And we've heard you say "strategy" and then that a "strategy is being formed," and "integrated strategy," but then, "if it expands" and what role will everybody play. So it seems like right now the strategy is to lay the groundwork for making those decisions, right? Because whenever we hear an explanation of what the strategy is, it's a lot of coalition building and putting something together to make those decisions in the future. Is that how you would define the strategy right now?

MR. EARNEST: I would define the strategy in a couple of pretty clear ways. The first priority, as the President has laid out, is supporting Iraq's political leaders as they form an inclusive government. That inclusive government will be required to unite the country to face down the threat that is posed by ISIL and to take the fight to ISIL in their country.

After all, we need to start from a place where the Iraqi government and the Iraqi people are responsible for the security of their own country. The United States stands ready and will continue to support the Iraqi government and the Iraqi people as they try to secure their own country. So that's the first thing.

The second thing is engaging regional governments. And when I'm saying regional governments, I'm principally talking about these Sunni-led governments in the region. These are individuals who for two reasons should be involved. The first is they can play

an important role in coordinating with the Sunni tribes in western Iraq that can also take the fight to ISIL. The second is that they have a larger stake in this even than the United States does; that so many of these countries actually are threatened by Sunni extremists that are wreaking havoc in some cases on their border or very near it. So they have an interest in committing to this broader effort to degrade and ultimately destroy ISIL.

The third aspect of this strategy is engaging the international community, that there are resources that can be brought to bear by our NATO Allies and by other allies. So we've already seen the U.K. and Australia and others commit military resources to providing some humanitarian relief to the religious and ethnic minorities that are being persecuted in Iraq. So there's a tangible role for our allies to play.

And, yes, there is a role to play for the United States military. But it's important for people to understand that that strategy for our military does not include sending combat troops on the ground into Iraq or to Syria. But it does mean using the military might of the United States to coordinate with our allies in support of Iraqi and Peshmerga fighters that can take the fight to ISIL. So that is the strategy.

And ultimately what -- let me finish with this just one last thing. The thing that's important for people to understand is this is a different strategy than what was previously tried in Iraq, that previously the United States bore the overwhelming brunt of this commitment. And ultimately, what we learned is that the United States military -- for all its prowess, and for all of the bravery that was exhibited over the course of years by our servicemen and women -- cannot solve this problem for the Iraqi people. Ultimately it's going to be up to the Iraqi people and the Iraqi government and Iraq security forces to secure their own country.

And the failure to learn that lesson would be a profound mistake. And it's easy to -- and I think it's understandable that people pay more attention to what the military component of our strategy is than they do to the diplomatic element of our strategy. But it is critically important that we ensure that the international community and that regional governments are invested in this effort so that the United States of America and our military are not bearing this weight alone.

Do you have more, Michelle?

Q Last one. Okay, so all of this is groundwork-laying, basically. And it's hard to imagine what the President is going to do on Wednesday besides lay all this out again. We've heard it before. So what are you expecting concretely then by the U.N. Security Council meeting from the coalition that's been formed? Do you have a timeframe for some kind of progress on that? Because for weeks now, it's been about building these coalitions. So what's the next kind of benchmark for seeing something from that coalition?

MR. EARNEST: Well, the President spent a lot of time when he was at the NATO Summit talking to our allies in NATO about this issue. The President also met with the Prime Minister and the incoming President of Turkey to discuss this issue, among other things.

He also talked to the King of Jordan about this issue. The Secretary of Defense and the Secretary of State were there to participate in these conversations.

As we speak, the Secretary of Defense is in Turkey talking about some of these issues with his counterparts there. Over the course of this week, the Secretary of State will be traveling to the region where he'll be meeting with his counterparts to talk about some of these issues. The President's counterterrorism advisor here at the White House, Lisa Monaco, is traveling to the region. She was in Yemen and has trips to Saudi Arabia and at least one other country planned while she's in the region this week. So these conversations are ongoing, and they will continue.

You heard from the President himself on Friday indicate that he was encouraged by the reaction that he got from our partners and allies in the context of those conversations about their willingness to support a broader international effort to confront ISIL and degrade and ultimately destroy them.

Sam, I'll give you the last one.

Q Well, two questions then. Can you talk a bit more about the tangible things you've gotten from our international allies? I know that they support in broad the strategy that we're doing, but have they committed any specific resources?

MR. EARNEST: They have. And there's a long factsheet here that I won't read from because we've all been here a while, but, yes, there are. I'll just -- I'll do the first three, and they're in alphabetical order. So Albania is first; they provided military equipment to the Kurds. Australia participated in Mount Sinjar and Amerli airdrop operations. They've pledged \$4.6 million to the U.N. to address some of this situation, and they agreed to accept 4,400 refugees from Iraq and Syria. They've also contributed significant airlift capacity and several planeloads of humanitarian assistance.

Q Would you mind making that list public?

MR. EARNEST: Yes, we'll get that to you. But it's lengthy, and it's an indication that nations like Canada, Estonia, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Hungary -- again, it's alphabetical order, so it's a long list.

Q I know we're running -- not much time. Bill Nelson -- you say you want congressional input here -- Bill Nelson, a senator, is actually introducing a bill that would authorize airstrikes in Syria. Is that something that the White House would/could support?

MR. EARNEST: I haven't seen his legislative proposal, but I am confident that somebody here in the administration will be in touch with him about his proposal. And we're certainly interested, like I said, in getting some buy-in from Congress and are open to considering the kinds of things that they want to move forward to demonstrate the kind of partnership that we'd like to see between the administration and Congress.

Q Last housekeeping item. Has the President actually seen or heard the Ray Rice video?

MR. EARNEST: I don't know. I have not talked to him about it. He's an avid sports fan, and this is something that has been covered extensively in sports journalism, so I do know that the President is aware of the situation as it relates to the Ravens' running back. I don't know if he's seen the video that was just released in the last 12 hours or so.

Q What about the Hawks email?

MR. EARNEST: Again, he's a big NBA fan. I'm confident that he's aware of the story, but I don't know if he's seen the email.

So thanks, everybody. We'll come back tomorrow.

END

2:59 P.M. EDT