

# Daily Press Briefing - July 1, 2013

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Director, Press Office  
Daily Press Briefing

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TRANSCRIPT:

The video is also available with [closed captioning](#) on YouTube.

**1:04 p.m. EDT**

**MR. VENTRELL:** Okay, good afternoon. Welcome to the State Department. We're deep into the middle of summer here, but Happy Monday to all, and I will turn it over to all of you.

**QUESTION:** You've seen the announcement by the Egyptian military about giving the bickering politicians and people 48 hours to get their act together or they're going to get their act together for them? I'm just wondering what you think about this.

**MR. VENTRELL:** Well, I don't have a specific reaction – again, the statement just came out really not that long ago – other than to say that we remain engaged with all sides and we're watching the situation closely, but I don't have a specific reaction to that statement by the military. We're in touch with all sides, including the armed forces and a range of members of the Egyptian Government and of course also civil society.

But you heard, and the President spoke earlier today, how focused we are, of course, on – in our longstanding policy that, first of all, that groups do not resort to violence. We want to see no violence in Egypt. Tragically and regrettably, there has been some violence. We're against all violence. And we urge all parties to ensure that the democratic process and the building of Egypt's democratic institutions can continue. And you heard the President today talk about how that requires compromise on all sides; it's not just at the ballot box but indeed through the compromise of the democratic process where people's needs and rights and indeed the economic system can function. So we're focused on all those fronts, but I don't have a specific reaction for you.

**QUESTION:** So in other words, you think the Egyptians should emulate the United States in its spirit of compromise currently between the Executive and the Legislative?

**MR. VENTRELL:** Look --

**QUESTION:** I mean, are we – is the United States really in a position to be telling Egyptian politicians they have to compromise when this town can't compromise on anything? Neither here nor there, quite apart from the – or apart from the military's statement today, just in general, I'm wondering if you could comment. I mean, what would the Administration do, or has the Administration warned against military intervention in the situation?

**MR. VENTRELL:** Well, I'm not going to get into all of our diplomatic communications other than to say that the things that I've been saying here publicly, you've heard the President and the Secretary of State speak as well, and our message publicly and privately has been very consistent that we want to see Egyptians succeed, we don't take sides, we don't have a particular party or group or interest that we're backing; indeed, the only thing that we're backing is the Egyptian people in their – the goal of their success in their democratic transition, that they can get their economy back on track, that they can get their – fully see their democratic transition succeed. So that's our focus.

**QUESTION:** The Egyptians claim, or the Egyptian military claims, that the country's national security is in peril. Do you have any assessment of current Egyptian national security situation?

**MR. VENTRELL:** Again, I don't think I'm going to make sort of a broad characterization other than to say certainly we're watching the situation closely. You know how seriously we take the protection of our own staff, our own citizens. Those are issues that we take very seriously. Obviously, the security of the Embassy is something that – and our consulate in Alexandria that we watch very closely, but I don't think I'm going to characterize it. We've seen tens of thousands, indeed it looks like millions, of people come out into the streets. Egypt is a democracy now. People have a right to make their opinions known and to express them freely.

**QUESTION:** So suppose that the situation does get out of hand and the military steps in. You would be okay with that? You'd be comfortable with that to say, let's say --

**MR. VENTRELL:** Said, I'm just not going to engage in the hypothetical.

Jill, go ahead.

**QUESTION:** Other subject?

**MR. VENTRELL:** Yeah, go ahead.

**QUESTION:** Could I ask you on the issue of compromise? You said something about compromise. How do you like to see them compromise?

**MR. VENTRELL:** Again, I'm not going to get into the specifics of – and it's the details are up to the participants themselves. What we're focused on is the broader goal of reconciliation between the different groups, compromise so that they can move forward with their transition and with their economy.

Go ahead.

**QUESTION:** Has Secretary Kerry been in touch with his Egyptian counterpart? Does he have any plans to be in touch with him?

**MR. VENTRELL:** I don't have a call with his foreign minister colleague to read out at this time. He mentioned, as you heard at his press availability a couple days ago, that he's been in touch with a couple members of the opposition and had some calls there. But I don't have a call of his to read out with the government at this time.

**QUESTION:** Can you tell us about Ambassador Anne Patterson? Is she in Cairo? Is the Embassy functioning? What's going on?

**MR. VENTRELL:** She's in Cairo. The Embassy continues to operate. Just to say you've seen some of these photos of the Ambassador, and we really find it abhorrent and reprehensible that people are sort of personalizing this. And the Ambassador has very much stated U.S. policy; she's one of our finest ambassadors and we really find it reprehensible that people have personalized it. And really, a lack of understanding on the part of some that we really don't take sides. We've been consistent about that very publicly and privately going back some time, so we find that regrettable.

Okay.

**QUESTION:** (Inaudible) would the U.S. military warn the Egyptian military not to stage a coup?

**MR. VENTRELL:** Again, I'm not going to get into our back and forth. As I said, the U.S. Government, we're in touch with our counterparts across the Egyptian Government, across the military, but I'm just not going to characterize it further at this time.

**QUESTION:** And is Morsy still the accepted leader?

**MR. VENTRELL:** He's the democratically elected leader of Egypt, as the President said this morning.

Jill, you looked like you had a question.

**QUESTION:** Snowden?

**MR. VENTRELL:** Yeah.

**QUESTION:** There are a lot of conflicting reports coming out of Moscow as to whether or not he has applied for asylum with Russia or actually some other countries. Can you shed any light on that?

**MR. VENTRELL:** We don't have information one way or another. I mean, it's up to the Russians to confirm whether that's the case there or other countries to do so. But I just don't have anything one way or another. He appears to still be in Russia, and our position is the same, that he should be expelled and returned home here to the U.S.

Also just to say we reject – you’ve heard Mr. Assange say earlier that he’s sort of marooned in Russia. That’s not true. We’re prepared to – as I said before, people who are accused of serious felony crimes – we’re prepared to issue one-entry travel documents. He’s still a U.S. citizen. He still enjoys the rights of his U.S. citizenship, which include the right to a free and fair trial for the crimes he’s been accused of.

**QUESTION:** There is a --

**QUESTION:** Wait a second. So --

**QUESTION:** And he would be arrested when he comes back, correct?

**MR. VENTRELL:** Again, there is an outstanding – he’s been accused of serious felony crimes.

**QUESTION:** Here’s a hypothetical for you: If he doesn’t want to end up in jail, is he marooned or not? I mean, it’s really kind of duplicitous for you to say that he’s free to leave Moscow on your one-way travel document when the --

**MR. VENTRELL:** But the --

**QUESTION:** -- when, when he arrives in U.S. – on U.S. soil or gets into U.S. custody, he’s going to be arrested and go to --

**MR. VENTRELL:** The erroneous piece, Matt, is that he’s somehow no longer a U.S. citizen. He is. He enjoys the rights and responsibilities of any U.S. citizen, including the right to a free and fair trial under our Constitution.

**QUESTION:** Right. So he’s – you’re ready to welcome him back with – but instead of with open arms, it’ll be with open handcuffs, so I don’t --

**MR. VENTRELL:** He has a country to return to, which is the United States of America.

Jill, go ahead.

**QUESTION:** Now, this is creating – all of these reports about spying, et cetera, are creating enormous difficulties, and at least publicly a lot of very heated criticism from the U.S. allies in Europe. How serious is this? How are you responding? Is Secretary Kerry going to be talking with leaders today (inaudible)?

**MR. VENTRELL:** Well, you heard the Secretary say that Lady Ashton did raise this in his bilateral meeting. And just to say you’ve heard that the DNI responded yesterday on the record to some of these issues, but just to repeat here that the U.S. Government will respond appropriately to our partners through diplomatic and intelligence channels. While we’re not going to comment publicly on the specifics of alleged intelligence activities, as a matter of policy we’ve made clear that the U.S. gathers foreign intelligence of the type gathered by all nations. You know we don’t talk about intelligence gathering from this podium; we haven’t before, we’re not going to start doing that now. But we have

a strong relationship with a number of these countries. In the case of the EU, you've heard – both the Secretary and the President have spoken to this. But we have strong partnerships and based on shared values with a number of these countries, and we'll continue to have that discussion in diplomatic channels.

**QUESTION:** But I mean, you have – so is this faux anger by the allies?

**MR. VENTRELL:** I mean, again, we'll have that conversation privately with them. I think as you heard, we have diplomatic channels such as the EU-U.S. dialogue of intelligence experts, and again we also have direct bilateral channels to discuss with these countries, so we'll have those discussions directly and in our private channels.

**QUESTION:** Are you aware of any statements made by Putin in the last hour or so that they are willing to give him asylum provided that he does not leak any more information? Was that something --

**MR. VENTRELL:** I'd seen a couple bits and parts of a transcript, but I haven't seen the entirety of it. But we agree with what President Putin said last week, that we don't want this to harm our bilateral relationship, and so we agree with him on that point, and we think there's a basis for him to be returned to the United States.

**QUESTION:** Would Russia granting him asylum cause a rift in your relationship?

**MR. VENTRELL:** Again, we're not at that point right now. We're going to continue to make our case about what we think needs to happen, and we hope they do the right thing.

**QUESTION:** Just going back to what you said about Assange being incorrect that Snowden is marooned, is that not sort of the definition of a political refugee? All refugees have a place to go back to; they just choose not to because they say they'll be persecuted. Why is that not --

**MR. VENTRELL:** Well, and that goes back to the central claim, which we reject the notion that this is some sort of political prosecution. Indeed, it's not. These are serious crimes, serious violations of his obligations, and as a former – as somebody who had access to classified information, and so our position is that he needs to face a free and fair trial and not be a fugitive. He needs to face justice here in the United States, just as any other U.S. citizen would need to do accused of similar crimes.

Jill.

**QUESTION:** And Russia also brings up the point that there is a death penalty in the United States, so therefore their human rights people believe that he should not be sent back period. What do you say to that?

**MR. VENTRELL:** Well, I hadn't seen that accusation. I don't think that's what we're talking about here for these types of crimes that have been committed.

**QUESTION:** New topic?

**QUESTION:** No, no.

**MR. VENTRELL:** Matt, go ahead.

**QUESTION:** Apart from the conversation that you just spoke about, the Catherine Ashton and Secretary Kerry, are you aware of other conversations, complaints, demarches being made to embassies?

**MR. VENTRELL:** I'm not sure if our ambassadors have had some demarches or diplomatic conversations. I know that the Secretary talked to Foreign Secretary Hague and Foreign Minister Fabius, but I believe those were on a wide range of subjects, including Syria and other issues as well. So I'm not sure to what extent individual ambassadors have had conversations at their posts.

**QUESTION:** All right. But the – when discussing --

**MR. VENTRELL:** But the point is, those conversations --

**QUESTION:** When discussing this issue, the – with the Europeans or others who might be upset or are saying that they're upset, the U.S. position is that all countries engage in intelligence gathering and this shouldn't come as a surprise to you?

**MR. VENTRELL:** Again, I'm not going to get into the content of that diplomatic exchange, other than to say that we're going to have it very directly and privately with the countries concerned.

**QUESTION:** But --

**QUESTION:** Change topic?

**QUESTION:** Hold on, I'm just – but you're not admitting any wrongdoing, though?

**MR. VENTRELL:** I didn't say that. I said we'll have our --

**QUESTION:** I know. I want to make sure that I understand, when these conversations happen, you're not saying, "Oh, sorry."

**MR. VENTRELL:** Again, I'm just not going to characterize --

**QUESTION:** You're not – you're explaining what you do, and you're saying, "This isn't unusual and you probably do it as well."

**MR. VENTRELL:** To take the lens back a little bit, I think a number of these countries are countries we have a very strong relationship with on a number of fronts --

**QUESTION:** Or you did, at least, have a very strong relationship with.

**MR. VENTRELL:** -- that we share intelligence with, and that's beneficial to all of our countries concerned. So I'm just not going to --

**QUESTION:** Well, your line about strong relationships based on shared values seems to be a bit betrayed by the fact that apparently you don't share values, or at least one particular value, with these countries that are expressing outrage. Now, it's one thing if you think that this is all just for show and they're complaining about something that they do themselves and should have known that you guys were doing it. But I think it's hard to pretend – if that's not the case, it's hard for you to make the case that you have shared values with the Europeans when they – and that they're saying that you don't. They don't – at least they don't share this value.

**MR. VENTRELL:** Well, we're going to follow up very directly with these governments in private, and we'll do so and continue to do so.

**QUESTION:** Right. Who was it, do you recall, who said. "Gentlemen don't read each other's mail"?

**MR. VENTRELL:** Again, Matt --

**QUESTION:** Do you remember that? (Laughter.) Do you know who said that?

**MR. VENTRELL:** I don't know who said that.

**QUESTION:** Secretary of State Stimson.

**MR. VENTRELL:** Well, thank you for the historical lesson. You learn a new thing every day.

**QUESTION:** Well, yes. Now, one could argue that it was a mistake not to read other people's mail, but I think you either have to defend it or apologize for it, and I don't think you can do that just privately when this didn't just impact governments, it impacted --

**MR. VENTRELL:** Matt, I encourage you to look back at what the President said. I know he just spoke this morning; the transcript has just come out. But he spoke at length about this, about his relationship with some of these key foreign leaders and how he has direct contact with them, and that's what he needs to have a good read on what's their mindset. I think the President talked about this at great length already today.

**QUESTION:** What do you make of calls within Europe, some politicians suspending or freezing the bilateral free trade agreement talks that are supposed to begin a week from today?

**MR. VENTRELL:** We think that these free trade talks have the potential to lead to great economic benefit to both European citizens and to U.S. citizens, and so we'll continue to pursue them because they're good for the people of the U.S. and they're good for Europeans as well. So we'll continue to pursue those, but I'd really refer to USTR for any status update there.

**QUESTION:** The next question is about --

**QUESTION:** So you said that it's going to be direct bilateral contact between U.S. and European country --

**MR. VENTRELL:** That's true.

**QUESTION:** -- but you don't have a schedule of they're going to talk --

**MR. VENTRELL:** Right. Through diplomatic --

**QUESTION:** -- the ambassador in Italy, for example, represent Italian --

**MR. VENTRELL:** We're going to be in discussion through diplomatic and intelligence channels directly with these countries, but we're not going to read out each individual exchange.

Go ahead.

**QUESTION:** Have you guys lost moral high ground on surveillance issues? I mean, the United States is constantly criticizing Iran and China for human rights abuses, surveillance issues.

**MR. VENTRELL:** I think you've heard me very categorically reject some of those comparisons over the past week or so and I've done so on a number of times, and we continue to reject those comparisons.

**QUESTION:** Can we change topics?

**MR. VENTRELL:** Go ahead.

**QUESTION:** I'm sorry, could you talk a little bit about why -- I mean, the list of countries that the U.S. was spying on is very extensive and includes allies like Japan, the Republic of Korea, countries where you couldn't really make the case that the U.S. is intelligence gathering for the purpose of, say, like fighting terrorism. But do you have anything on why --

**MR. VENTRELL:** I'm just not going to get into any further details of our intelligence methods from here.

**QUESTION:** Is the U.S. aware of other countries doing similar things to U.S. Embassies overseas, given that this is being treated as sort of like a not very irregular kind of affair?

**MR. VENTRELL:** Again, as we said, the U.S. gathers foreign intelligence as the type gathered by all nations. So I think I was pretty clear about that.

Lalit, why don't you go ahead.

**QUESTION:** Yeah. Have any of the countries raised any objections to you or issued any notices?



**MR. VENTRELL:** Matt already asked about that, and again, I don't have any specific details to read out.

Bingru.

**QUESTION:** Patrick, on Snowden's case, Secretary Kerry just met Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi.

**MR. VENTRELL:** He did.

**QUESTION:** And it was reported he talked on this case with the Chinese counterpart.

**MR. VENTRELL:** He did. He expressed our concern and our regret.

**QUESTION:** Could you talk – could you give us more information about their talks?

**MR. VENTRELL:** Well, no, he characterized it and I think he did so in great detail about some of the topics that they talked about. They also talked about a wide range of our larger bilateral issues, including D.P.R.K., economic issues; of course, we have the S&ED which will be coming up soon. So there was a wide range of issues that they talked about, but he did express his disappointment in the Snowden case.

**QUESTION:** What did the Chinese minister tell Secretary Kerry?

**MR. VENTRELL:** I don't think we're going to read out their side of a diplomatic conversation.

**QUESTION:** Can we change the topic?

**MR. VENTRELL:** Okay. Go ahead, Said.

**QUESTION:** Can I go to the Secretary's shuttle diplomacy? What is the status now of his effort between the Palestinians and the Israelis?

**MR. VENTRELL:** Look, as the Secretary said, Said, we made some real progress, and with a little more work, we believe the start of final status negotiations could be within reach. And as the Secretary talked about, there are some wide gaps at the beginning that have narrowed considerably. He said that he was going to leave some staff in the region to continue some of the talks, and we think that we're on the right track. But I'm just not going to characterize it beyond that. The Secretary said that certainly there will be an opportunity potentially to travel back to the region again soon, if necessary, and he's prepared to do that if the conditions are right.

**QUESTION:** So why do you think that the statements issued by either the Palestinians or the Israeli side actually contradict the optimism that was stated in the words of the Secretary of State?

**MR. VENTRELL:** Well, I think you heard the Secretary talk about this in his press availability a little bit, in terms of there'll be various statements made and things said in public, but his optimism is based on what's being said in private and he's going to continue and have the team continue to work on this.

**QUESTION:** And finally, if there is to be some sort of a peace summit between Abbas and Netanyahu, is it likely to take place there or here in Washington?

**MR. VENTRELL:** I just don't want to make any predictions about next steps other than to say that some progress was made and the Secretary has his team in place continuing to work through the issues.

**QUESTION:** Would holding something like this, a peace conference here in Washington, a peace summit, would it give the United States more leverage or less leverage?

**MR. VENTRELL:** Again, I'm just not going to predict or preview what the next steps may be. The Secretary said he was prepared to return to the region in the near future if the conditions are right.

Okay.

**QUESTION:** I'm just curious.

**MR. VENTRELL:** Go ahead.

**QUESTION:** You will concede, I expect or I suspect --

**MR. VENTRELL:** You're always trying to get me to concede something, but go ahead.

**QUESTION:** Well, I mean, there -- what is the evidence for the -- to back up the statement of the Secretary that there has been real progress? Is there anything that you can point to that is not a secret?

**MR. VENTRELL:** Again, the Secretary was very clear from the beginning of this process we're not going to be getting into the day-to-day and the back-and-forth and what the --

**QUESTION:** Yeah. I just want to know, for the public, when the Secretary of State comes out and says there has been real progress --

**MR. VENTRELL:** I think the --

**QUESTION:** -- he doesn't do so in a vacuum.

**MR. VENTRELL:** Right.

**QUESTION:** He does so in an atmosphere where there is not a single tangible, discernible sign of progress to the rest of the world, to anyone.

**MR. VENTRELL:** Matt, the Secretary feels very strongly --

**QUESTION:** So I just want to know, is there a single tangible item that is – that you can point to that isn't secret to back up the claim that there's been real progress?

**MR. VENTRELL:** Matt, the Secretary believes very strongly in the integrity of the process. He feels strongly that keeping these negotiations private lends integrity to the process, and that some of the spoilers of things that can happen in the press of trading barbs or having exchanges through the press is deeply unhelpful to the potentiality to make progress here. And so we're not going to read out the steps. We said we weren't going to from the beginning. You all knew that's how this process was going to go forward.

**QUESTION:** I understand.

**MR. VENTRELL:** And so the Secretary was very clear that he believes, based on what he's seeing in his private discussions, that there's been progress made, but obviously the judgments will be made about this in the future based on what progress is made.

**QUESTION:** But would you agree that there isn't anything that you can point to as a sign of progress?

**MR. VENTRELL:** Again, that's your characterization. My characterization of it is --

**QUESTION:** No, no, you're pointing me to his comments.

**MR. VENTRELL:** Right.

**QUESTION:** His comments need to be backed up with some kind of fact. Now, it may very well be that any sign of progress – the reason that he's saying that, is because there is actually a sign of progress that's in secret. But I want to know if there's any publicly available, tangible sign of – that would prove or that would back up the claim that real progress has been made.

**MR. VENTRELL:** As frustrating --

**QUESTION:** And you're telling me no, right?

**MR. VENTRELL:** As frustrating as it is to you, Matt --

**QUESTION:** There isn't anything you can point to --

**MR. VENTRELL:** As frustrating --

**QUESTION:** -- that would show --

**MR. VENTRELL:** Can I finish?

**QUESTION:** -- me or anyone else – I just want to know, yes or no? Is there a single tangible piece of publicly available information that would back up the claim that real progress has been made? Yes or no?

**MR. VENTRELL:** Matt, you do make a valid point, which is that – and what I will concede to you is that it can be frustrating that, through this process, not every piece of it is read out, of course, as we like to read out progress that is being made generally in our diplomacy. And that's a real frustration. But given how intractable, how difficult, this problem has been for so many decades, the Secretary thinks there's real value in keeping that private, and it is on his good word that progress is being made.

**QUESTION:** Right. Okay. So there isn't anything you can point to to back up that statement?

**MR. VENTRELL:** I think we've done what we can on this, Matt.

**QUESTION:** No. All right. But I just wanted – because, listen, we went through this whole thing during the last – during the Bush Administration with Annapolis, being told every day that progress was being made, progress was being made, we can't tell you about it; and now we're being told – and that did not result in an agreement. And now we're being told the same thing.

**MR. VENTRELL:** The Secretary is aware of the history.

**QUESTION:** Good.

**MR. VENTRELL:** And he's aware of the precedent.

**QUESTION:** Good, because your colleague once said that she didn't want to look through the rearview mirror, but I'm glad that --

**MR. VENTRELL:** I'm just saying the Secretary is aware of the history. He's not naïve, and he's very focused on working in good faith to make progress to getting these two sides back to the table.

**QUESTION:** Just a quick follow-up. Just a quick follow-up.

**MR. VENTRELL:** Why don't we let Roz have a question, and then I'll go to you, Said.

**QUESTION:** Oh, yeah, yeah. Sorry, go ahead.

**QUESTION:** Does it have anything – does the Secretary's optimism have anything to do with the makeup of the government that the Prime Minister, Mr. Netanyahu, is now leading? There was the interview over the weekend between The Washington Post and Yair Lapid, who is now the Finance Minister, in which he indicated we're going to have to roll back some of those settlements in the occupied West Bank.

**MR. VENTRELL:** The Secretary is positive, Roz, because both sides have committed publicly to endeavor in this process and to work toward negotiations. And so it's on that basis that he is doing his diplomacy between both sides, and very intensively, and he

wouldn't continue to do it if he didn't think there was a chance or a way forward. So we're not naïve about how difficult this is or how long and intractable this problem has been, but the Secretary will push forward.

Go ahead.

**QUESTION:** So Roz raised the issue of settlements. The Israelis greeted Secretary of State Kerry by announcing settlements, and in fact, they gave him a sendoff with the announcement of more settlements. Does the Secretary of State get really upset by the Israelis doing this, and in fact, putting hurdles along the way in the and – along this process that he's trying to relaunch?

**MR. VENTRELL:** Said, you know how we feel about settlements. I don't need to tell you. We've said it repeatedly, and our position is the same.

**QUESTION:** Yes, but you say it repeatedly and we know – and it's an admirable position, but what are you doing in terms of on the ground to stop the Israelis from doing these activities that, at the end of the day, will scuttle all peace efforts?

**MR. VENTRELL:** We consistently make our position clear on settlements.

Go ahead.

**QUESTION:** On North Korea?

**MR. VENTRELL:** Yeah.

**QUESTION:** Do you have any information about the North Koreans going to export their long-range missile to foreign country?

**MR. VENTRELL:** I don't have any information on that. I hadn't seen that.

**QUESTION:** You don't have anything?

**MR. VENTRELL:** No.

**QUESTION:** Thank you.

**MR. VENTRELL:** Go ahead.

**QUESTION:** I'd like to go back on the NSA. Do you plan to give these diplomatic explanations before the start of the free trade agreement? And Switzerland, which was the first country mentioned by Snowden and the first one requesting some explanation, got them and found them unsatisfactory. So do you have any specific on that --

**MR. VENTRELL:** Those bilateral exchanges are ongoing and happening currently.

**QUESTION:** As far as timing, will that happen before – with the Europeans, will it happen before the FTA is --

**MR. VENTRELL:** Well, as I said, the exchanges are going on as we speak. I refer to USTR on anything regarding the status of the trade negotiations. Those are our diplomats who do that kind of negotiating.

Go ahead.

**QUESTION:** Patrick, can I go to South Asia?

**MR. VENTRELL:** Sure.

**QUESTION:** In the disputed Kashmir region, there were massive demonstrations today in response to killing of two civilians yesterday by Indian soldiers, including a teenager. And are you concerned about the human rights situation there?

**MR. VENTRELL:** Again, why don't I – I'll have to look into the situation. I hadn't seen that report, but let me look into it.

**QUESTION:** And Patrick, on the same subject, a British historian, William Dalrymple, has suggested that a lasting peace in Afghanistan post-2014 depends on a kind of rapprochement between India and Pakistan, and that was posted on the Brookings Institution website. This is a long article. What are you doing to improve the relations between Pakistan and India?

**MR. VENTRELL:** Well, we want Pakistan and India to have a good relationship, we want Pakistan and Afghanistan to have a good relationship, and we focused a lot of our diplomacy in that direction.

Jill, go ahead.

**QUESTION:** The subject of human rights was just mentioned and --

**MR. VENTRELL:** Yeah.

**QUESTION:** -- I know your human rights department here is looking at two bills that President Putin signed. One is the blasphemy bill and the other one is the gay propaganda bill. Do you have any response to either of those, or both?

**MR. VENTRELL:** Yeah. Well, there are a couple of pieces of legislation, Jill, that were signed into law in Russia over the weekend that are concerning, further restricting freedom of expression and assembly.

First of all, on LGBT, the U.S. places great importance on the protection of the human rights and fundamental freedoms of all people, including lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered persons around the world. This particular law restricts expression and assembly of anyone publicly supporting the rights of LGBT persons, and our opinion is that human rights are universal and that the supporters are – whether they're LGBT persons or they're supporters, have the same rights as all other people and the right to make their positions known.

In terms of this other piece of legislation, offending religious feelings law, just to say that while speech and action that deliberately denigrates religious believers should be condemned, our opinion and the U.S. position has long been that the best antidote to intolerance is to open and free expression and debate. And so that's something that we've made clear is the U.S. position, and that's why we're concerned with this action in Russia. I understand that Russia has joined with us in the Human Rights Council on resolutions in the past sharing that same sentiment, so we have some concerns with regard to that piece of legislation as well.

**QUESTION:** Change topic?

**QUESTION:** Sorry.

**MR. VENTRELL:** Go ahead.

**QUESTION:** Just really quick, going back to Egypt just to clarify. When you said you don't have a readout of a call that Secretary Kerry may have made to Egypt's Foreign Minister, does that mean he has not made a call, or you just don't have the readout?

**MR. VENTRELL:** My understanding is he has not made a call to his Egyptian Foreign Minister – to the Egyptian Foreign Minister. I will check in to see if there's been anything else to report, but my understanding is he had not been in touch with the Foreign Minister as of yet.

**QUESTION:** Okay.

**QUESTION:** Syria?

**MR. VENTRELL:** Go ahead.

**QUESTION:** Can you give us any update about the Doha talks with Taliban?

**MR. VENTRELL:** I don't have an update. Ambassador Dobbins has returned to the United States.

**QUESTION:** Do you expect anytime soon that this talk will resume?

**MR. VENTRELL:** Again, I can't look into the glass ball and predict, but we want Afghans to sit down with Afghans and start talking about their future.

**QUESTION:** A small follow-up to that: On the BSA negotiations which were suspended by President Karzai --

**MR. VENTRELL:** Yeah.

**QUESTION:** -- have you got any new dates? Has it resumed or still suspended? Any update on that?

**MR. VENTRELL:** My understanding is that they are still suspended, but just to – we’ve seen this palace statement that happened overnight from President Karzai. But just to say, as President Obama and President Karzai affirmed in January, an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace and reconciliation process is the surest way to end violence and ensure lasting stability in Afghanistan and the region. But they also agreed that a bilateral security agreement is in both countries’ interests, in that same meeting, to maintain a post-2014 presence that is sustainable and that supports capable and effective Afghan National Security Forces.

So the U.S. supports a peaceful, democratic, and united Afghanistan. We’re committed to peace and reconciliation. And we remain prepared to negotiate with Afghanistan to conclude a BSA that supports our shared objectives.

**QUESTION:** And as for the terms of the BSA thing, when it was started, it was said that it would be concluded within one year of the start of the negotiations. Would this suspended period be counted within the one-year period or you can extend it to beyond one year?

**MR. VENTRELL:** I’m not sure. We’re trying to finish it as quickly as we can, and we think there’s an importance in finishing it as quickly as we can.

**QUESTION:** Can we change topics --

**MR. VENTRELL:** Go ahead.

**QUESTION:** -- and go to Syria?

**MR. VENTRELL:** Yeah.

**QUESTION:** Is it the assessment now of this Department that Geneva 2 cannot be held in July or August?

**MR. VENTRELL:** We said we’re not going to put a timeline on it. We think that a negotiated political settlement is the best way to a stable and secure and prosperous Syria, one that respects the rights of all Syrians. We’ve said that you need both sides willing to have participants who are going to be working toward the best interests and the future of all Syrians working toward a Syria that protects the rights of all of its citizens, and that we’re not there yet. But I just don’t want to put a timeline or predict on it.

**QUESTION:** Okay. So the Government of Syria and its allies, Russia in this case, they say that they are ready to go without any preconditions. On the other hand, you are unable to bring in your allies in the opposition to state the same thing. Could you clarify that?

**MR. VENTRELL:** Well, it’s true that the opposition is working through some of its leadership issues. We continue to urge them to resolve those leadership issues and speak with a unified voice and be able to negotiate with a unified voice. At the same time, while the regime has played lip service to the idea of negotiations, the truth is they brought in



outside actors, Iran and Hezbollah, to continue the slaughter. You saw the strong statements we've put out, including about the siege of Homs and our deep concern there. Aerial bombardments continue, and so we remain deeply concerned. And what we want to see is that you need both sides to choose people who will protect, not one side or another, but want to protect all Syrians. And so we haven't seen a seriousness of purpose from the regime either.

**QUESTION:** Going back to Geneva 1, a little more than a year ago --

**MR. VENTRELL:** It is --

**QUESTION:** A year ago, yesterday, as a matter of fact.

**MR. VENTRELL:** Indeed, the year anniversary, I believe, was yesterday. So there's been a year since that.

**QUESTION:** Do you still have differing views on the points of Geneva 1, or are you able to see more eye to eye with the Russians on what needs to happen for this to succeed?

**MR. VENTRELL:** I wouldn't say that we're at 100 percent agreement on every element of it, but suffice it to say that we are in agreement on one key element, which is that a negotiated settlement that leads to a transitioning governing authority that can protect the rights of all Syrians is the best way forward.

**QUESTION:** So are you willing to back away or back away from the demand that Assad must step aside before Geneva happens?

**MR. VENTRELL:** I mean, again, there's no possibility. Assad has no future leading Syria. He's clearly lost any sign of legitimacy through the slaughter of his own people, and the Syrian people won't tolerate it.

Okay. Go ahead.

**QUESTION:** United States extended one more year economic sanctions against North Korea. Is there any additional sanctions against North Korea?

**MR. VENTRELL:** I don't have any new sanctions to announce today, but we've been very clear that our sanctions will continue, that we want to stop the D.P.R.K. from its proliferation sensitive activities, and we'll continue to robustly implement those sanctions.

But as you know, the Secretary's out in the region right now. He's had a productive conversation, the trilateral meeting with South Korea and Japan. He's had a meeting with his Chinese counterpart. And all of these countries, we're all committed to denuclearization and North Korea upholding its commitments to the international community to denuclearize. And so we remain firm with our counterparts on that.

Go ahead, in the back.

**QUESTION:** The American President said today that the decisions on the U.S. aid to Egypt will be related to how the government will react to the demonstrations in the country. Does this mean that more U.S. pressure will be seen in the coming days? And in case the call by the military fails, what will be the American reaction?

**MR. VENTRELL:** I think the President was just making the point that, as the legislation stands, there are currently a number of conditions on our aid to Egypt and some of them relate, given concern on Capitol Hill and members of Congress, toward democratic progress in Egypt. So that's been something that's been in the legislation for some time.

Go ahead.

**QUESTION:** To go back to the NSA leaks, do you have any response to, like, the French political leaders saying that, in response to the revelations of eavesdropping, they're suggesting that France should grant asylum to Snowden?

**MR. VENTRELL:** I hadn't seen those in particular, but --

**QUESTION:** And, I'm sorry, just one more. As -- I just want to understand, as a matter of, like, general operating procedure, does the Secretary -- does the Department of State kind of operate under the assumption that its embassies in allied countries are being bugged or eavesdropped on?

**MR. VENTRELL:** I'm just not going to characterize it further, other than to say that, as we've made clear, the kind of intelligence that we gather is something that other nations do as well.

**QUESTION:** Could you tell us about Under Secretary Burns's trip to Iraq and Lebanon?

**MR. VENTRELL:** Yeah. I really don't have much to say beyond the -- he -- we had media notes detailing his meetings in both places. I'd be happy to get them to you, Said. He gave a press conference in Lebanon as well before departing. You heard his strong words about Hezbollah and our concerns there. But beyond our media notes, I don't have an additional readout for you.

**QUESTION:** Sorry. Just to go back to North Korea, do you --

**MR. VENTRELL:** Yeah.

**QUESTION:** Does the State Department have any concerns with North Korea seeking out a bilateral with India at the -- on the sidelines of ASEAN, considering their, at least stated in the past, ambitions to be a recognized nuclear weapons state?

**MR. VENTRELL:** Look, we reject the potentiality of D.P.R.K. being recognized as a nuclear state. We just don't think that's plausible or happening. But I really refer you to those two governments. I'm not aware of that meeting.

**QUESTION:** Have you been in touch with the Indian Government on -- in that regard?

**MR. VENTRELL:** I mean, India is a country that we maintain contact with on D.P.R.K. from time to time and have routine interactions with, but I don't have anything to read out.

**QUESTION:** Patrick, just – this is tangentially related to the NSA thing.

**MR. VENTRELL:** Yep.

**QUESTION:** It's just with the one report, I think it was in Der Spiegel, talked about intercepts of the EU embassy or the EU office here, talking about tapping into an encrypted fax machine. I'm just curious, does the State Department still use fax machines?

**MR. VENTRELL:** I'm sure there are fax machines in this building, but --

**QUESTION:** Encrypted or otherwise? Are you --

**MR. VENTRELL:** -- I'm not sure that I'd be capable of sending a fax out. But I'm sure we have fax machines somewhere in this building.

**QUESTION:** All right. And then the other thing – my last thing is you are familiar with the – that the trial of Bradley Manning is ongoing?

**MR. VENTRELL:** I am.

**QUESTION:** Last week, one of your colleagues, Mr. Murphy, Nicholas Murphy, put forward – submitted an unclassified deposition. So everything that's in – stipulation. Everything that I'm about to say has been unclassified.

**MR. VENTRELL:** Okay.

**QUESTION:** There – it's basically a list of 119 – or, I'm sorry, 117 cables that, if I understand correctly – and this is part of my question – the Department is putting forward as evidence that what was leaked caused national security harm, damage.

One, is my assumption correct on that?

**MR. VENTRELL:** I'll have to check in for you. We have not been commenting, and I don't think we're going to start commenting, on the ongoing legal process. There are --

**QUESTION:** Well, I'm just trying to figure out if this --

**MR. VENTRELL:** -- as we said going back many months, there are going to be Department witnesses and there will be cooperation by the Department of State on some of these matters.

**QUESTION:** Well, I don't see – I'm not sure this gets – this – I understand talking about an ongoing legal proceeding, but I'm just trying to understand if I am correct in assuming that these cables are ones that the Department is saying are proof – these are the cables

on which the charges against Mr. Manning are based, in terms of these – in other words, these cables – the release of these cables caused some national security harm.

**MR. VENTRELL:** I'll have to check into the accuracy of that.

**QUESTION:** Okay. Because the reason that I ask that question is that some of these cables, certainly not all of them – and I'm just going to read the title of three of them – “Jamaica: Malaria Update,” which is essentially, if you don't read it, an update on the malaria situation in Jamaica; “Grenada Trying to Read St. Lucia Tea Leaves,” which is a compilation of rumors that were collected around the Caribbean about what people in the island of Grenada are thinking about politically in neighboring St. Lucia; and “Libyan Central Bank Establishes New Training Institute,” which reads as if it could be a press release from the Libyan bank.

These were all classified documents, and what I'm wondering is if you are making – well, one, is there are review going on into the over-classification of documents in this building? I know that there was one government-wide, but is it still going on in the State Department? Because, frankly, if you look at the – I mean, it's ridiculous that these things were ever classified in the first place and if you're – and secondly, I don't understand if these – if the assumption is correct in the beginning that you're holding these documents out, or these are among the documents you're holding out to be – have caused the United States national security damage, it's a pretty – it's pretty difficult to see how this damaged or how the release of these damaged national security.

So if you could answer the question on, one, if the assumption is correct about why these were stipulated to, and two, if there is a review into possible over-classification, if that's still going on, I would appreciate it.

**MR. VENTRELL:** Well, Matt, I think that may be the longest question we've ever had in this briefing room, but --

**QUESTION:** I doubt it, I doubt it. I think I've done longer.

**MR. VENTRELL:** All right. Well, we will look into it see what we can get back for you.

Anything else? Thank you.

**QUESTION:** Thanks.

**(The briefing was concluded at 1:41 p.m.)**

**DPB # 110**