

# Press Briefing by the Press Secretary, Ambassador Michael Froman, Ben Rhodes

[obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2015/11/19/press-briefing-press-secretary-ambassador-michael-froman-ben-rhodes](http://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2015/11/19/press-briefing-press-secretary-ambassador-michael-froman-ben-rhodes)

November 19, 2015

The White House

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

November 19, 2015

Pan Pacific Hotel  
Manila, Philippines

\*\*Please see below for a correction, marked with an asterisk.

4:23 P.M. PHT

MR. EARNEST: Good afternoon, everybody. It's nice to see you all. The purpose of today's briefing is to try to give you some insight into some aspects of the President's trip that you all have been covering for quite some time. That specifically is the Trans-Pacific Partnership agreement. So I brought to this briefing the person who's been principally responsible for negotiating that over the last several years -- Mike Froman is our Ambassador at the U.S. Trade Representative's office.

So what I thought we would do is to give him the opportunity to make some opening comments and then take your questions on that topic, and then we'll let him go. And Ben and I and Dan Kritenbrink, who is standing to my far right, Senior Director for Asia at the NSC -- I get that right, Dan?

MR. KRITENBRINK: Yes.

MR. EARNEST: So we can stand here and take questions on other topics as they come up.

So, Mike, with that, do you want to get us started?

AMBASSADOR FROMAN: Well, thanks very much. With the conclusion of the TPP negotiations last month and the release of the text earlier this month, TPP was a major focus over the last couple of days. And certainly the culmination of that was the TPP leaders meeting yesterday, where the President convened the other 11 TPP leaders, and they all had an opportunity to discuss the agreement and next steps. And each of them focused on the economic benefits of the agreement -- first and foremost, the removal of barriers to exports that will allow greater opportunity in each of the countries.

From our perspective, that's the elimination or the reduction of 18,000 tariffs on U.S. exports, 18,000 taxes on our manufactured exports, our agriculture exports; also globalization of services markets in this region that will allow our service providers as well to participate in these fast-growing markets.

We talked about how TPP raises standards -- labor and environmental standards, intellectual property rights standards across the region. They also talked about the new issues that TPP takes on -- state-owned enterprises, putting disciplines on state-owned enterprises, making sure that they compete on a fair and level playing field with private firms. Dealing with issues like the digital economy and the free flow of data across borders, which is so important to e-commerce and, therefore, to small and medium-size businesses, and the ability of small and medium-size businesses to engage in the global economy.

Beyond the specific economic benefits of the agreement, several of the leaders talked about how TPP fit in their own domestic reform agenda -- whether it was in Japan and the third arrow of Abenomics; or in Vietnam where TPP will require significant reforms of the state-owned enterprise sector, the labor regime there, the IPR regime as well, and how TPP will help those countries further their domestic reform efforts.

I'd say the overall sentiment of the leaders was that TPP is more than just another free trade agreement. It's being seen as a key part of the regional architecture, both economic and strategic. It's a key part of the President's rebalancing toward Asia strategy. But from the perspective of the other countries, as well, it's absolutely key to their ability to diversify their partnerships, diversify their markets, which they see as both economic and a strategic value. And you had a number of the leaders indicate that TPP was something they couldn't afford to be left out of, and that gave a great deal of momentum to that.

Indeed, I'd say the overwhelming sense of the leaders was a strong political commitment by all the leaders to further the ratification effort in each of their countries to fully implement the agreement so that their people could get the benefits of the agreement as soon as possible.

MR. EARNEST: Great. So with that, if there are questions about the TPP agreement or the discussions that the President has had about the trade agreement over the course of this trip, why don't we take those now. And for the questions today, Jess is going to be running the mic so we can make sure that people back home and our stenographers can hear the questions.

Are there questions on TPP we want to start with? Yes, sir.

Q Xi Jinping yesterday was warning about the fragmentation of trade with this sort of spaghetti bowl of trade agreements, particularly in the Asia Pacific region. What do you say about the threat of trade sort of falling into rival blocs, if you like, with TPP and the Asia Pacific Free Trade Agreement and the Comprehensive Trade Agreement?

AMBASSADOR FROMAN: Well, I think over the course of the last several years there have been literally dozens of trade agreements negotiated in this region. For example, China is involved in negotiating FTAs with Korea and Japan. They've recently completed one with Australia. They, of course, are leading the effort to have the RCEP trade agreement.

Our approach is TPP, which we think sets high standards for the region, the 12 countries involved -- the 12 currently APEC countries involved represent about 40 percent of the global economy. And in fact, we went into TPP very much with the thought in mind that if you could have a platform to which other countries over time who are able and willing to meet the high standards which all 12 of us agree should be part of TPP, and consistent with our own domestic processes, which in our case means consulting with and ultimately having approval of Congress, could potentially expand and deal with some of those issues of clarifying rules for the region as a whole to address the spaghetti bowl issue.

We think this kind of platform where you have 40 percent of the global economy signing on to high standards is, in fact, a good step forward for setting a single high standard for the region.

MR. EARNEST: Other TPP questions?

Q Two CNN questions in a row, but did any of your colleagues mention any concerns about Hillary Clinton's opposition to the TPP? And are you going to try at all to persuade her over the coming months to maybe soften her stance on that between now and the election?

AMBASSADOR FROMAN: Well, I'm not going to weigh into presidential campaign politics. I will say that they follow our politics quite closely and our processes quite closely. Every country around the table has its own domestic procedures and its own politics around TPP that it's going to deal with. And the President engaged with the other leaders about this, make clear that trade is always a challenging issue but that as we explain what's in the agreement and now that it's out there in public and everyone can dig into it and see what the benefits are -- the 18,000 tax cuts, the opening of services markets, the dealing with the new issues of raising the standards -- that ultimately we'll have the support of Congress for that. And we want to secure that support as early as possible.

MR. EARNEST: Anybody else? Yes, Robert.

Q Just following up on that same topic -- do you feel that there is a political window of opportunity to do that before the campaign next year rolls too far along to be able to achieve that? And how confident are you that you can get that done?

AMBASSADOR FROMAN: What we're focused on ourselves is doing everything that's within our capacity to move the process along -- concluding the agreement, getting it out there in public, beginning the process under -- (inaudible)

MR. EARNEST: Ambassador Froman, thank you for your time. Appreciate it.

We'll go more broadly to other questions that are related to the Asia trip, which both Dan and Ben can handle, or other topics that may be on your mind today.

Q I wanted to ask Ben, first of all, about the reports coming out of Europe, evidently, that the mastermind Abaaoud is dead -- some European officials are saying that. What is the United States hearing and can you confirm that he is dead?

MR. RHODES: No, we're not going to speak to his status. We're going to have the French authorities be the ones who are speaking to both the raid that took place in Saint-Denis and his status. We are actively, of course, sharing intelligence and working very closely with the French and other European partners, but we'll let them speak to those specific issues.

Q Since Paris, Ben, has the President been able to secure any firm commitments from any of our coalition partners as to how they will step up what they're doing in this fight. We know the French are doing more. We know the Canadians are at least taking their warplanes out of the mix. But over the past week, has there been really firm commitments that are going to push this thing forward?

MR. RHODES: Yes, well, first of all, I think you've seen since Paris at every stop I think a shared resolve from the countries at the G20 and the countries represented here at APEC to confront the threat posed by ISIL.

In terms of concrete additional commitments in cooperation with the United States, we've already seen France indicate very clearly that they're going to be intensifying their efforts. There was a very specific agreement that was concluded around the sharing of military intelligence that will help facilitate issues like our ability to target terrorists. And the French themselves have clearly picked up the pace of their airstrikes in Syria, particularly in and around Raqqa.

At the same time, we have seen the Russians indicate of course an interest in going after ISIL. They have been saying that for some time now. What we had seen in the past is that the large majority of their airstrikes were not focused on ISIL but were rather focused on protecting the Assad regime, targeting other elements of the opposition. We've seen some Russian focus on Raqqa as well, and on ISIL. If that becomes a trend and that continues, again, we think that would be the most constructive role for Russia to play so that they are a part of what we are doing as a coalition to go after ISIL safe havens while preserving, frankly, the moderate opposition that is going to be necessary to participate in the Vienna process.

With Prime Minister Trudeau, he made very clear privately to the President, as well as publicly, that even as he is keeping his commitment to remove the number of Canadian planes that are involved in strikes in Syria, that they are very much going to be a key partner in the coalition and, frankly, they're going to be exploring ways where they can work with us in different areas to potentially intensify support for elements of the

counter-ISIL coalition. Strikes are one part of that; so is the support we provide to forces on the ground in both Syria and Iraq, as well as the intelligence sharing and combatting of the foreign fighter flow that is so important.

So those conversations are going to go forward with the Canadians. I think what we also see on this trip is a renewed sense of urgency not just around the counterterrorism effort and the targeting of ISIL, but around the process in Vienna. And we've had two meetings now -- the one most recently just before the G20.

And that sets out, again for the first time, a clear timetable for how this transition could go forward. Where you have a period where we identify opposition who can come in and do a negotiation with the regime, you have then a period of time where those negotiations go forward, they address issues perhaps like constitutional reform, you try to get ceasefires in place to stop the fighting. It's not going to be universal, given some of the groups like ISIL that are in Syria, but you can create potentially areas of stability.

And then you have a timeline in 18 months for an election. I think there's a lot of interest from the leaders to invest in that process to make sure that it is successful this time. So a lot of the focus has been on the push on the diplomatic track as well. But we'll be continuing I think discussions with coalition partners about additional steps that they can take -- again, both in terms of the strike campaign in Syria and Iraq, but also, importantly, getting support to opposition elements in Syria and Iraqi elements fighting against ISIL on the other side of the border as well as, again, the critical intelligence and law enforcement cooperation that's necessary.

Q But that's what I was trying to get at -- what can you get the other 60 members or 60 of the coalition are going to do beyond what we know about the French stepping up the air campaign, are there -- is there a firm commitment from the Turks to seal the border? Is there a process, a timetable to do that? Is there -- there were reports about the Saudis, for example, pulling out of the air campaign. Are there specific things particularly to do with trying to find local forces to -- because none of this is going to be accomplished, I think you would agree, unless there is some sort of ground force in place. And the President is clear it's not going to be the Americans.

MR. RHODES: So absolutely, and you raised exactly the right issues. First of all, with Turkey, they recently -- we recently just moved a number of additional aircraft to Incirlik, the facility that we work with the Turks at in Turkey. We had a discussion with Prime Minister -- or with President Erdogan about additional steps that can be taken to seal the remaining part of the border that is of concern to both us and them, and we're going to have military consultations going forward at an operational level to see if we can fulfill that political objective and strategic objective.

At the same time, a lot of what we're talking about here is, again, not just strikes but this question of how do you get support to the opposition. In Syria, the United States has taken the additional step of the President's authorization of the deployment of a Special

Forces team, which is going to make it easier to facilitate the flow of weapons and equipment and, frankly, advice and facilitation for opposition forces who have been making progress.

And so what we've seen is, in the north, forces on the ground that have been able to push back ISIL. That has taken away some of the border crossings that they've used, now moving down south in the direction of Raqqa and aiming to cut off supply lines from Raqqa to that border. At the same time -- so on the Syrian side of the border, we want to work with other countries and have a discussion about how can we increase the flow of support, equipment to those Syrian forces who are fighting against ISIL on the ground. That's going to be one of the areas that I think the President will be talking to other leaders about going forward. He already has throughout the course of this trip.

In Iraq, the support that is going to the Abadi government and to Kurdish forces in the north has been very important. And again -- so, for instance, in the Sinjar offensive that was recently successful, that cut off Raqqa from its supply line into Mosul. The U.S. has provided direct support and has facilitated the flow of additional arms to the Kurdish forces, and so has Germany. Germany has been a partner in putting forward that type of support.

So again -- and the President talked to the Prime Minister of Australia yesterday. They have forces on the ground who are participating in the training and assisting of Iraqi forces. So I think across both Syria and Iraq, we want to look at what can other nations do not just to help with the air campaign, but I think, importantly, to help with training, equipping, and support for these forces that are fighting and making some progress against ISIL on the ground.

We can handle a significant amount of this air campaign. We've taken thousands of strikes. Frankly, the key area in terms of being able to do more on the strike campaign is our ability to generate more targets through intelligence. So it's not necessarily going to be the best contribution for every country to be taking strikes. There are other ways to contribute.

So piecing this all together is an important part of the President's agenda on this trip. It will continue when he sees President Hollande back in Washington next week. That clearly will be a focal point in terms of addressing what are the additional French contributions to this effort, how does that fit into the broader coalition effort, and then what can they do together to work with other countries that are feeling a greater sense of urgency after Paris to do more.

Q It sounds like President Hollande wants the U.S. and the Russians to work together. Is that your sense of it, that he wants to see this sort of grand coalition coming together to defeat ISIS? And I know the President talked about some of his reservations, that you may not be fully there in terms of trusting Putin's motives with Assad. But can he get to that point?

And I did want to ask a Syrian refugee question. I don't know if that goes to you, Josh. But that question would be -- I know you have a problem -- the President has a problem with some of the Republicans who have been talking about this issue, but there are Democratic governors who have raised questions about this. What do you say to those Democratic governors who have those concerns about allowing refugees to come into their states?

MR. EARNEST: I can take that one, if you want to do the first one.

MR. RHODES: With respect to Russia, I think we and the French have exactly the same interest -- which is to see Russia's military focus inside of Syria shift to countering ISIL and away from targeting groups that are simply opponents of the regime, some of whom we believe could be a part of the moderate opposition.

We have a coalition that -- includes the French, 65 countries -- 65 members -- that has been taking action against ISIL. And we have always indicated that if Russia wants to be a part of an effort to go after ISIL, that that would be constructive. Thus far, what we have done is simply de-conflict some of our military operations. But again, if Russia wants to shift its focus to ISIL, that would be to the world's benefit. At the same time, frankly, the most important thing that Russia can do is to use its unique relationship with the Assad regime to facilitate a successful transition in which ultimately Assad leaves power.

So again, even if Russia does make that military focus shift to ISIL, which we'll have to see whether they follow through on that type of commitment, we would want to see them using their leverage through the Vienna process to ensure that there's an orderly transition that involves Assad leaving power. But I think our objectives are exactly one and the same with President Hollande's. It's to get as much focus on ISIL from Russia, as well as from the other members of the coalition, as also to bring the conflict in Syria to an end so that everybody's focus can be on countering ISIL and addressing this counterterrorism challenge going forward. And that will ultimately require, we believe, Russia to accept over time that Assad is going to have to leave power.

MR. EARNEST: Jim, in terms of the conversations we've had with governors -- as you know, my colleagues back at the White House, over the course of this week, have engaged in a number of conversations with governors across the country, both Democrats and Republicans, about the security precautions that are in place for those individuals seeking to enter the United States.

As you've heard us say on a number of occasions, including earlier this summer when there were a number of questions raised about how the United States was contributing to the solution to the problem of the large flow of migrants from Syria into Europe, we saw those heartbreaking pictures of Syrians who lost their lives making a very dangerous journey from Turkey to Greece, for example. And the questions that came up were, what is the United States doing to ensure that we are fulfilling our responsibility to try to meet the basic humanitarian needs of those individuals? And there was strong bipartisan support for the United States acting boldly to do so.

What we said at that time is the same thing that we're saying now, which is that the most rigorous screening procedures that are in place for anybody seeking to enter the United States are in place for refugees applying for asylum in the United States. This means that they have to undergo a background check. Biographic and biometric information is collected about these individuals. There are in-person interviews that are conducted. The information that is collected about them is run through databases that are maintained by the National Counterterrorism Center, by the Department of Defense, law enforcement agencies like the FBI, and international law enforcement agencies like Interpol.

That is part of the explanation for why it takes an average of 18 to 24 months before an individual can be admitted as a refugee. So the questions that were raised by some governors are actually entirely legitimate in terms of the news. And the governors, justifiably wanting to understand precisely what security precautions are in place, are reasonable. And that's why you've seen specific White House outreach to answer those questions.

The concerns that the President has raised have been about the way that some politicians in Washington have sought to capitalize on a terrible terrorist attack in Paris to score political points. And to combine that cynical political tactic with the suggestion that people should be treated differently based on their religious beliefs is offensive to a large number of Americans, Democrats and Republicans.

And we are dedicated and committed to making sure that as we consider an approach to dealing with this challenge and making sure that the United States is doing our part, the first consideration that the President is going to make is for the safety and security of the American people. A close second is going to be making sure that whatever policies we have in place uphold the longstanding cherished values of the United States of America. These are values that both Democrats and Republicans cherish. And when I say Democrats and Republicans, I mean both political leaders but also Americans across the country.

And the President believes that those -- that the national security of the country, that the values of the country are what should guide our decisions -- not panic, not fear, and not, frankly, cheap political calculations.

Josh Lederman.

Q Thanks, Josh. Ben, can you give us an update on what kind of briefings the President has received on this trip about Paris? And latest intelligence about potential threats to the U.S. homeland? And are you concerned now about sending the President to France in less than two weeks amid all of this uncertainty about whether all the people that are involved have been detained or eliminated?

MR. RHODES: Well, first of all, the President has been regularly updated about the situation in Paris throughout the trip. He receives his PDB, his presidential daily intelligence briefing, every morning. And then throughout the day he's received periodic



updates, including yesterday, of course, when he was updated on the events in Saint-Denis with the French police raid.

With respect to his travel to Paris, we are planning for him to go to Paris. We have great confidence in our French partners. And ultimately, again, they're going to be the ones who will make determinations about they provide security for the climate summit. And we have a very close international and law enforcement information-sharing relationship with them, which also gives us great confidence.

With respect to homeland threats, the clear direction he gave his national security team before he left was to make sure that we're pulling every thread on any potential plotting in the United States; that we're communicating with governors and other state and local officials and law enforcement, so people understand the steps that we're taking and people understand what the nature of this threat is. That work has been ongoing from the Department of Homeland Security and the FBI. And we're going to continue to be very mindful that we have to be vigilant against what is a very lethal threat from ISIL and their aspiration to launch attacks beyond the area in Iraq and Syria where they've been traditionally based.

So that's the type of vigilance we've had, though, not just since Paris, but since the President took office -- because we had been living with a threat of terrorism from al Qaeda, based in Afghanistan and Pakistan, from AQAP, and of course from ISIL as well as other groups. So that's -- I think that's been a constant. But he's always pressing that no stone be left unturned to make sure that we're not going to miss anything that could slip through the cracks.

MR. EARNEST: Mike.

Q Thanks, guys. I guess maybe this is for either of you. But accepting the idea that everybody, including the President, understands that the Paris attacks were awful and horrible, do you think the President views what happened in Paris as an opportunity in the sense that it can mobilize the world to a much more aggressive posture against ISIS, or does he view it as a problem in the sense that it whips the world up into a frenzy that leads down a path that he doesn't want to go down along the lines of the kind of demonization and rhetoric that he was so critical of during the '08 campaign of President Bush of the ways in which President Bush kind of whipped the world into a frenzy to end up in Iraq and Afghanistan, or maybe more so Iraq? So is there a way in which you could sort of talk about how he views what happened in Paris?

And then, just real quickly on the first question -- I don't know, with all due respect, that you ever answered the questions of, like, is there a country -- I mean, the President has been here now talking about all these world leaders, both in the formal bilats and in the informal ones. And maybe the answer is that he doesn't have any firm commitments; there's no -- X country has had a thousand troops and now they're going to go to two thousand, or they've had this kind of intelligence-sharing, and now they're going to

double that, or whatever. Maybe the answer is they haven't, or maybe the answer is you can't tell us. But if you could sort of say which is it. Is it just that you don't know or that you can't tell us? But you didn't give any specifics.

MR. RHODES: Well, no, the specifics -- look, there are two issues here. There are specific commitments, and then there are also essentially situations where leaders give direction to have discussions at the operational level to design specific commitments. We've seen from the French a very specific commitment and an intensification of the air campaign, as well as the completion of this military and intelligence agreement.

With the Turks, I think we want to see a very specific commitment to work with us to better secure that border and to make sure that we have a shared understanding about how we're going to facilitate the equipping and the advising of forces who are fighting against ISIL inside of Syria. And so that was a very focused discussion with President Erdogan. And I think there is a shared commitment to get that done. Frankly, that's going to require very detailed consultations between our defense and security agencies.

Prime Minister Trudeau was very specific today, that he wants to look at the areas where Canada can make commitments to the counter-ISIL campaign, even as they are drawing down their role in the Syrian air campaign. That's going to lead to our defense -- respective defense departments having discussions.

So again, that's just a few countries. But there's a mix of both specific actions that's been taken in the very near term. Unsurprisingly, France has been at the top of that last. But a lot of these countries, frankly, will need to sit down, look at what their resources are, get with our Defense Department, and figure out where they can plug in more resources going forward.

Australia yesterday made very clear their commitment to continue what they're doing with us in both the air campaign and advising and assisting on the ground.

On your first -- but I should say that, again, I think you'll see over the course of the next several weeks, us pursuing this resourcing question with many different questions. And out of the political discussions and sense of urgency that has been generated after Paris, you'll see, I think, an intensification of commitments from coalition partners.

Obviously, as you noted, Mike, the situation and the attacks in Paris were a horrible tragedy, and that of course is what is front and center in our minds. I think that what we do see, though, is an understanding -- an acute understanding that the threat from ISIL is truly global and must be dealt with by the entire world. And that's because of the attacks in Paris. That's also because of the attacks in Beirut, the attacks in Ankara, the downing of the Russian airliner. I think every country around that table, at the G20, and many of the countries represented here at APEC understand that this is not something that is distant; that this is a group that has aspirations to attack essentially the entire civilized world, the entire international community without respect to region or religion.

And so there is a new sense of urgency. And I think we do want to take that sense of urgency and make it concrete. We've been in this fight against ISIL for over a year. We've taken thousands of airstrikes. We've got thousands of troops inside of Iraq, and some who will be inside of Syria working with forces on the ground. To the extent that we can mobilize additional support for those forces that are fighting on the ground in Iraq and Syria, and to the extent that we can continue to have the type of cooperation that's necessary to develop intelligence on what ISIL is doing, on what fighters are flowing into and out of that war theater, we want to pursue closer cooperation. And I think every country now understands in a very acute way that they have to be a part of this global effort.

I think the political side of this is really important, Mike. And you see this with the discussions in Vienna, with the discussion that President Obama had with President Putin at the G20, with President Hollande's upcoming travel to the United States and to Russia that this may also be a moment where everybody understands that this war in Syria has to be brought to an end, that it's gone on too long.

And there are countries that have backed different sides in this. Russia and Iran have been the principal backers of the Assad regime. We have many allies and partners like Turkey, Syria, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Jordan, who have been backing opposition forces. I think there's a message to all of us who have been engaged in supporting forces in the Syrian civil war that there has to be urgency around getting a political settlement, and that the continued militarization of the situation in Syria is not going to serve anybody's interests. That if people believe that they can win militarily, then nobody is going to win, because it's just going to perpetuate this cycle where ISIL is fueling the grievances of the Syrian people and many people around the world who want to come fight against the Assad regime. And the Assad regime is clinging to power that it's not going to be able to restore.

So I think that diplomatic effort is truly going to be one of the areas that you're going to see more and more focus from leaders who just can't tolerate this civil war in Syria anymore, and that's going to have to include Russia and Iran recognizing that their interests are not advanced by the continuation of a civil war in Syria.

For instance, they've both been targeted by ISIL, of course, and the key point that we made is that you cannot deal with this threat exclusively militarily. There has to be a political framework that restores stability in the country. Then everybody can go after ISIL. We're going to be going after ISIL in the meantime, but that will be a far more achievable goal if you have the political transition in place.

The one thing I'd say on the other element of your question, though, is that we know that ISIL propagates heinous and hateful and violent ideology. And there's been much shed about the fact that ISIL utilizes social media to try to radicalize individuals. Frankly, the threat in the United States in many ways is not just somebody trying to come to the United States and commit an act of violence. ISIL is very directly trying to radicalize young people in the United States and around the world. And if we overreact in ways that

alienate Muslim communities around the world, by applying religious litmus tests to refugees, for instance, or accepting a narrative of the war between Islam and the West, we're going to make that radicalization process easier for ISIL, not harder.

And so it's very important that even as we intensify the counter-ISIL campaign, we are combatting that ideology with the better side of our values, the best of our values, and that we're not pouring additional fuel onto the grievances that ISIL seeks to foster by taking steps like applying a religious litmus test to refugees or defining this in some ways as a conflict with Islam.

MR. EARNEST: One last thing I'd add to that, Mike -- and this is actually a point that the President made when he was talking about this earlier -- is the very dynamic that Ben was just describing is something that President George W. Bush understood quite keenly as well. And I think that would explain why we've seen a number of senior officials from the Bush administration indicate the same -- express the same concerns that we have about some of the rhetoric, particularly as it relates to the refugee program that we've seen predominantly from Republicans over the last few days.

Kevin.

Q Thanks, Josh. There have been some lawmakers who have suggested on the refugee front -- why don't we hit a pause button, as has happened previously, for example, with the Iraq refugees? Can you sort of help me make sense of the idea that that's not a good idea? Does that make sense? I mean, people have suggested that. Would the President be open to that suggestion?

This one is for Dan. Do you any update on the conflict in the South China Sea? Have there been any additional conversations on that, in particular here at APEC?

And for you, Ben, are we at war? And if so, with whom? And if we are at war with a specific person, persons, group, will you spell that out? And is that legal if Congress doesn't have a say in this?

MR. RHODES: I don't know how many times we've been asked if we're at war with ISIL, and I don't know how many times we've said, yes, we are at war with ISIL. We have been engaged in a war with ISIL for some time now. The fact of the matter is, the United States was engaged in a war with ISIL's predecessor, al Qaeda in Iraq. So, yes, we do believe we are at war. We are at war with a terrorist network, a lethal terrorist network. We're at war with ISIL, just as we're at war with al Qaeda and its affiliates.

In terms of the legal authorization, we believe that we have authorization under the 2001 AUMF to be carrying out -- sorry, the 2002 AUMF -- to be carrying out our counter-ISIL campaign. However, we clearly believe that that AUMF was written at a different time, in a different threat context, with a focus on al Qaeda and their Taliban sponsors. If we want to indicate to the world that the United States is united in this effort, is in it for the long haul, and is very clear about the objective of destroying ISIL, the very best thing that Congress could do is pass an authorization to use military force.

And we don't think this should be a partisan issue. I think if you asked every member of Congress if we're at war with ISIL, just about everyone would say yes. If that's the case, we should be able to work together to pass an AUMF that can be used by this President and clearly is going to extend into whoever the next President is. So that clearly is the most constructive step we believe that Congress could take.

I'll just say one thing on the refugee question. As Josh noted, it takes up to 18 to 24 months for a refugee to be admitted into the United States after the exhaustive screening that is conducted. To be clear here, based on what we know about ISIL, and based on the types of tactics that we've seen terrorists pursue, waiting for 18 to 24 months and going through an exhaustive process of screening and interviews, and vetting by our intelligence community is not at all the likely scenario by which ISIL would aim to carry out attacks. They clearly are focused on conducting attacks in the current context.

And again, subjecting one of their operatives to an 18-to-24 month process that puts them face-to-face with interviewers from the United States that subjects them to all of our various intelligence databases -- again, we are mindful of any threat, and so that's why we take the precautions that we do. But it certainly does not seem that that would be the most likely way in which this threat would manifest itself. We just don't think a pause is necessary, because the fact of the matter is, this is a lengthy timeline. We can work to increase confidence in vetting procedures going forward. That's something we're talking to Congress about. But, in our view, a pause is not necessary.

MR. EARNEST: Just building off what Ben said, the White House did issue a statement of administration position indicating that the President would veto the legislation that has been put forward by Congress on this issue for many of the issues that Ben just outlined.

I think the other relevant statistic here is that based on the population of individuals that do come to the United States under the refugee program, 98 percent of them are children, are women or families. And I think that gives you a sense of the kind of people that are helped by this program.

The last thing I'll say about this is that we did see from President Hollande yesterday that France intends to move forward with their commitment to accept 30,000 Syrian refugees over the next two years. So surely if the nation that has endured firsthand this heinous terrorist attack can follow through on their commitments to meet the basic humanitarian needs of Syrian citizens who are fleeing violence in their home country, surely the United States of America can muster the same courage.

Dan, do you want to take the other one on the South China Sea?

MR. KRITENBRINK: Absolutely -- happy to. You had asked whether the South China Sea had been a subject of the President's bilaterals, and I can say, yes, it has. And I think it's a natural reflection of the fact that the shipping lanes in the South China Sea, peace and stability in the South China Sea are critically important I think to the region's security

and continued economic prosperity. And so I would anticipate that many of the leaders that the President meets with will raise these issues, and I anticipate the same will be in the President's interactions with the countries of ASEAN.

And as the President said quite eloquently yesterday in his press interaction with Philippine President Aquino, the U.S. position remains consistent and clear: We are not a claimant to the maritime territorial disputes in the South China Sea, but we do have a national interest in ensuring freedom of navigation, unimpeded lawful commerce, peaceful resolution of disputes, including the use of the international arbitration under the U.N. Convention on the Law of the Sea.

So you'll continue, I think, to see the President make our position clear, but I would anticipate that it will continue to be an important issue throughout his meetings on the trip.

MR. EARNEST: Ben, do you want to add to that?

MR. RHODES: Just very quickly on that. A concrete manifestation of the U.S. commitment to be present in this region and to uphold those principles of freedom of navigation, support for our partners, is the \$250 million that he announced the other day when he arrived at the Philippines, making clear that we have a stalwart alliance here, making clear that we're going to be able to expand our network of partnerships in this region.

So we believe that our presence in the region is stabilizing. Our presence can reassure countries that these disputes are going to be solved consistent with the rules and not through one big nation bullying a smaller one. And that's, I think, the clear message of the trip.

MR. EARNEST: Margaret.

Q One of these to Dan, and one of these to Ben or whomever wants to jump on this. ISIS has claimed that they've killed a Chinese national, as well as a Norwegian. Is there any comment on that or context given where we are in the region? And then also, Ben, you specifically said the President has a desire to increase targets, so that would be the most effective next step in the ISIS campaign. To that end, is the President considering increasing the number of Special Forces, or widening the type, range of targets, raids that he would authorize the U.S. to carry out?

MR. RHODES: So, on your first question, I've seen those reports. I don't think we are in a position to confirm them at this time. Again, I think the indication clearly is that ISIL poses a threat to every nation without respect to region or even necessarily the level of their engagement in Syria. They seek to suggest that they're particularly targeting members of the coalition. That is certainly the case. It is also certainly the case that they have inflicted harm against citizens and interests of countries who are not engaged in military action inside of Syria.

I think the Chinese recognize they have -- I think as we look at foreign fighter flows, there have been people who have gone from China into Syria. So like every other nation who's seen that challenge, they have an interest in working with us on an intelligence basis, most likely to counter terrorism and counter ISIL.

With respect to targets, it's certainly one of the principal objectives of the Special Forces deployment to Syria to work with opposition forces on the ground who can help us in that effort. And to be very specific, if you look at our airstrikes, a significant portion of them have taken place inside of Syria, and that area from Kobani westward. And that's precisely because we developed relationships with the forces that we're fighting on the ground so that as they were, again, defending Kobani and then taking the fight westward along that border, we were able to work with them to identify targets that we could hit and degrade ISIL -- ISIL training camps, ISIL positions, ISIL heavy weaponry. So the closer we have relations with these countries that are in the fight on the ground, the more we're going to be able to identify targets that can roll back ISIL.

The same is certainly true in Iraq, obviously, where our work with the Kurdish forces in the north, and most recently in Sinjar, involved providing them with air support and their advance on Sinjar. I think generally, though -- so there's one category of targets, I think, that depends very much on those relationships on the ground. That's what our Special Forces, in part, are going to be able to do inside of Syria.

Again, the President is committed to this particular deployment. I wouldn't want to go beyond that. But the fact of the matter is, a small deployment can leverage a much broader intelligence base because it's about relationship-building and about the information that you can then get from the forces that you're working with to organize and facilitate.

Then a second element of this is ISR assets -- international, surveillance and reconnaissance assets. We have nations that are flying with us to provide that type of intelligence basis to be able to identify, for instance, ISIL infrastructure. We've increased the targeting of ISIL oil infrastructure in recent days with great success in targeting trucks that were carrying oil that brings significant amounts of revenue to ISIL. So nations can contribute to the identification of targets through that means, as well.

And then, of course, the more broadly you're working with different intelligence services across the region the more you're going to be able to pull the thread on, for instance, individuals like the high-value targets that we've gone after recently. Again, without getting into any specifics around our sources and methods, it's in part the infrastructure that we built over the course of the last year-plus of the counter-ISIL campaign that is now allowing us to do things like target "Jihadi John" inside of Syria, to target some of the other ISIL leaders that have been taken out in Syria in recent months, or to target, for instance, the emir of ISIL in Libya. So I think we've already constructed an architecture that allows us to go after high-value targets, but the more we have cooperation from intelligence partners in the region and in Europe, the more effective we're going to be.

Q A couple different questions. First for Ben, on Russia. They're basically saying that they have good intelligence and a good sense that very soon there's going to be an announcement about coordinating forces between France, Russia and the United States. And you talked a little bit about that and you said that you want Russia to show exactly what they're doing and show that they're hitting ISIS and not hitting the moderate opposition. Can you kind of respond to what Russia is saying, that this is something that's coming soon? And how long would you need to see them actually hitting the forces that you say they should be hitting before you can be comfortable with coordinating with them?

And then, secondly, is there any coordination or any fear that coordinating with Russia is going to affect our relationship with Russia over Ukraine and our concerns over what they're doing with Ukraine? Are those two things becoming intermingled in any way?

MR. RHODES: I was going to answer the second question even if you didn't ask it. The fact of the matter is, first of all, Russia has indicated to us as recently as President Obama's discussion with President Putin at the G20, that they want to focus on ISIL; they want to focus on places like Raqqa where ISIL has an entrenched safe haven. They feel in the aftermath of the downing of their Russian airliner obviously their own renewed sense of urgency to go after ISIL.

So to us, it's not merely a question of announcements. I think clearly indications, public indications from Russia that they want to be a part of this counter-ISIL effort, they want to be a part of a counter-ISIL that we, frankly, have built over the course of the last year and a half, that would be constructive. I think we would want to see that there is follow-through and that the follow-through not just be strikes against ISIL, but a stopping of the strikes against groups that we believe could be part of the moderate opposition.

We've been very clear about who we're targeting. It's ISIL and the Khorasan Group, this element inside of al-Nusra that we believe is involved in external plotting. If you look at who Russia is targeting, some of those people are likely to be a part of the type of political solution that we're going to pursue. The way in which this could come together, frankly, through the Vienna process. We are identifying the list of those opposition groups and figures who will participate in the negotiations with the Assad regime. Clearly, Russia, if they are truly invested in that process, has an interest in not weakening or degrading or certainly attacking militarily those very same actors that we need to be a part of a successful political process.

Because the fact of the matter is, I think as it's been demonstrated, even if you have an air campaign from the Assad regime, from the Russians, from the Iranians working on the ground, it is very hard inside of Syria to take and hold opposition territory, to take and hold Sunni-majority territory. In many respects, this has sectarian elements, and so I think what Russia is finding in its own activities is that the ability to dislodge whole populations of people who are just going to reject the Assad regime, and who feel that they've been the target of the sectarian conflict -- that's just not going to happen.



So what we would like to see is a focus militarily from Russia on ISIL, a focus through the political process and through their military restraint in preserving a moderate opposition that can be a part of a political process, and ultimately, Russia recognizing that the transition plan that has been set at Vienna will have to include at some point Assad stepping aside. Those are the elements that we want to see.

I'm clear this is going to be a focus of President Hollande and President Obama's discussion. I'm sure it will be a focus of President Hollande and President Putin's discussion. We welcome this. I think often people want to know whether or not we'd be concerned about the Russians playing a large role. We want Russia to play a significant role in solving this problem because they are ones who have significant leverage on the Assad regime, and insofar as they want to make contributions to the counter-ISIL campaign, that's a good thing.

So if we can push this towards alignment that would serve all of our interests. But we would want to see the follow-through. Because at times, we've heard commitments from the Russians, including before they launched their military efforts, that this was going to be about ISIL, but you can see very clearly by looking at a map that thus far it hasn't been.

At the same time, to your second question, we do not in any way want to see any linkage of the Ukrainian issue to the situation in Syria. The fact of the matter is the sanctions that have been imposed on Russia are not because of Syria, they're because of Ukraine and Russia's persistent violation of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. So it's very important that it be clear that even if we can pursue more constructive efforts with Russia on counterterrorism that we are going to have significant differences about the situation in Ukraine.

Now, there, Russia does have an opportunity to fulfill the Minsk commitments that they have made and that the separatists have made. That is the pathway for Russia to begin to repair its relations with the United States and Europe over the situation in Ukraine -- for them to use their influence in Ukraine to follow through on those Minsk commitments, and to respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine.

And that was a key focus of the discussion that the President had with the other European leaders at the G20 in his Quint meeting as well as his discussion with President Putin.

Q I have a question both for Ben and Dan. Let me ask about today's coming bilateral talk with Prime Minister Abe. I'm sure they're going to talk about regional security issues, including maritime security in the South China Sea. What kind of role does the United States expect the Asian allies and partners to play in order to maintain international norms by freedom of navigational operation? As you know, Japan is also providing the capability and facility to Caribbean and Vietnam. Do you expect Japanese self-defense forces to provide the same kind of freedom of navigational operation in the South China Sea? Thanks so much.

MR. KRITENBRINK: Well, first of all, on the bilateral itself, I'm sure the President is very much looking forward to seeing Prime Minister Abe in just a little while. This will be their first meeting since Prime Minister Abe's very successful State Visit to Washington in April. And as you said, I'm sure that the regional security issues will be on the agenda. But given that we are close allies and global partners, there will be a whole range of issues that they'll discuss.

On the specific issue of maritime disputes in the region, what I would say is what the President has said publicly before, that the core of our rebalance strategy and the core of our position on these maritime issues is a belief in advancing and sustaining a rules-based order in the region -- rules that apply equally to all powers, large and small. And that applies as well to the maritime realm.

And so when we see instances of powers that behave in ways that contravene those international rules and norms, we expect our friends and partners and allies in the region to stand with us and to call out that behavior and work to advance that rules-based order.

MR. EARNEST: We have probably time for two more. Michelle.

Q This is probably best for you to answer, I think. But what do you think of this bipartisan bill now on security of people coming in? The visa waiver program has been questioned for a long time. So now, obviously people on both sides want to limit anybody who's been to Iraq or Syria in the last five years from coming in. What do you think of that? Is that something that the President would consider? Or are you going to say he might veto that as well?

And on the question of -- now, I'm going to forget what I was going to ask. The visa waiver and --

MR. EARNEST: Well, I'll answer that and you can think of your second one. If you guys know more about this, weigh in here. But there are a couple things I know about this. I know that there have already been a couple of security enhancements that have been added to the visa waiver program. These are enhancements that were made in the last couple of years, and we can get you those technical enhancements that do actually relate to ensuring that we have a proper screening of procedures in place that's based on travel history. So that's the first thing.

The second thing is I'd just refer you to the President's comments earlier this week where he noted an openness to working with Congress on enhancements that could be added to our screening procedures. Now, these would not be enhancements that are designed to undermine the effectiveness of the program, but rather enhancements that would strengthen the program and ensure that the national security interests of the United States comes first.

I say all of that mindful of the fact that the screening procedures that are already in place when it comes to the refugee program are the most rigorous of anybody seeking to enter the United States, already take 18 to 24 months. It's clear that there is a rigorous process that is already in place when you consider the biographic, biometric information that's

collected. So we've sort of been through all of that. But that openness remains whether it's the refugee program or aspects of the visa waiver program.

Q -- no travel to Iraq or Syria over the past five years. I mean, there is an arbitrariness to that in that it's a little bit beyond a case-by-case basis. So would he be open to this --

MR. EARNEST: I'm not aware of all of the details of this specific bill or what specific position that we have taken on it. And so we can take the question and see if we have something more specific we can share with you. I will have somebody follow up with you with some more details about those specific changes that have been made to the visa waiver program, mindful of the need to tighten security based on the travel history of some individuals.

Q Were these changes that were made after ISIS?

MR. EARNEST: No, these were changes that were made years ago. But we'll follow up with you on the details of what they are and when they were implemented.

MR. RHODES: We want to take approaches that are effective in dealing with what the threat is. I mentioned before that the refugee program is a lengthy process. We don't share an overland passage with Greece in the way that other European countries do, of course, so this issue of travel is of concern. That's clearly a faster way to get into the United States. At the same time, you're talking about a program that deals with an enormous volume of travel and commerce with enormous economic impacts. So from our view, the type of solutions that cast too broad of an effect on the ability to, frankly, just have basic travel and commerce between the United States and Europe are going to be problematic.

However, we can work with Congress to try to identify focused efforts where we can be upgrading necessary screening. What's I think going to be even more important is the intelligence-sharing and law enforcement cooperation that we have with European partners. Because what we found is you obviously want to catch somebody at several layers, so if someone has been to Syria -- you obviously want to prevent them from getting there, but first of all, we're trying to shut down the border with Turkey so they can't get out of Syria. If they get out of Turkey, you want to have the type of agreements with other countries where they have the access to the information to detect if somebody is someone we believe poses a threat, and have the authority to detain that individual, so that it gets harder and harder for people to pass through different countries on their way towards the destination certainly of the United States.

So there's been this ongoing effort of trying to harmonize the laws and authorities that countries have to pick up people of concern and to check them against the intelligence information that's available not just to one country but to many. And so this is going to be I think an essential part of our effort -- it already is -- going forward.

Q Are you saying you think something like that specifically would be too broad?

MR. RHODES: I'm aware of the bill, but I think we have to take a look at the language and consult with the members of Congress. So as Josh said, we'll get back to you as that process goes forward.

Q Just quickly, and maybe you can answer it -- you may have already partially answered it. But you've been making this repeated defense of the refugee vetting program as it stands. But we also hear the Director of the CIA saying that he's going to evaluate to see what else could be done. So it sounds like you're saying that the openness is there to make it tighter, but do you already have things in mind that you'd like to -- I mean, if there are going to have to be changes, do you already see areas where there could be changes?

MR. RHODES: Well, again, I don't want to get into the intelligence side of this. But I think we have expressed an openness, including to Congress, to be reviewing these procedures, to be making sure that no stone is left unturned, to, frankly, determine what our ability is to access the different information available in the government so that we're doing the most thorough job possible to vet somebody against whatever connections we may be able to determine they've had in the past.

So, again, without getting into intelligence matters, which is certainly what the CIA's role in this would be, you always want to make sure that the process is exhaustive, that you're vetting not just the person but you're able to determine whether they've had associations in the past with people who we know to be members of ISIL, and you want to make sure that you have access to the information that is available across the U.S. government -- because there are different terrorism databases. But we've done a lot of work already in this administration, particularly in the aftermath of the attempted Christmas Day bomb, to ensure that there's broad access to terrorism databases.

But this is something that it's appropriate for us to be continually looking at. The question is whether or not it is necessary and appropriate to just shut down our refugee program. We do not believe it's necessary or appropriate. And again, as I said to Mike, there's a threat, of course. Whenever anybody is trying to get into the United States you want to make sure that there's not a threat that they have an association with ISIL or that they might become a vehicle for ISIL's ambitions. There's also a threat of radicalization -- online radicalization, use of social media. That's a threat as well. So just as people need to be concerned about whether or not we have appropriate vetting procedures to prevent someone from coming here to the United States to commit a terrorist act, they have to be concerned that we're not doing things that makes it easier for ISIL to radicalize individuals who are already in the United States -- whether they're Americans or whether they are other people who have already reached the United States.

And ISIL depends -- if you look at their online content, if you look at their social media, they depend on the narrative that they're a caliphate, of course, and we're trying to deal with that by taking back that territory from them. They depend on the narrative that the United States and the West is at war with Islam. They depend upon the narrative that they are standing up to the United States and the West on behalf of Muslims. And we, therefore, need to be very mindful that we should not be doing things that plays into that

narrative, because that, too, is a threat. And that, frankly, is a threat of people who are already in the United States who ISIL is trying to radicalize online right now -- not someone who is sitting and waiting in a refugee vetting process.

So there's a lot of discussion over here about countering ISIL's ideology and their social media tactics. There's a debate over here about refugees. Let's not forget that the debate over here about counter ISIL ideology and about what they're able to do on social media involves people who are sitting in the United States right now and are consumers of this content. And we need to do whatever we can to undermine ISIL's narrative even as we're vetting anybody who is seeking admission into the country if they're a refugee.

Q Switching topics. The President will travel tomorrow to Malaysia for the second time in two years. The Prime Minister of Malaysia is under a number of investigations for corruption. He's also appeared to crack down on free speech, shutting down some newspapers and jailing dissidents. And there's been big demonstrations for him to step down. President Obama seemed to have a fairly close relationship with him, not only with the two visits but playing golf in Hawaii last year with him. Is the President going to raise any concerns directly about his own conduct and his own administration's conduct on these matters? Is he concerned that what's going on in Malaysia is a setback to the administration's push to spread democratic values in Southeast Asia?

MR. RHODES: Absolutely, I think the President will want to raise and will raise with Prime Minister Najib concerns that we have about the status of the political opposition in Malaysia, the imprisonment developments of that opposition or of a free media in civil society that are such important components of democracy. So I think he'll raise those issues very directly. We're obviously traveling to Malaysia for the East Asia and ASEAN Summits, but he'll also have a bilateral meeting with the Prime Minister and address those issues.

I think he'll also want to hear and engage with young people and representatives of civil society as well, so that we're demonstrating that our engagement is not just with one figure, it's with the government and it's with the people of Malaysia.

At the same time, of course, he's worked with Prime Minister Najib and the Malaysian government on issues like completion of TPP, on issues like maritime security and the broader ASEAN and East Asia Summit agenda. So we continue to believe that we are able to work effectively on behalf of a number of important shared interests that we have with Malaysia, but we're going to be very candid about areas where we have disagreements and differences and objections if we see that the type of universal values that we support are not being respected.

In Southeast Asia, generally, I think we see a number of positive democratic trends at the same time. The President just recently hosted President Widodo of Indonesia, which has gone through a very successful democratic transition. We recently saw a very successful election in Burma in which the opposition won an overwhelming victory at the end of a very spirited campaign, a key milestone in the democratic transition taking place there.

But this is a region where there are countries at different stages of their -- with different systems. And we think that it's demonstrated time and again that democracy is a better system. It delivers not just more in terms of political rights, but it can deliver successful development for people. And we'll be candid with Prime Minister Najib as -- again, I'm sure if he sees Hun Sen of Cambodia, we'll make clear our deep concern about recent steps that have been taken to marginalize the opposition, including the stripping of political rights and some very concerning statements that would suggest that, in Cambodia, there's going to be a reversal of political rights rather than preparation for an election that the Cambodian people can determine.

MR. EARNEST: Why don't we take two more? Yes.

Q A question on the South China Sea. I know that (inaudible) -- the subject of the South China Sea.

MR. RHODES: No, we're not -- we do not see this -- when we look at the South China Sea and maritime security, that is an issue that we have focused on through the East Asia Summit process, given the presence of ASEAN and given the presence of many of the countries in the region, and given the fact that we believe the East Asia Summit should be a forum for addressing political and security issues as well as economic issues. The sessions at APEC are entirely economic.

We do raise the South China Sea in our bilateral encounters here. So it was a subject with the President of the Philippines. It, I'm sure, could be a subject with Prime Minister Abe. It certainly was a subject with the Prime Minister of Australia. It comes up in the President's conversations on the margins with leaders. But we are not looking for APEC as an institution to be focused on maritime security issues.

We do want the East Asia Summit to be a forum for addressing maritime security issues, and I think you'll see it be a focus in Malaysia as well.

Q On the South China Sea, where do you see it going? Because, with respect, we always hear you talking about freedom of navigation, respect for rules-based order there, but if there was not further action, China is going to continue building up those islands and within a year or two they will be fully functioning military outposts. And that spooks the Philippines, Japan, other nations in the region. Is there really nothing else that you are going to be doing other than calling for this very gentle, nebulous idea of rules-based development?

MR. RHODES: Well, first of all, there's much that we're doing. We, ourselves, have conducted and will continue to conduct freedom of navigation operations as appropriate. We just announced the other day \$250 million in maritime security assistance for our Southeast Asian partners. So the United States, through its military presence and through its security assistance, is demonstrating that we are going to uphold these basic principles.

With respect to our focus on resolving these disputes consistent with the rules-based order, clearly that's the preference. We certainly don't want to see a military conflict in this part of the world. I don't think that's in anybody's interest. The fact of the matter is we're work very closely with the countries in the region to make sure that they are invested in these principles. We would like to see ASEAN and China complete a code of conduct so that there's not the risk of escalation.

We've made clear to China our opposition to the militarization of the South China Sea and continued reclamation. That, by the way, applies not just to China, it applies to other countries, because we're seeing the potential risk of other countries continuing to take those actions. So we'd like to see that activity stop. China has made commitments that they're not going to pursue the militarization of the South China Sea, and we're going to have to monitor whether or not that's the case.

Look, these are longstanding territorial disputes. There's going to be a period of time before they're resolved. In the interim, we want to make sure that principles like freedom of navigation are upheld, that it's clear that the United States is going to be present in this part of the world, that we have a broad range of military and security partnerships in this part of the world, and that the trend towards militarization is stopped and that there's a process that is set in place for nations to deal with these issues peacefully.

MR. EARNEST: Thanks a lot, everybody. Have a good evening.

END

5:40 P.M. PHT