

Daily Press Briefing: Discussion of Venezuela

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July 9, 2014

Jen Psaki, Spokesperson

Daily Press Briefing, selections on Venezuela

Washington, DC

QUESTION: Do you have anything else that you can tell us about the circumstances surrounding the exchange of chiefs of mission?

MS. PSAKI: Certainly. One, there's nothing out of the norm about this at all. We – let me just get a quick update and see where we are on this. It's customary practice, diplomatic practice, to put in place a charge when we do not have ambassadors at the mission. This is not a new practice. There was an acting charge there previously, and Lee McClenny's arrival is part of a routine personnel rotation.

QUESTION: Well, it might not be unusual logistically, but relations between the United States and Venezuela are unusual.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: So I mean, what about the circumstances between the United States and Venezuela, as reflected by this move?

MS. PSAKI: Well, it doesn't change the fact that there are a range of reasons why we have a diplomatic presence in countries, even where we don't agree on every issue. And certainly, in this case, as I mentioned the other day, the Venezuelan Government has tried repeatedly over the last couple of months to shift focus from its mistakes and Venezuela's problems to the bilateral relationship. But again, it's still, in our view, productive to have a presence where we can. There are American citizens that we can provide services to, we can voice concerns where we have them, and those are some of the important tools that our diplomatic embassies and posts serve as well.

July 7, 2014

Jen Psaki, Spokesperson

Daily Press Briefing, selections on Venezuela

Washington, DC

QUESTION: What can you tell us about the exchange of chiefs of mission last week? It was on a day when there wasn't a briefing.

MS. PSAKI: I believe there was a report that we will have a new charge starting soon in Venezuela, but I don't have an exact timeline at this point.

QUESTION: So does that – is that an opening for improving ties between the U.S. and Venezuela, then?

MS. PSAKI: There's always – we remain open to a long-term relationship with Venezuela. We have existing concerns, as you know, about circumstances on the ground and accusations they've made against the United States. Those haven't changed, but it's an – it's just somebody who will be there, of course, with other officials on the ground representing our – the needs of the United States.

QUESTION: Is there something that has happened to make this opportunity an opportunity?

MS. PSAKI: Nothing specific that I'm aware of, Scott.

June 12, 2014

Jen Psaki, Spokesperson

Daily Press Briefing, selections on Venezuela

Washington, DC

QUESTION: The Venezuelan Government has asked Interpol to arrest three Venezuelan opposition leaders who are living here in the United States and arrange their extradition to Venezuela. Is that a request that the United States Government intends to comply with?

MS. PSAKI: Well, Scott, as you know, we don't speak to extradition requests, so there is very little that I have to add on this front. I will see if there's more that we can convey in terms of our concerns about the overarching message it's sending.

QUESTION: What about the requests to have these opposition leaders detained?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I think you're familiar with our view, broadly, here that the focus needs to be on having a dialogue between all sides. And there have been a range of accusations launched against not just the United States but opposition leaders in the country, and that hasn't been a productive approach to what we're seeing on the ground.

June 5, 2014

Marie Harf, Deputy Spokesperson
Daily Press Briefing, selections on Venezuela
Washington, DC

QUESTION: Any thoughts on the order of the opposition leader Leopoldo Lopez to stand trial now on charges of instigating violence during the anti-government protests?

MS. HARF: Well, what we've said on Venezuela hasn't changed; our position hasn't changed that we believe dialogue is the way forward here. It's not politicized arrests, not trying to criminalize dissent, and that all of the parties here – the two sides – really need to figure out a way to talk going forward. We haven't seen the government engage in a meaningful way on that yet. And this – these steps are certainly not helpful and quite detrimental to the process.

May 29, 2014

Jen Psaki, Spokesperson

Daily Press Briefing, selections on Venezuela

Washington, DC

QUESTION: The Venezuelan Government says the U.S. Envoy to Colombia, Kevin Whitaker, is helping the opposition leader, Maria Corina Machado, plan a series of coup plots. Is that true?

MS. PSAKI: Absolutely not. Let's be clear: These allegations are absolutely false and baseless. We've seen many times the Venezuelan Government try to distract from its own actions by blaming the United States or other members of the international community for events inside Venezuela. The real issues are ones that must be the subject of serious, inclusive dialogue among Venezuelans with actions to address the legitimate grievances of the Venezuelan people.

May 21, 2014

Jen Psaki, Spokesperson

Daily Press Briefing, selections on Venezuela

Washington, DC

QUESTION: Do you have any comment on the Foreign Relations Committee vote on sanctions against members of the Venezuelan Government?

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm. Well, as an Administration, we continue to consider all available options to foster a peaceful solution to the unrest in Venezuela. We possess a range of diplomatic tools, including sanctions, to address human rights violations. But in our view, sanctions are a tool. They're not an objective.

And we believe that genuine democratic dialogue continues to be an appropriate path here. We have also no indications that other Latin American countries at this time would support sanctions on Venezuela. So of course, Congressional – Congress is free to call for or vote on whatever they choose to, but we continue to focus on a range of diplomatic tools to see how things can be resolved on the ground.

QUESTION: Could I ask something entirely unrelated?

MS. PSAKI: Yes.

QUESTION: Well, I – just one on that. What difference does it make whether any countries in Latin America would support it?

MS. PSAKI: I just --

QUESTION: Do you mean – would that affect the – would that have an impact?

MS. PSAKI: No, it didn't. I just added it because I thought it would be a useful point for all of you to be aware of.

QUESTION: Right, but – I mean, do – because the impact of sanctions, should they be imposed, would be negligible if it didn't have the support of --

MS. PSAKI: I should've separated it. I don't want you to overthink the importance of that point. I just thought it was an interesting one to share.

May 13, 2014

Jen Psaki, Spokesperson
Daily Press Briefing, selections on Venezuela
Washington, DC

QUESTION: (Inaudible) take this if you don't have an answer. There have been some complaints on the Hill going back a couple days, or actually more than a couple days – in the last week about Venezuela and the State Department holding up or opposing the – excuse me – sanctions. Can you respond to those complaints?

MS. PSAKI: Well, as you know, Matt, we – and I think Roberta Jacobson was up on the Hill just last week --

QUESTION: Right.

MS. PSAKI: -- speaking about --

QUESTION: And I think that's where the – that may have been where these originated.

MS. PSAKI: Well, our view – obviously, there are a range of members who have proposed sanctions and they have every right to do that. While Assistant Secretary Jacobson was up there, she made the point that the U.S. Government should not undermine the current dialogue while it still offers a chance of progress, and that remains our view. She noted that members of the opposition participating in the dialogue have also made that point to us, and obviously we want to continue to give this process an opportunity to work.

QUESTION: And you're not aware of the opposition changing its mind or saying that, in fact, no, we never said that we thought sanctions were a bad idea?

MS. PSAKI: Not that I'm aware of. But let me just reiterate: We share the concerns expressed by many in U.S. Congress regarding the situation in Venezuela. We believe no option should be off the table when it comes to sanctions, but timing is key and this current dialogue in Venezuela is still fragile.

QUESTION: Okay. Well, is it not correct that a bill that would allow the Administration to impose sanctions does not actually impose sanctions?

MS. PSAKI: I don't have any details on the bill.

QUESTION: I mean – right. But I mean, you would have the option, once such a law is passed, to hit them with sanctions or not hit them with sanctions. So I guess I just --

MS. PSAKI: Well, but, as you know, sometimes it sends a strong message when you do that, as was the case --

QUESTION: Okay. So it's the perception of the --

MS. PSAKI: We want to give the opportunity for the current dialogue to work.

QUESTION: Does the State Department want to react to critics who called the Administration a selfie-taking, hash-tagging, teenage Administration?

MS. PSAKI: I don't think I have any comments on that.

QUESTION: What about – I mean, this was in the pages of The Wall Street Journal today, and David Ignatius a few days ago called on President Obama to quote, “suck it up.” Any reaction?

MS. PSAKI: I think our actions and our engagement in the world speaks for itself.

QUESTION: Which one, which part?

May 7, 2014

Jen Psaki, Spokesperson

Daily Press Briefing, selections on Venezuela

Washington, DC

QUESTION: The one in Venezuela. President Maduro is saying that if the United States applies some sanctions on Venezuela, they will respond firmly and the first affected will be the Venezuelans living in the United States, because they will do things like closing consulates and things like that. And at the same time he's asking President Obama to accept or the Administration to accept the credentials of the new ambassador they already put up for consideration. So do you have any reaction?

MS. PSAKI: Well, obviously, the Venezuelan Government, as you know, is going through its own process. We're encouraged – we have been encouraged by the UNASUR-led initiative that has been ongoing over the course of the last several weeks with Vatican involvement. We encourage the parties to remain focused on strengthening Venezuela's democracy, including the right to peaceful protests. Obviously, there have been a range of requests out there, but we believe the focus should be on resolving, at this point, the conflicts happening within Venezuela.

QUESTION: There is a caravan or a group of Venezuelans coming from Miami mainly to here to protest in Washington.

MS. PSAKI: To Washington?

QUESTION: Yeah. So they will – apparently they'll be here on Friday, but Maduro's saying that they want to investigate those people and probably take some measures on that.

MS. PSAKI: I'm not even familiar with that report, so I'll check and see if we have more to say.

May 5, 2014

Marie Harf, Deputy Spokesperson
Daily Press Briefing, selections on Venezuela
Washington, DC

QUESTION: This morning, the Human Rights Watch issued a report detailing instances of torture, security forces using armbands.

...

QUESTION: In specific instances of torture, the collusion between the executive and the judicial to silence the opposition. Your reaction to that, and are there instances of torture in Venezuela?

MS. HARF: Well, I haven't read the whole report yet. I've been very clear up here, as have all of us, that criminalizing dissent is not an acceptable behavior for a government to do. And we've seen that quite a bit in Venezuela. We've seen the pictures and the reports coming out about what's happening to some protestors. There's no place for any of that violence. I'll take a look at the report and see if we have a more robust response for you.

April 25, 2014

Jen Psaki, Spokesperson

Daily Press Briefing, selections on Venezuela

Washington, DC

QUESTION: Are you all aware of an American citizen who's being held? A court ruling ruled that he could be held in custody, and he's suspected of being a U.S. agent.

MS. PSAKI: Let me see, Catherine. I believe I have something on a U.S. citizen, but we are – because of privacy considerations, it's unlikely I'll have very much for you. But we are aware of the reports that a U.S. citizen has been arrested in Venezuela. We take seriously our obligation to assist U.S. citizens overseas. We stand ready to provide all appropriate consular services in cases where citizens are detained or arrested abroad. But again, I don't have any other details, given privacy considerations.

QUESTION: Has there been a consular access granted?

MS. PSAKI: I don't have any other details. I will check and see if there are any updates since yesterday when I had this information.

QUESTION: Thanks.

March 28, 2014

Marie Harf, Deputy Spokesperson

Daily Press Briefing, selections on Venezuela

Washington, DC

QUESTION: Roberta Jacobson yesterday made comments to the effect that the State Department is considering or views sanctions against Venezuela as a possible tool --

MS. HARF: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: -- for effecting change in that country. I was hoping you could maybe clarify where in the toolbox sanctions are from the State Department's point of view. And also, apparently Colombia has said that the regime has agreed to the opposition's terms for talks. I just wonder if you could get some reaction on that.

MS. HARF: A couple points. On the first, we have said -- Secretary Kerry has said, and I have said, certainly, that there are a number of policy options on the table for how we could help foster a peaceful solution here. We have said one of them could be sanctions, but I have nothing to predict in terms of what that might look like. What we've been more focused on, quite frankly, is what you've heard me talk a lot about -- that the importance of getting a third-party mediator talking to both sides here to try and get some peaceful resolution of this going forward.

And I don't know if this is what you're referring to, so follow up if it's not, but the group of foreign ministers who went to Venezuela and I think met with both the government and the opposition -- I don't know if it was yesterday, but recently -- is encouraging. We hope this could be an effort to end the violence and promote honest dialogue that addresses the Venezuelan people's legitimate grievances. There's still -- this is just the beginning stages of what this might look like, but hopefully this or something like this can serve as a third-party mediator to try and get the parties to the table, try and end the violence, and move forward here.

QUESTION: I mean, as you probably know, people like us tend to hear sanctions and we glom on that. I was wondering if you could characterize how realistic the application of sanctions is in this case.

MS. HARF: As I said, we've set a wide range of policies around the table. But what we are really focused on right now is trying to identify -- have the two parties identify and agree to a third-party mediator here. So while there are many options on the table, I think we're focused on the mediation aspect at this point.

QUESTION: Thanks.

March 27, 2014

Marie Harf, Deputy Spokesperson

Daily Press Briefing, selections on Venezuela

Washington, DC

QUESTION: Leopoldo Lopez, the opposition leader in Venezuela, just wrote an op-ed – I think it was in The Washington Post – speaking about the intense repression of Venezuelans and calling for more engagement in the – from the international community, saying not to do so would make the international community, particularly members of the OAS, quote, “complicit in the downward spiral of Venezuela.” I’m just wondering if you have any thoughts on the instances of repression that he mentions.

MS. HARF: Well, as we’ve said from the beginning, that the Venezuelan Government needs to immediately take steps to recognize that its citizens need to have a voice in their future, and that means working with the opposition, possibly – or probably, I would say, through a third-party mediator – I’m not sure who that could be – but getting the sides to the table to start talking through dialogue about how to move this forward – not criminalizing dissent, not kicking out of the legislature this woman who tried to speak at the Organization of American States and talk about what was going on in Venezuela. This is exactly opposite of what Venezuela needs to do.

But one thing we’ve stressed all throughout this is this is not about the United States, this is not about the rest of the world; this is about Venezuela getting its internal situation in order. We will help, we will stand by them, we will obviously – and if there’s any way we can – help move this process forward, but it really needs to be a Venezuelan-led process, again, probably with a third-party mediator that the two sides need to identify and that the two sides need to be okay with.

March 25, 2014

Marie Harf, Deputy Spokesperson

Daily Press Briefing, selections on Venezuela

Washington, DC

QUESTION: Apparently, Congressman Maria Corina Machado was expelled from congress for coming to the OAS. Do you have anything on that?

MS. HARF: Yes, I do. Just give me one second. Yes. So she – let me see this – so I don't have anything on being expelled from congress. I'll check on that part. She was offered a – to address the Permanent Council of the Organization of American States by Panama, I believe. They made her a part of their delegation. We strongly supported Panama's efforts here. She is an opposition leader. But we believe that listening to a democratically elected member of any member state legislature, regardless of party affiliation – Lord knows we do it here – is consistent with the OAS's history of openness and transparency.

So obviously, we think this is disturbing, we don't think that Venezuela should continue down this path, and that obviously, they can't solve their problems by criminalizing or cracking down on dissent; that the government should choose dialogue over confrontation. They haven't done that and they need to.

March 24, 2014

Marie Harf, Deputy Spokesperson
Daily Press Briefing, selections on Venezuela
Washington, DC

QUESTION: Marie, on Venezuela --

MS. HARF: Yeah.

QUESTION: The Embassy down in Caracas announced over the weekend that it will stop reviewing new visa applications. Any further explanation as to why?

MS. HARF: Yeah. Mm-hmm. Let me just pull that up. Yes. So our Embassy in Caracas. Just give me one second. I do need to clean out this book. As a result of the recent expulsion of several consular officers and Venezuelan Government delays in issuing visas for incoming officers, we regret that the United States Embassy is unable to schedule appointments for first-time tourist visa applicants, except in emergency situations, at this time. So basically, for first-time B1 or B2 visa applicants, we don't have the resources or the manpower to schedule appointments for them to come in and apply for a United States visa. Venezuelans wishing to apply for their first B1 or B2 visas or to renew one that has expired more than a year ago can make an appointment at other U.S. embassies and consulates to do so.

QUESTION: Do you have an estimate of how many applications will stop being reviewed?

MS. HARF: I don't. It's a good question. I can check and see with our folks and see how many sort of first-time visa applications we get. I just don't know.

QUESTION: Is there a fear that there could be a rush of Venezuelans trying to flee the country, given that the protests are entering the second month and the number of deaths keep climbing also?

MS. HARF: Is there a fear that played into this decision?

QUESTION: Yeah.

MS. HARF: No. This decision was completely resource-based, personnel-based. It was just a numbers issue. We just don't have the manpower now because our folks were expelled and we don't have new people that have replaced them to just handle the applicants.

QUESTION: This also being read from both the government and the opposition as a hint of possible sanctions that have been called not only from Venezuela --

MS. HARF: I think people are trying to read a lot of tea leaves here. As I said, it's a personnel issue. If they were to move forward and get our folks in there, then maybe we would be able to

have these appointments be scheduled. Again, we've said we're looking at what steps to take, separate and apart from this. But this truly is a issue of not having enough folks there to handle the applications.

QUESTION: Marie, a quick follow-up to the Taiwan question.

MS. HARF: Uh-huh. Yeah.

QUESTION: Do you have any concern at all over any possible widespread – further spread of the demonstrations and instability in Taiwan?

MS. HARF: Not to my knowledge, not that I've heard. I'm happy to check with our folks, but not that I've heard at this point.

March 20, 2014

Jen Psaki, Spokesperson

Daily Press Briefing, selections on Venezuela

Washington, DC

QUESTION: It's very – probably very brief. You've seen reports from Venezuela about the arrests of several opposition mayors. Do you have any comment on that?

MS. PSAKI: Sure. Reports of the arrests of the mayors – of San Cristobal, Daniel Ceballos; of San Diego, Enzo Scarano – deeply concern us. The Venezuelan Government should stop the violence against its citizens and opposition officials who are exercising their freedom of speech. We call again on the Venezuelan Government to release those it has unjustly jailed, lift restrictions on freedom of the press, and engage in an authentically inclusive dialogue with Venezuelans across the political spectrum.

March 18, 2014

Jen Psaki, Spokesperson

Daily Press Briefing, selections on Venezuela

Washington, DC

QUESTION: The unrest continues. There is still going on a lot of problems there, and there is no dialogue. Any comments of the U.S. following all these disaster in Venezuela?

MS. PSAKI: Well, we continue to seek a constructive bilateral relationship with Venezuela, as we've spoken about a bit in here. There are steps that have been taken, including the kicking out of three of our diplomats and heightened rhetoric that has occurred consistently over the last several weeks that has certainly caused us pause. We've said – and I said yesterday, so I don't have anything necessarily new to add – that we'd certainly support a third-party mediator. There are a range of options for that to be an unbiased mediator between the opposition and the government, but that's basically --

QUESTION: I'm not asking about the bilateral relation within the U.S. and Venezuela.

MS. PSAKI: Yeah.

QUESTION: I'm asking about the Democratic Charter that Kerry mentioned that the U.S. can call in the OAS. Do you think that is the moment, maybe, to call again to the OAS to review all these situation in Venezuela? What's going to be the next move of the U.S., based on the Democratic Charter?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I think I was answering what we think the next move should be, which is a third-party mediator, who can have – can bring both parties together, the government and the opposition. They need to agree on someone who's impartial, that both parties would be comfortable with.

March 17, 2014

Jen Psaki, Spokesperson

**Daily Press Briefing, selections on Venezuela, via telephone
Washington, DC**

QUESTION: Hi. Yes, it's EFE News Services. I wanted to go to Venezuela. On Saturday, President Maduro proposed that the U.S. name an emissary or a special envoy to start a dialogue with his government and the UNASUR on the protests. I wanted to know if the U.S. would be willing to do that or at least consider it. Thank you.

MS. PSAKI: Thank you. Well, let me first say that the Venezuelan Government should stop the violence against its citizens who are exercising their freedom of speech. The Venezuelan Government should release those it has unjustly jailed, allow citizens to express their freedom of speech, lift restrictions on freedom of the press, and engage in an inclusive dialogue with Venezuelans across the political spectrum. That would be the most productive steps – those would be the most productive steps they could take.

A dialogue – we believe a dialogue should be facilitated by a third party acceptable to all parties in Venezuela, including those in the opposition who believe their democratic rights are being suppressed. Beyond that, I don't have any details on U.S. plans. We believe that a third party is essential to moving this process forward.

QUESTION: Mm-hmm. But would you be willing to be that third party?

MS. PSAKI: I'm not aware of plans for that. This is something where we feel that the Venezuelan Government and the opposition need to be in agreement. There are a range of options. I'm not going to detail those, but our focus is on continuing to call on the Venezuelan Government to take steps to promote freedom of speech and take steps to release those who are unjustly jailed, et cetera.

QUESTION: Okay. Thank you.

MS. PSAKI: Thank you.

February 28, 2014

Jen Psaki, Spokesperson

Daily Press Briefing, selections on Venezuela

Washington, DC

QUESTION: This morning, after his talks with his Colombian counterpart, Secretary Kerry talked about Venezuela as well in a press availability that he had.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: And he mentioned that in his talks with Maria Holguin, they had discussed some kind of mediation efforts to try and resolve the political crisis in Venezuela. Do you have more details on that, exactly which countries, who might be involved, what they're looking at?

MS. PSAKI: I don't. What he's referring to is a third-party mediator. But again, that's a discussion that's – that they are having. It is clear that there is likely a need for that, as the Secretary said. But I don't have any other details to share with you.

QUESTION: But would your preference be another Latin American or South American country?

MS. PSAKI: I just am not going to outline preferences given this is a discussion they're having.

QUESTION: Presumably it's not going to be the United States, though?

MS. PSAKI: That's right, yes.

QUESTION: Okay, thank you.

February 27, 2014

Jen Psaki, Spokesperson

Daily Press Briefing, Selections on Venezuela

Washington, DC

QUESTION: Yes, on Venezuela. The Government of Panama has requested a meeting of the foreign ministers of the hemisphere to discuss the situation in Venezuela, and the OAS is supposed to discuss this – that possibility soon. However, Venezuela has said that it doesn't want the OAS to discuss the protest. It prefers that it would be UNASUR. And I wanted to know if the U.S. wants or thinks that it would be helpful, a debate in the OAS about this.

MS. PSAKI: Well, I believe we said in a statement we sent out a couple of days ago that engagement through the OAS, we thought was – would be a productive part of the process, and a productive venue, I should say. Broadly speaking, we have indicated our readiness to developing a more constructive relationship with Venezuela. It's true that other countries in the region have also indicated that. It makes it more challenging, of course, when there are steps taken for us, including the expulsion of three of our diplomats. And also we believe that there needs to be a focus, of course, in Venezuela on events on the ground and listening to the voices of the people there.

QUESTION: And would you like to see a meeting of the foreign ministers?

MS. PSAKI: I'd have to check with our team and see if that's something we are working towards or we're engaging with from here from the United States.

February 25, 2014

**Jen Psaki, Spokesperson
Daily Press Briefing, Selections on Venezuela
Washington, DC**

QUESTION: Well, I do have Afghanistan questions, which I'm sure a lot of people do, but maybe we should just go and get on the record the Venezuela expulsions first.

MS. PSAKI: Sure. As many of you have seen, because I believe some of it has been reported, but in response to the Venezuelan Government's decision to declare three Foreign Service officials persona non gratae, we, on February 17th, in accordance with Article 9 of the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, the State Department has declared three officials from the Venezuelan Embassy in Washington, DC, persona non gratae as well. They have been allowed 48 hours to leave the United States. As you know, the convention permits the United States to declare any member of a diplomatic mission persona non grata at any time and without the necessity to state a reason.

QUESTION: Sorry. What was on the 17th?

MS. PSAKI: That was when that action was taken in Venezuela. So in response to that action --

QUESTION: Right. I was wondering --

MS. PSAKI: Sorry, that was sort of confusing --

QUESTION: Okay. So -- but they've been given --

MS. PSAKI: -- how I stated that.

QUESTION: Right, okay.

MS. PSAKI: Yes.

QUESTION: So they've been given 48 hours from what, today?

MS. PSAKI: Last night was when it was given.

QUESTION: Last night, okay. So it isn't just taking a week for this to come out that you guys --

MS. PSAKI: No.

...

QUESTION: Can I just follow up on --

MS. PSAKI: Sure. Let's just go one at a time. Jo, go ahead.

QUESTION: I don't – I saw – I'm still catching up, having been away with you. But I saw this morning that President Maduro had actually said that he was interested in trying to appoint a new ambassador to Washington. Were you aware of that before you decided to make these expulsions public, or was it in response to that that you were making these expulsions public?

MS. PSAKI: These – well, these – we're making these public because we made the – the message was sent last evening, so it wasn't related to anything other than that. This was in response to the actions taken by the Government of Venezuela.

QUESTION: So in light of the comments made by President Maduro, he's stating his intention to try and appoint a new ambassador, which I believe is going to be made sometime later on today. Would that be something that you would welcome?

MS. PSAKI: We've seen those reports, and obviously, we have indicated our readiness to develop a more constructive relationship with Venezuela. We've said many months ago that could include an exchange of ambassadors. But Venezuela also needs to show seriousness for us to be able to move forward. And recent actions, including expelling three of our diplomats, continue to make that difficult.

QUESTION: So you would not go back on this decision should he, this afternoon, decide such and such a person is going to be the ambassador? That would not – you would not go back on your decision to expel these three particular individuals at this point?

MS. PSAKI: Well, as you know, a decision about an exchange of ambassadors is a mutual decision, so obviously, we've said months ago that we could – we would be open to an exchange of ambassadors but that Venezuela needs to show seriousness about their willingness and their openness to a positive relationship moving forward. And – but this is not an action that's related to that. I wouldn't look at it in that way.

...

QUESTION: Okay, thank you. Since you are in a kind of a stalemate with Venezuela, what is next? Are you going to suggest anything in order to improve dialogue, to break relations, to have any initiative in the frame of the OAS? So what to expect from your side? Thank you.

MS. PSAKI: Well, as we've said before, we have serious concerns about some issues in Venezuela, including democracy and human rights. And we'll continue to express those concerns. If and when Venezuela decides to engage constructively on areas of mutual interest, we would welcome that. And as I said, we have indicated and have indicated for months our

openness to develop a more constructive relationship with Venezuela, but again, recent actions, including expelling three of our diplomats, continue to make that difficult.

QUESTION: So these actions cancel any good faith actions in either side? I mean --

MS. PSAKI: I don't think I said that. I think I'll leave it at what I just said.

Do we have any more on Venezuela?

QUESTION: I just have one more now that --

MS. PSAKI: Sure.

QUESTION: -- now that that's been raised. You talk about you've indicated for months. I mean, I remember in Guatemala when the Secretary met the foreign minister -- correct, had a meeting with him?

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: So since then, if you had a -- if you could do a chart, like a chart, how would you say the rapprochement has gone? Is it flat-lined? Is it going down? Is it going up? I mean, what has been -- since that meeting back in Guatemala, there were at least two, I think, meetings between Roberta Jacobson --

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: -- and Venezuelan officials. Have there been any more than that that we just don't know about?

MS. PSAKI: I don't have any other meetings to report. I'm -- what I'm indicating here is an openness in the future to a positive relationship. Obviously, there are steps --

QUESTION: All right. No, but -- so for the last -- but over the last year, how would you -- what does that graph look like?

MS. PSAKI: I'm certainly not going to give a grade, Matt.

QUESTION: I'm not asking for a grade -- a graph.

MS. PSAKI: Or an evaluation of it, or a graph, any form of mathematical analysis.

QUESTION: Wise, wise.

MS. PSAKI: But what I am not – what I will just reiterate is that we're open to a positive relationship. Obviously, we need to see more positive steps from Venezuela.

Do you have – on Venezuela, Said?

QUESTION: Venezuela, yeah.

MS. PSAKI: Okay.

QUESTION: How do you decide which three diplomats to expel in retaliation? Is it like a predetermined list? Or what kind of process, what kind of selection process do they go through?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I'm --

QUESTION: In this case or similar cases.

MS. PSAKI: I'm not going to outline that for all of you. Obviously, reciprocal actions and steps taken like these are pretty standard practice. So that's a step we took last night, and I'm just announcing it today.

QUESTION: So it would be safe to assume that they would be of the same level?

MS. PSAKI: Often they can be, but I don't have any other readout for you than that.

QUESTION: Do you have the names or who are they?

MS. PSAKI: I do. Let me see – let me do the best I can here for you, so bear with me: First Secretary Ignacio Luis Cajal Avalos, First Secretary Victor Manuel Pisani Azpurua, and Second Secretary Marcos Jose Garcia Figueredo. How did I do?

QUESTION: Very well.

MS. PSAKI: All right. (Laughter.)

QUESTION: Great. Thank you.

QUESTION: One question about --

MS. PSAKI: Go ahead in the back.

QUESTION: -- Venezuela.

MS. PSAKI: Yes.

QUESTION: It's very common that the U.S. reacts in many cases when there are a situation of human rights in many countries. There is a lot of material on Venezuela. You can see them on YouTube, you can see it in Twitter. It's unbelievable the kind of images that we are seeing that – of repression to the society there. Now, the Government of Venezuela have said that the U.S. is insolent making these comments. Any reaction to that? Is the U.S. – has the U.S. a right to talk about other countries when you see these kind of situations going on?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I would certainly not just point you to but stand by the Secretary's statement that we put out this weekend where he called on the government to stop – to step back from its efforts to stifle dissent through force and to respect basic human rights. And respect for human rights and freedom of speech and freedom of the media, as you know, are principles that we believe should be held to universally. So certainly we respect, of course, the sovereignty of every country, but we certainly think we are within every right to point out where we think appropriate actions are not being taken.

QUESTION: Now, we have seen these situations in other countries. For example, we remember Libya, we have seen it in Syria. Are we close to say, "Maduro, you have step out also," or we are far away from that?

MS. PSAKI: That is certainly not what I am suggesting at all. We, of course, are again open to a positive relationship if they're willing to take steps.

October 4, 2013

Marie Harf, Deputy Spokesperson
Daily Press Briefing, selections on Venezuela
Washington, DC

QUESTION: Do you have an update on your diplomatic dispute with Caracas? And the question has been asked yesterday, that did you send a new charge d'affaires to Caracas, and are you still working on any rapprochement with Venezuela?

MS. HARF: Well, we – thank you for asking that question. We didn't send a new charge. Philip Laidlaw, as the Deputy Chief of Mission, became the new Charge d'Affaires once his predecessor departed Venezuela, so I think we were right when we were talking about this yesterday, that he just replaced the former Charge.

And we'll continue to believe that a functioning relationship with Venezuela is in the interest of both countries – focusing on counterterrorism, counternarcotics, commerce – some of these issues we've talked about for a long time. That's what we're focused on right now.

QUESTION: Did you take an action here to sort of respond to the action of asking the charge d'affaires to leave from Caracas?

MS. HARF: We did. They asked three of our folks – they PNG'd three of our folks, and we responded and did the same with three of their folks in Washington as well.

QUESTION: Including the charge d'affaires?

MS. HARF: Including their charge, correct.

October 3, 2013

Marie Harf, Deputy Spokesperson
Daily Press Briefing, selections on Venezuela
Washington, DC

QUESTION: Thank you. I was wondering if you can comment if any policy – U.S. policy towards the Western Hemisphere is going to be affected because of the shutdown. And I have a second part on Venezuela. I know that there is a new chargee d'affaires in Caracas. I was wondering what will be their – his duty is to promote dialogue again, and if so, what will be the talking points with the Venezuelan Government? Thank you.

MS. HARF: You're welcome. Thank you for the question. Well, look, what we've talked about is that our operations around the world – there's a lot of things we do in all regions of the world, including in the Western Hemisphere. We've had to sharply curtail travel of our senior officials and State Department officials, for example. That's one way it's been impacted. And every day longer we go, cultural exchange programs and other programs will continue to be impacted. So, clearly, we believe that this hurts our ability to promote our interests, certainly in the Western Hemisphere, but around the world.

In terms of Venezuela, I'm not exactly sure who you're referring to. We talked yesterday a little bit about the situation with --

QUESTION: The new one?

MS. HARF: -- our charge and their charge, and I don't know if you're --

QUESTION: No, there is a new one, a new chargee d'affaires in – the U.S. one. The U.S. named a new one in Caracas.

MS. HARF: Okay.

QUESTION: That's my understanding.

MS. HARF: Okay.

QUESTION: I don't know, so I was wondering what will be there --

MS. HARF: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: -- his new duty is to promote dialogue? And if so, what will be the talking points?

MS. HARF: Well, let me check into exactly what our staffing is at our Embassy there. I know we've talked a lot about that in the last few days. I'm happy to get back to you on that.

But look, what we're focused on right now is handling the situation that arose this week with our diplomats there and their diplomats here. I'm not going to do a longer-term analysis of where the bilateral relationship stands at this point. We'll see what happens going forward.

October 2, 2013

Marie Harf, Deputy Spokesperson
Daily Press Briefing, selections on Venezuela
Washington, DC

QUESTION: Could you confirm officially that the U.S. has expelled three Venezuelan diplomats, including the charge d'affaires? And don't you feel any deterioration of your relationship with Caracas?

MS. HARF: Well, first, I can confirm that in response to the Venezuelan Government's decision to declare three of our Embassy Caracas officials as personae non gratae, including our charge, that we informed the Venezuelan charge d'affaires on October 1st that in accordance with Article 9 of the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, and Article 23 of the Vienna Convention on consular relations, we have declared him – so that's the charge, the second secretary, and one of their consuls personae non gratae – we told them this last night, and they have been allowed 48 hours to leave the United States.

We've said for a long time, in terms of the broader relationship, that we want a functional and constructive relationship with Venezuela. We are certainly still committed to that, and we'll continue working with the Venezuelans on this – on these issues that feed into our relationship.

QUESTION: Just to add to that, the company that is involved is POSCO, a Korean company.

October 1, 2013

Jen Psaki, Spokesperson

Daily Press Briefing, selections on Venezuela

Washington, DC

QUESTION: I don't even know if it had happened when the briefing had occurred yet, but Venezuela --

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm. It had not happened.

QUESTION: It had not happened. So you have not yet had anything to say about it?

MS. PSAKI: We said something to some who asked last evening, but --

QUESTION: I know the Embassy --

MS. PSAKI: -- I will give you an -- all an update of where things stand at this point.

QUESTION: Yeah. And then just on -- as well as an update on where things stand, what -- this would seem to signal the death knell for the rapprochement that the Secretary got started in.

MS. PSAKI: This is the second "rapprochement" use this briefing. It's impressive.

QUESTION: But the first "death knell."

MS. PSAKI: Yeah. (Laughter.) That's true.

QUESTION: The first death knell.

MS. PSAKI: In my tally up here.

QUESTION: Anyway, is that dead now because of this latest move by them? And are you planning to reciprocate?

MS. PSAKI: Well, let me give you a brief update which we actually didn't have last evening. So the Venezuelan Government delivered a diplomatic note to our Embassy in Caracas last night informing us that they had declared the Chargé, the political officer, and the consular officer persona non grata. They were given 48 hours to leave the country. We completely reject the Venezuelan Government's allegations of U.S. Government involvement in any type of conspiracy to destabilize the Venezuelan Government. We reject the specific claims against three members of our Embassy. In accordance with the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations

and on Consular Relations, the United States may take reciprocal action. We're still considering what actions we might take.

QUESTION: When you say --

QUESTION: Have they left? Do you know?

MS. PSAKI: I'm not aware of their exact status. This obviously just happened overnight last night.

QUESTION: The Venezuelan (Inaudible) -- does it have an ambassador or a chargé here?

MS. PSAKI: A chargé.

QUESTION: When you say the specific claims against the three, is that -- those are the espionage claims?

MS. PSAKI: There were a range of claims issued. Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: Including espionage? I just want to make sure that you deny that.

MS. PSAKI: We -- of course, yes. We reject all claims --

QUESTION: And as to the broader --

MS. PSAKI: Question?

QUESTION: -- rapprochement issue?

MS. PSAKI: Well, Matt, obviously we've had a relationship with Venezuela that we've been working on for some time. We're not going to give up on those efforts, but --

QUESTION: Really?

MS. PSAKI: -- clearly --

QUESTION: If I was in a relationship with some entity that had been -- be going this badly for that time, I would think it might be time to call it quits.

QUESTION: Matt, let's keep your relationships -- (laughter) --

QUESTION: States have lower standards than individuals do. So in other words, it's not over, you're still willing to work with them, the --

MS. PSAKI: This happened last night.

QUESTION: I know.

MS. PSAKI: Obviously, we're taking -- we're considering actions we're going to take in response. I don't think that's a --

QUESTION: Okay.

MS. PSAKI: -- positive step, but of course, we look at the longer-term horizon there.

QUESTION: Do you know when the last round or last contact there was --

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: -- in the previous rapprochement? I believe there was at least one meeting between Roberta Jacobson and the Foreign Minister.

MS. PSAKI: The last contact at that level?

QUESTION: Right.

MS. PSAKI: I don't --

QUESTION: In the context of what was discussed between the Secretary and the Foreign Minister in Guatemala.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm. I'm happy to check on that for you, and we'll get a note around to all of you.

Go ahead, Jill.

QUESTION: Jen, can we get a little more specific about the charges? Because one of the things that they specifically said was that these diplomats allegedly were involved in some type of energy power outage creating that.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: Can you just specifically address that?

MS. PSAKI: So this was related to, I believe, their travel to Bolivar state. That was part of the discussion, I think, that you're referring to, or part of the accusations. They were there conducting normal diplomatic engagement, as we've said in the past, and should come as no surprise. We, of course, maintain regular contacts across the Venezuelan political spectrum, and

we maintain a broad perspective on Venezuela and travel frequently, of course. That's what diplomats do. So there was nothing out of the ordinary about that, and that was part of their accusations.

QUESTION: So in other words, the power went out when they arrived? Is that what happened?

MS. PSAKI: Well, it – that may have been what happened, but the accusation that there was anything out of the normal about their travel is just inaccurate.

September 20, 2013

Marie Harf, Deputy Spokesperson
Daily Press Briefing, selections on Venezuela
Washington, DC

QUESTION: Venezuela?

MS. HARF: Yeah. Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: President Maduro accused the United States of blocking his flight to China by denying airspace passage through Puerto Rico.

MS. HARF: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: What were the reasons for that, and has that been resolved?

MS. HARF: Yes. So the United States has granted permission to Venezuelan authorities to enter U.S. airspace. The Government of Venezuela had sought permission on September 18th for a civilian aircraft carrying Venezuelan officials to pass through U.S. airspace over Puerto Rico, en route to Europe, I believe, without following proper diplomatic clearance procedures, and specifically they made a request for diplomatic clearance for the aircraft with one day advance notice. Diplomatic flight clearances are required to be made with three days advance notice.

So although the request was not properly submitted, U.S. authorities worked with Venezuelan officials at the Venezuelan Embassy to resolve the issue. We made an extraordinary effort to work with the relevant authorities to grant flight approval in just a matter of hours, and as a result, we notified the Venezuelan authorities of the approved overflight request last evening, the 19th.

QUESTION: Any comment on the fact that he's flying a Cuban airplane?

MS. HARF: No, no additional comment on that. This is where we are in terms of airspace; nothing else further for you on that.

Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: A follow-up on Venezuela. The – I think it was the Venezuelan Foreign Minister last night also said that the United States had denied visas to the UN delegation, or the Venezuelan delegation traveling to the UN. Do you have anything on that?

MS. HARF: I can tell you that no visas have been denied for the Venezuelan delegation to this year's UN General Assembly.

July 19, 2013

**Marie Harf, Deputy Spokesperson
Daily Press Briefing, Selections on Venezuela
Washington, DC**

QUESTION: Do you all have any reaction to the President of Venezuela lashing out at Samantha Power for what he said was despicable criticism of Venezuela's human rights record?

MS. HARF: Well, first I would say that Samantha Power is an incredibly competent and outstanding nominee. We fully stand by her. And generally speaking, consistent with U.S. principles, we will continue to encourage respect for fundamental freedoms and democracy around the world. When it comes to Venezuela, we will continue to voice our strong support for strengthening democratic institutions, respect for freedom of expression, protection of civil society, and improved national dialogue. And along with others in the international community, we will express our concerns when there is credible evidence that fundamental freedoms are not being respected in any country.

QUESTION: You guys are having a tit-for-tat again with Venezuela. Is this – I mean, the U.S. was kind of hoping maybe they could improve relationships between these two countries, or --

MS. HARF: Well, we continue to --

QUESTION: -- how are we doing on that?

MS. HARF: We continue to seek a functional and productive relationship with Venezuela, and we remain open to a dialogue on a range of issues of mutual interest. Those include counternarcotics, counterterrorism, and the commercial relationship, including energy.

QUESTION: These two things – like, Snowden and this – and it just seems like they're just exchanging barbs.

MS. HARF: Well, again --

QUESTION: That's not much of a relationship.

MS. HARF: Well, again, we continue to seek a productive relationship with them. As with any – many relationships, there are ups and downs. But our goal is a functional and productive – excuse me – relationship with Venezuela, and we remain open to a dialogue with them on a range of issues.

July 8, 2013

Jen Psaki, Spokesperson
Daily Press Briefing, Selections on Venezuela
Washington, DC

QUESTION: Okay. It is regarding Mr. Snowden, as you probably are aware that Mr. Snowden has been granted asylum. Venezuela has granted asylum to Mr. Snowden among two other countries in Latin America. I was wondering if you have any reaction on that or if this is going to have any impact considering that the U.S. and Venezuela are trying to work on their bilateral relation.

MS. PSAKI: So let me say first that, of course, as in all of our communications with foreign governments regarding Mr. Snowden, we have advised the Government of Venezuela of the felony charges against him and urged that he should not be allowed to proceed in any further international travel other than as necessary to return him to the United States. We've had our differences with Venezuela on some issues, but we've also been able to work together on some. And this is a case where, as someone who's facing felony charges, we're hopeful that any government involved would take that into account and support his return to the United States.

QUESTION: Is it your determination that in order for him – that he is physically unable to make it from Russia to Venezuela or Bolivia or one of those countries without transit – without having to refuel through a third country that wouldn't necessarily provide him with – that wouldn't agree not to – would agree to extradite him?

MS. PSAKI: Well, it's speculating a few steps down the path here, because obviously we know that he would need to transfer somewhere out of there. We've been very clear to governments across the board of our desire to have Mr. Snowden returned to the United States. I don't think there's any secret of that. In terms of the paths or steps, I mean, you'd have to either look at the airport maps or talk to the various governments that could be the options.

QUESTION: So where do things stand right now in terms of – is your – kind of – I know you're casting a wide net in countries not to admit him or to extradite him and not to give him asylum, but, like, where is kind of the frontline of your diplomacy right now in this? This is with Russia, to try and urge them to send him back or --

MS. PSAKI: Well, I don't want to get into too many levels of specifics here, but obviously we have been in touch with a wide range of officials. It's no secret where he is located now. We agree with the comments of President Putin last week that we wouldn't want this to impact our relationship. We certainly feel that anyone – any country granting asylum to Mr. Snowden would create grave difficulties in our bilateral relationship, and that's a message that we've conveyed publicly and, of course, privately in conversations as well.

QUESTION: Jen --

QUESTION: Specifically on Venezuela, you said we've had our disagreements with Venezuela, but we have been able to cooperate on some issues. Is that what you said?

MS. PSAKI: I did.

QUESTION: Can you name one issue since the election of Chavez that the United States and Venezuela have cooperated on?

MS. PSAKI: Well, Matt, I think I was making a broad point there and making a point about the fact that the Secretary also --

QUESTION: In other words, no.

MS. PSAKI: Let me finish. The Secretary also had a meeting, as you know, with the Foreign Minister that was a potential opening. We're not getting ahead of where we are, but of course we would look closely and it would certainly impact our bilateral relationship if any country, including Venezuela, were to grant him asylum.

QUESTION: Right, right. No, no. I just want to -- so you would point to the meeting that happened in Guatemala as a sign of cooperation, as one of the few areas of cooperation between Venezuela and the United States since President Chavez was elected. I realize this is now President Maduro.

MS. PSAKI: Yes.

QUESTION: But I'm asking you if you can -- you would say that that's evidence of cooperation, a meeting?

MS. PSAKI: Well, Matt, I think what we're looking to do --

QUESTION: Can you name --

MS. PSAKI: -- is re-step our relationship here. That's where we're hoping to go.

QUESTION: Right. And this would be a problem?

MS. PSAKI: This would be a problem. Absolutely.

June 19, 2013

Jen Psaki, Spokesperson
Daily Press Briefing, selections on Venezuela
Washington, DC

QUESTION: On Venezuela, have we gotten anywhere since the meeting in Guatemala with – in terms of the --

MS. PSAKI: Well, we're still working to schedule the next meeting.

QUESTION: Okay. Nothing yet?

MS. PSAKI: As you know, Assistant Secretary Roberta Jacobson will be a lead on that. But I don't have an update on the exact timing yet.

QUESTION: All right. And then, apparently, there's a Venezuelan opposition leader in town right now. He's one of Capriles' top deputies. He's got meetings on the Hill. I'm just wondering if he's coming here at all, if you're aware of it. And if you're not, if you could look into it.

MS. PSAKI: We'll – I'll check on that for you and see – do you know what the – this individual's name is?

QUESTION: I do, but I don't have it with me here.

MS. PSAKI: Okay.

June 7, 2013

Jen Psaki, Spokesperson
Daily Press Briefing, selections on Venezuela
Washington, DC

QUESTION: Can I ask you one question about if there's any update on Venezuela and the dialogue that was announced?

MS. PSAKI: There's not an update on a scheduled meeting, which is, I believe, the question you asked yesterday.

QUESTION: Well, it's more than a meeting. It's a plan. They were going to come together with a plan to sketch out a series of --

MS. PSAKI: I don't have an update on that, either. Matt was asking about a specific meeting yesterday --

QUESTION: Hold on.

MS. PSAKI: -- which is why I said that, but --

QUESTION: No, I mean, the beginning of this -- I mean, I presume the beginning of the dialogue was the Secretary's meeting with the Foreign Minister.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: But I mean, but he did mention that there was going to be an ongoing and continuous, or continual --

MS. PSAKI: Absolutely.

QUESTION: -- dialogue with the aim of restoring or at least improving relations. So we're just -- I think the question is --

MS. PSAKI: Is, "What is the update?"

QUESTION: -- can you update us when --

MS. PSAKI: I'm happy --

QUESTION: -- or is there any update, and can you when there is?

MS. PSAKI: I am happy to update all of you when there is an update to provide. And of course, he just got back from his trip two days ago.

June 6, 2013

Jen Psaki, Spokesperson

Daily Press Briefing, selections on Venezuela

Washington, DC

QUESTION: -- on what -- something the Secretary said -- well, actually a meeting the Secretary had yesterday in Guatemala. And that is with the **Venezuelan** and the agreement to start this high-level dialogue. I'm just wondering -- and I realize it's very early days since this happened, so I'm not sure that there is anything more to report on it, but has an initial high-level meeting been set up yet? Is there a time or a venue for this? Or is it still just being determined?

MS. PSAKI: I'm not aware of a specific logistic update on that front, just to reiterate what the Secretary said yesterday, which is that we're working to try to establish a more constructive and positive relationship with Venezuela. Obviously this meeting was a small step toward that. In terms of the next step, I don't have anything specific scheduling update on it.

June 5, 2013

Jen Psaki, Spokesperson

Daily Press Briefing, selections on Venezuela

Washington, DC

QUESTION: Today, the Secretary is meeting with the Venezuelan Foreign Minister. I wondered if you could say which side called for that meeting.

MS. PSAKI: Well, I believe in our background briefing we did with the traveling road show, they confirmed that it was the Venezuelans who asked for the meeting. Just to confirm for everybody, the Secretary will meet with Venezuelan Foreign Minister Elias Jaua on June – today, I should say – today, on June 5th. He will talk about the U.S. Government's interest in building a functional operational relationship with Venezuela. And our interest in establishing a productive and functional relationship with Venezuela based on mutual interests, including counternarcotics, counterterrorism, and commerce. And I believe that meeting is either about to happen or are happening, as we speak.

QUESTION: Staying in Venezuela, the filmmaker Tim Tracy – did you guys accept the meeting before he was released or after?

MS. PSAKI: Well, the Secretary was prepared to discuss his case during the meeting. In terms of the tic-tock of the timeline of when we accepted it, I believe it was sometime last week, but it was an issue he was prepared to discuss.

And can also confirm, of course, as you all have seen, that Mr. Tracy has been released. We are pleased that he will be reunited, of course, with his family. We also want to thank the fine work of Venezuelan Charge Ortega and our Embassy in Caracas in getting to this moment.

QUESTION: So is he – do you know where in the world – is he still there or is he --

MS. PSAKI: No. He's either en route or back.

May 31, 2013

Jen Psaki, Spokesperson

Daily Press Briefing, selections on Venezuela

Washington, DC

QUESTION: I have one other follow-up, which is quite – probably easy, Venezuela.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: Is there any update on these two guys?

MS. PSAKI: Not since yesterday. There's still – of course, as I mentioned yesterday, we are cooperating – embassy security personnel is cooperating with Venezuelan authorities. We have been in touch with these two individuals. I don't have another update in terms of the conclusion.

QUESTION: All right. Do you know – if and when there is a – well, presumably there is going to be a conclusion to this – can you – is it possible to let us know within the bounds of what you can say about Chief of Mission personnel, if those two – the two individuals involved in this incident are still in the country and are still – or if they cease to become or they cease to no longer – they cease to be under COM authority?

MS. PSAKI: I don't have an update on that.

QUESTION: No, I know, but can you --

MS. PSAKI: I'm happy to check. I'm happy to check. They are DOD personnel, as you know, but I'm happy to check on that.

May 30, 2013

Jen Psaki, Spokesperson

**Daily Press Briefing, selections on Venezuela
Washington, DC**

QUESTION: Maybe you've seen reports of tensions between Venezuela and Colombia after Enrique Capriles, the losing presidential candidate, visited President Santos. Do you have a comment on that?

MS. PSAKI: I have seen those, but I just don't have a comment from here on that.

QUESTION: Besides bi-national relations, Venezuela threatened to withdraw from its role of the peace process with the FARC that Colombia has been having, which you have supported. Would you have a concern in that happening, maybe Venezuela derailing the process?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I don't want to speculate on that. Let me just say broadly, to your point, that, as we've said previously, we welcome and support efforts by President Santos and the Colombian people to pursue the lasting peace and security that Colombia deserves. We don't – the United States is not a party to these negotiations, so we refer you to both parties to discuss further.

QUESTION: And even more broadly than – there's been reports about infighting between the Chavistas in Venezuela. After this thing with Colombia, do you feel that there's instability or a threat of instability coming from Venezuela?

MS. PSAKI: I just haven't seen those reports that you're referencing, so I'll have to look a little more closely at them.

QUESTION: Your colleagues from the Embassy in Caracas, what's the latest on the investigation? Is it correct or are these stories correct that this may have been a fight between the two of them and not between some disgruntled other patron or employee of the establishment in question?

MS. PSAKI: I don't have anything on that for you. There is an investigation looking into the details of what happened here. I just want to reaffirm that there's no indication that either of these individuals were involved in any illegal activity, but I refer to, of course, the authorities on the ground who the Embassy is working closely with to make a final conclusion.

QUESTION: Sorry, when you say that there's an investigation, you're referring to the Venezuelan criminal investigation?

MS. PSAKI: I'm referring to not an investigation of their wrongdoing; an investigation of the details of what happened.

QUESTION: Is there – the incident, no, but is there – are you aware if there's an investigation by either the State Department, because these people came under Chief of Mission status, or the Defense Department into what they were doing?

MS. PSAKI: I'm not aware of that, but Embassy officials are working closely with Venezuelan authorities on working toward achieving the details and figuring out the details.

QUESTION: Yes, but I think you said you were going to take the question as to whether they were in a zone that was recommended to keep out of. Anything on that?

MS. PSAKI: I think we sent something out, so let me just repeat this for you, the Embassy's travel policy, which we put out publicly, as you know, and is broadly applicable to all citizens living in any particular country or community. It's divided into three zones, so yellow, orange, and red. The area in question was an orange zone, and the Embassy recommended that – recommends that U.S. direct hire personnel and their families assigned to U.S. Embassy in Caracas do not travel to orange zones between the hours of 8:00 p.m. and 6:00 a.m.

May 29, 2013

Jen Psaki, Spokesperson

**Daily Press Briefing, selections on Venezuela
Washington, DC**

QUESTION: Do you have any update on the incident in Caracas Patrick --

MS. PSAKI: I do.

QUESTION: -- was talking about yesterday, on the condition of the people injured in Caracas, who they were and what they were doing in Caracas?

QUESTION: What were they doing?

MS. PSAKI: Well, we can confirm that two employees of the Defense Attache Office of the U.S. Embassy in Caracas, one civilian and one uniformed service member, sustained, as Patrick confirmed yesterday, non-life-threatening injuries – they were gunshot wounds – during an incident at a nightclub in Caracas at approximately 4:00 in the morning on May 28th.

QUESTION: Sorry, a follow-up to that?

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: Within your advisory to State Department employees that are based in Caracas, you do have certain areas that you refer them to go – that you think that it's okay for them to go to and other areas that you recommend that they don't. Do you know if this particular establishment where they were shot outside of is in one of the areas that the State Department embassy security prefers that employees not go to?

MS. PSAKI: We have no information that leads us to believe that. I'd have to look into it further. Broadly speaking, we do – and this doesn't exactly address your question, but I just wanted to add to it that this is a case where, obviously, the specifics are still being looked into, the details around the incident, of course. Broadly speaking we of course hold any employees representing the United States, no matter where they work, to a high standard. But we'll let the final details of the process work themselves through.

QUESTION: Just to follow on that, do you have any insight into motivations for the shooting, or will there be an investigation? Will the U.S. cooperate with Venezuelan authorities on that?

MS. PSAKI: I don't have any more details. They are looking into the details right now, so as those become available, we may or may not have more. Just to --

QUESTION: Any further characterization of what they did at the Embassy as military attaches, especially the civilian? The uniform function might be more clear.

MS. PSAKI: I don't. I would send you to my friends over at the Department of Defense.

QUESTION: Sorry. Do you mind taking the question about whether – I mean, I think it's understood --

MS. PSAKI: Sure. I'm happy to.

QUESTION: -- where the shooting was, the location of where they were shot. Do you mind taking the question whether --

MS. PSAKI: Sure. I'm happy to take the question.

QUESTION: -- it's in an area that is advised not to go to?

MS. PSAKI: Absolutely.

QUESTION: Thank you.

QUESTION: One more thing on it. So the narrative here is that they were not seriously injured, correct? And it's been --

MS. PSAKI: Non-life-threatening.

QUESTION: Non-life-threatening, so --

MS. PSAKI: Unless you're a doctor.

QUESTION: So they're non-life-threatening, which we could assume they are able to talk and it's been more than 48 hours since this happened. Have – has anybody in this building gotten a story from them about whether they thought they were targeted, or this was random violence?

MS. PSAKI: I just don't have any more specifics for you. As I mentioned, this is obviously something that is being looked into, in cooperation. Embassy security personnel is cooperating with Venezuelan authorities to do that. And as we have more to say, I'm sure we'll say in response to your questions.

May 28, 2013

**Patrick Ventrell, Acting Deputy Spokesperson
Daily Press Briefing, selections on Venezuela
Washington, DC**

QUESTION: Can you just clear up what happened in Venezuela overnight with the two members of the – or two Embassy staffers? Tell us what happened.

MR. VENTRELL: Yeah. We can confirm that two members of the U.S. Embassy in Caracas were injured during an incident early this morning. Medical staff inform us that their injuries do not appear to be life threatening. Embassy security and health unit personnel are at the hospital and have been in touch with the two individuals and their families, but we have no further details to provide at this time about the incident.

QUESTION: Well --

QUESTION: It occurred at the Embassy?

QUESTION: -- can you say how they were injured?

MR. VENTRELL: I don't have any more information about the extent of their injuries, other than to say that they're – we don't believe they're life threatening at this point. This did not happen at the U.S. Embassy compound. This was offsite.

QUESTION: Yes. Can you be more explicit?

MR. VENTRELL: Again, all the details of this – we're still taking a look at it. I don't have any more information to provide to you at this time.

QUESTION: What kind of – did it happen – where did it happen?

MR. VENTRELL: Again, my understanding is that this was at some sort of social spot or somewhere outside of the Embassy grounds. But in terms of the exact location of it, I don't have any details on that.

QUESTION: A social spot? You care to be a little bit more – like a drinking establishment?

MR. VENTRELL: Again, I'm not aware if – I'm not sure if it was a restaurant or a nightclub or what the actual establishment was, but that's why we're in touch with both our personnel and --

QUESTION: Was it, in fact, a strip club --

MR. VENTRELL: I have no information --

QUESTION: -- in Caracas?

MR. VENTRELL: -- on the site, Matt, one way or another.

QUESTION: How about the rank of the staff?

MR. VENTRELL: Just that they were Embassy personnel. I don't have further details at this time.

QUESTION: Were they Foreign Service -- or are they Foreign Service officers, or are they other --

MR. VENTRELL: No, my understanding is that they are other agency personnel, not from the State Department. But if we're able to confirm later in the day more about their status, we'll do that for you.

QUESTION: But again, you said that injuries are non-life-threatening?

MR. VENTRELL: Non-life-threatening.

QUESTION: What kind of injuries? Were they stabbed, shot?

MR. VENTRELL: I mean, again, as we look at the details of the incident -- let's wait till we have more information about both the location and the exact circumstances of this incident.

QUESTION: Has anybody been arrested for their --

MR. VENTRELL: Not that I'm aware of, but in instances like this, we are in contact with local authorities, which is a standard operating procedure for us overseas. Okay?

May 23, 2013

Patrick Ventrell, Acting Deputy Spokesperson
Daily Press Briefing, selections on Venezuela
Washington, DC

QUESTION: The U.S. is following some situation going on in Venezuela where some reporters' recordings are being broadcasted related to government officials? And now it is said today there's going to be a second recording coming. Is the U.S. is following all these kind of scandal in Venezuela?

MR. VENTRELL: I mean, we do watch the situation closely in Venezuela. I don't have a particular – particular information about this recording of --

QUESTION: It's a recording they open in all the media regarding the government in Venezuela that created a scandal during the last three days.

MR. VENTRELL: We are watching the situation closely.

May 15, 2013

Patrick Ventrell, Acting Deputy Spokesperson
Daily Press Briefing, selections on Venezuela
Washington, DC

QUESTION: Let's go a minute to the Western Hemisphere, especially in South America, some countries. There are some problems of dialogue, and also some pressure to the press from the governments. I want to know if the U.S. is following some rumors about intervention in Argentina to some media that sometimes is opposite to the government, harsh comments from the Government in Venezuela, in Ecuador. How is the U.S. following all these cases?

MR. VENTRELL: We follow press freedom across the hemisphere. It's something that is part of the Inter-American Democratic Charter. It's something that we care about deeply and in terms of the balance of power between different branches and the freedom of the press. These are issues that we raise across the hemisphere consistently. I don't have a specific reaction for you country by country, but this is something we work toward broadly.

QUESTION: Related to the dialogue in Venezuela, is the U.S. interested in inviting some of the opposition in Venezuela to come here to have some conversations – talking about Capriles? Are you inviting, probably in the future, him to the United States to talk? Because there is no dialogue in Venezuela.

MR. VENTRELL: Again, I'm not aware of an opposition visit to the United States at this point, but we maintain a wide range of contacts in Venezuelan society.

May 9, 2013

Patrick Ventrell, Acting Deputy Spokesperson
Daily Press Briefing, selections on Venezuela
Washington, DC

QUESTION: Yesterday in the building, there was a Council of the Americas.

MR. VENTRELL: Yeah.

QUESTION: And the Vice President Biden and also the Under Secretary for the Western Hemisphere Roberta Jacobson talk about Venezuela and the need of dialogue.

MR. VENTRELL: Yeah, yeah.

QUESTION: I want – Maduro has been visiting some countries like Uruguay, Argentina, and also he's going to be in Brazil. I want to know if the U.S. is worried that Maduro is creating a new bloc of countries that are not interpreting – making an interpretation of this message – politically talking – that is the reason – necessity of dialogue in Venezuela.

MR. VENTRELL: I'm not sure that – again, and I refer you to the Vice President's remarks. I can't possibly improve on them; they were very good. But in terms of our relationship with the countries in the hemisphere, we pursue them with our friends and with all countries in the hemisphere, and we pursue them, and we're not concerned as people, as countries look at their various bilateral arrangements or multilateral arrangements. We engage widely and have a robust relationship with our Latin American partners.

QUESTION: Yeah, but if you see the picture of some countries that are invited to the White House, you will see, for example, that yesterday was observed that the Chilean President is invited to the White House, the Peruvian President is invited to the White House, Mr. Biden is going to Brazil and Colombia, and there are some countries there in South America that are not being visited. And the question is if you see the picture that it seems that some countries that aligned maybe in the UNASUR with the Maduro position and the U.S. is talking more with other countries. It's not – the picture looks –

MR. VENTRELL: We pursue a collaborative and cooperative and positive relationship with our partners across Latin America. And this – some of these visits and these engagements really underscore our commitment to Latin America in this Administration.

May 2, 2013

**Patrick Ventrell, Acting Deputy Spokesperson
Daily Press Briefing, selections on Venezuela
Washington, DC**

QUESTION: Well, yeah. Just briefly, I wanted to know if there's any update on the situation in terms of your dealing with the Government of Venezuela, President Maduro. We went on at length about this yesterday. I'm just wondering if there's any – if you have any changes or clarifications that you want to make to --

MR. VENTRELL: Matt, I just want to make it clear that what's really important – and this is important for the Venezuelan people – is that the 7 million people who voted for the other candidate have their issues and their concerns resolved. And so in terms of working with the Venezuelans, the Venezuelan people have to have confidence in their institutions and the results of these elections. And so that's something we've been very concerned about, and we're continuing to push for this process to go forward, but in terms of this is something that's got to be resolved through the Venezuelan institutions and it's for the Venezuelan people to decide.

QUESTION: Because shortly after you said what you said yesterday, which was in essence that you're dealing with this government as if it was the legitimately democratically elected – or this president as the legitimately democratically elected, the opposition came out and said that they're going to go ahead and continue to demand a full recount.

MR. VENTRELL: Well, and they should continue to go ahead and demand the full recount, and that's something that we've consistently said should go forward. In terms of your parsing a hypothetical to me, are you – if they were as the legitimate – I mean, my only --

QUESTION: No. It's not a hypothetical.

MR. VENTRELL: Matt --

QUESTION: No.

MR. VENTRELL: There's a hypothetical in there, but let me clarify. Let me clarify, Matt.

QUESTION: Well, I defy you to tell me what the hypothetical is in that question.

MR. VENTRELL: As if they were.

QUESTION: You're treating them as if they were. That's not a hypothetical at all.

MR. VENTRELL: The point is that --

QUESTION: You're -- the question is are -- do you accept that President Maduro is the legitimately democratically elected president of Venezuela. There's no hypothetical.

MR. VENTRELL: And our --

QUESTION: Just because the words "as if" are in there doesn't mean it's a hypothetical question.

MR. VENTRELL: Let me restate it more clearly then, Matt. The Venezuelans have to make that assessment. And there are 7 million people who voted a different way, who still have concerns, who want them resolved, and the opposition is continuing to work through that. We continue to support the need for looking at all the irregularities, for looking at a full recount. And so that's what we continue to support.

In terms of the day-to-day bilateral relationship, yes, we do continue to have our Embassy there and have quote/unquote a "bilateral relationship." But this isn't about recognition. It's the Venezuelan people who have to decide about the legitimacy of their leaders.

May 1, 2013

**Patrick Ventrell, Acting Deputy Spokesperson
Daily Press Briefing, selections on Venezuela
Washington, DC**

QUESTION: What is your reaction to the beating of the opposition legislators in the Venezuelan National Assembly after the decision of the president of the assembly to deny them the right to speak until they recognize President Maduro, and how will it affect your evaluation of whether or not to recognize Maduro's government, which has also refused a recount that you have requested?

MR. VENTRELL: Thanks for the question. Let me state clearly, violence has no place in a representative democratic system and it's particularly inappropriate within the National Assembly. We're deeply concerned by the violence that occurred, express our solidarity with those injured, and again urge all parties to refrain from acts and attitudes which contribute to physical confrontations. And as I said this just earlier this week here from this podium, but the rights of all Venezuelans, including their elected representatives, to assemble freely and speak their minds and convictions are essential components of democracy as defined and agreed to by consensus in the Western Hemisphere in the Inter-American Democratic Charter. So we've been pretty clear about this going back, and I reiterate it again today.

In terms of the vote recount issue, we've said that it's the prudent and essential approach to do a prompt, transparent recount in an inclusive manner to look at the vote count to help build confidence among the Venezuelan people. And our understanding is that some of that is still going on, but it's working its way through the Venezuelan system.

QUESTION: So are you going to delay the decision of recognizing or not the government until that is taken care of, or solved, or has --

MR. VENTRELL: Well, we don't sort of recognize governments. We have a bilateral relationship with a country and that bilateral relationship continues. But we've said that it would generate more confidence among the Venezuelan people if a full recount and an investigation of the irregularities can go about.

QUESTION: Right. But usually, the governments are recognized, and Secretary Kerry had said that they would withhold this until they know what happened with the election.

MR. VENTRELL: Well, that was in a particular moment when the opposition hadn't decided the way forward. They said that – and the government agreed – to look at a recount after the inauguration, which they are doing through their process. But the bottom line is there's not this sort of sense of legal recognition, where we say you are recognized as the sovereign leader of a country. We have a bilateral relationship with the government and that bilateral relationship continues.

QUESTION: Well, do you think that the government is legitimate and do you regard – whether the word is “recognize” or not, do you regard Maduro as the lawfully and legally elected president of the country?

MR. VENTRELL: Well, that's for the Venezuelan people to decide in terms of the legitimacy. But we continue --

QUESTION: No, it's not. It's up to the Venezuelan people to decide what you think of him?

MR. VENTRELL: Well, no. We – I'm saying --

QUESTION: No. You have your opinion, and that's what I want to know.

MR. VENTRELL: And Matt, I --

QUESTION: I don't care what you – whether – what the Venezuelan people did or did not do is immaterial to my question.

MR. VENTRELL: All right.

QUESTION: What I want to know is does the United States regard – not recognize – regard Mr. Maduro as the legally, lawfully elected, democratically elected president of Venezuela?

MR. VENTRELL: We continue to have our bilateral relationship with this government, which is led by Mr. Maduro. And so he is --

QUESTION: So there's no – you can't answer that question yes or no?

MR. VENTRELL: Well, there's no break in relationship. He's now --

QUESTION: I'm not asking if there's a break in relationship.

MR. VENTRELL: Right.

QUESTION: I'm asking if you – if the United States government considers Mr. Maduro to be the legal – the legally elected, democratically elected president of Venezuela.

MR. VENTRELL: We work with Mr. Maduro as – and his government – as the government in place running affairs in Venezuela. In terms of generating greater confidence in the vote outcome, we thought that it was good for the Venezuelan institutions and for the Venezuelan people to pursue that and to look into irregularities so that – what's really at stake here is that the Venezuelan people have faith in their institutions and in their government.

QUESTION: I understand that. But it sounds to me like the answer is yes, you do believe that Mr. Maduro was legally elected president of Venezuela because you're still working with him and his government.

MR. VENTRELL: We are still working with him and his government. It is up to the Venezuelan people to decide whether it was a legitimate election and was done so according to their standards. And that's why they're looking at it, and that's why the opposition called for a reexamination of what happened, and we want that to happen in their institutions.

QUESTION: So you still are going to wait before you confer whatever kind of recognition it is that --

MR. VENTRELL: Look, it's just – it's not for us to put --

QUESTION: I know it's not for you --

MR. VENTRELL: -- a stamp of approval one way or another on their electoral process. It is for us to work with the government that's in place on mutual interests of concern, which we need to on bilateral interests that we have in common and we need to work with.

QUESTION: But you routinely comment about the transparency or credibility of elections in countries that are not the United States.

MR. VENTRELL: And Matt, at the time, we expressed our concerns about the irregularities.

QUESTION: I understand that. But you are – at this moment, you are working with Mr. Maduro as if he was the newly elected president of Venezuela?

MR. VENTRELL: Yes.

QUESTION: All right.

April 26, 2013

Patrick Ventrell, Acting Deputy Spokesperson
Daily Press Briefing, selections on Venezuela
Washington, DC

QUESTION: U.S. citizen Timothy Hallett Tracy has been arrested. There are charges that he is a spy for the U.S., that he received funds from a NGO tied to the U.S. Government. Have you been able to – the consulate has been able to talk to him at all? And what is the latest on – from your side?

MR. VENTRELL: So we are aware of the arrest of a U.S. citizen in Caracas. We're seeking further information from the Venezuelan Government on the case, and we're seeking consular access to the detained individual. Because of privacy considerations, we're unable to comment on this specific case further at this time.

But let me just say that these type of accusations are the latest in a series of allegations made by the Venezuelan Government in recent weeks against a variety of, quote/unquote, "foreign actors" suggesting efforts to affect political developments in Venezuela. These allegations have not been substantiated. The U.S. continues to categorically reject any allegations of U.S. Government efforts to destabilize the Venezuelan Government or to harm anyone in Venezuela. So again, we're still looking for more information about this specific case, but that's the broad sweep of the pattern that we've seen.

QUESTION: But there's no link between Mr. Tracy and any U.S. Government agency?

MR. VENTRELL: Again, this is about an arrest of a private U.S. citizen.

April 24, 2013

**Patrick Ventrell, Acting Deputy Spokesperson
Daily Press Briefing, selections on Venezuela
Washington, DC**

QUESTION: President Maduro was happy with the comments from the podium yesterday about sanctions being considered and he's announced that the – that Venezuela has appointed a new charge d'affaires in Washington in hope for a better relationship with the United States. Do you have a reaction either to the appointment or to his comments that Venezuela, under his leadership, wants a better relationship with the United States?

MR. VENTRELL: Right. Well, as you know, Shaun, with all bilateral diplomatic relationships, it's important to establish effective channels of communication between governments so we can discuss matters of mutual concern. The Venezuelan decision to send Calixto Ortega as their charge d'affaires of – in charge of the Venezuelan Embassy here could be a step in that direction. He's known and is a respected participant in the Boston Group, which was a bipartisan group of legislators from Venezuela and the United States established back about a decade ago to discuss bilateral relations.

So we have had historical ties with the Venezuelan people – historical, human, and cultural ties – and we believe it is important and timely to establish a productive relationship based on mutual interests, such as counternarcotics, counterterrorism, the energy relationship, the commercial relationship. So that's really where we are in terms of our relationship with the Venezuelans.

QUESTION: Where are you in terms of your assessment of the election? There have been calls for a recount or an audit. Do those calls of the United States still stand, or are those --

MR. VENTRELL: We do continue to believe that the ongoing CNE recount and a thorough review of alleged voting irregularities will – is important and essential to ensure that the Venezuelan people feel that their democratic aspirations are being met and that they have greater confidence in the election outcome.

QUESTION: Patrick, on that, just out of ignorance more than anything, does the U.S. have a charge in Venezuela?

MR. VENTRELL: We do have a charge d'affaires.

QUESTION: He never left?

MR. VENTRELL: My understanding – I think we may have a different charge d'affaires now, but let me check on that.

QUESTION: But I mean, it's been staffed, in other words?

MR. VENTRELL: We've consistently staffed the charge d'affaires position, but I'd have to check for you on who he or she is at this moment.

April 23, 2013

**Patrick Ventrell, Acting Deputy Spokesperson
Daily Press Briefing, selections on Venezuela
Washington, DC**

QUESTION: The Foreign Minister, Minister Jaua, was threatening countermeasures if, as was asserted, the United States imposes sanctions on Venezuela. To begin with, is there any effort on the part of the United States, any proposal to impose any type of sanctions? And what's your general response to this?

MR. VENTRELL: Not that I'm aware at this time. I'm not sure exactly what he's referring to. But I'm not aware of any particular effort afoot in terms of sanctions in Venezuela at this point.

QUESTION: So there's no – that's not something that's under consideration?

MR. VENTRELL: Not that I'm aware of, no.

QUESTION: I think he was – there was a report that was quoting the Assistant Secretary for the Western Hemisphere, Roberta Jacobson, as being quoted talking about the consideration of sanctions.

MR. VENTRELL: Yeah, I think this was a specific interview she had given. But I think her position was not indicating one way or another in that interview. I'd have to go back and look at the transcript, but that's my understanding.

QUESTION: Wait, how can she not indicate one way or another whether she was considering it? Like, by nature, you are considering it if you have been talking about it.

MR. VENTRELL: Right. Let me clarify. My point is I think the Venezuelan side may have looked at that and read into we're considering something, and I'm saying that that's not something that we're currently contemplating at this moment.

QUESTION: Sanctions?

MR. VENTRELL: Sanctions.

QUESTION: As was just mentioned, the Foreign Minister suggested that Venezuela might respond to this perceived threat by stopping oil sales to the U.S. Do you have any reaction to that threat?

MR. VENTRELL: I hadn't seen that specific threat. But we have continued to have our economic and commercial relationship with Venezuela despite some of the ups and downs of the relationship over time. And that's one area that we said we're looking to improve potentially with the Venezuelan Government going forward.

April 16, 2013

**Patrick Ventrell, Acting Deputy Spokesperson
Daily Press Briefing, selections on Venezuela
Washington, DC**

QUESTION: So what do you make of the fact that they went ahead and certified the result without a full recount or a full audit? What do you make of the violence that has ensued?

MR. VENTRELL: So, Matt, as we noted yesterday, given the very close results, opposition candidate Henrique Capriles and a member of the electoral council, the CNE, as the – it's referred to, called for a 100 percent audit, a recount of the results. Ruling party candidate Maduro also endorsed this idea. And we said yesterday, a full recount would be important, prudent, and necessary in ensuring that an evenly divided Venezuelan electorate is confident that the election meets their democratic aspirations. The OAS and the EU have expressed similar views. And there are also outstanding allegations of voting irregularities raised by the opposition.

So the CNE's decision to declare Mr. Maduro the victor before completing a full recount is difficult to understand, and they did not explain their haste in taking this decision.

QUESTION: Sorry. You're still sticking with this line that Maduro called for a whole – a full recount?

MR. VENTRELL: My understanding is he did endorse that idea at one point yesterday. Now, where he eventually ended up throughout the day – but there was a moment where he endorsed the idea of a recount and said there was nothing to hide. So those were his words.

QUESTION: Okay. So what's your next step, or is there one?

MR. VENTRELL: We'll be absolutely in consultation with the OAS, the EU, regional partners, and we continue to believe that resolving the voting irregularities and the calls for a recount would do much to ensure that the Venezuelan people feel included in the process and that their democratic aspirations are being met. So --

QUESTION: So you still think that they should recount the votes?

MR. VENTRELL: I mean, that's been our position. That hasn't happened.

QUESTION: No, no, even – no, after the vote has been certified, after the election's been certified, you still think that there should be a recount?

MR. VENTRELL: Well, under the Venezuelan constitution, it's ultimately up to the CNE to certify the election results, which they've done.

QUESTION: Well, I understand that, but what's the U.S. position? Is the U.S. position that there still should be a recount?

MR. VENTRELL: Well, our position is that --

QUESTION: Or the Venezuelan people have confidence --

MR. VENTRELL: Our position is that -- let me finish, Matt -- our position is that resolving these irregularities would have engendered more confidence in the Venezuelan people in the quality of this vote. And so that is the concern we've expressed. But in terms of where we go forward, I just don't have anything more for you today.

QUESTION: Well, okay. So are you prepared to congratulate Mr. Maduro on his victory?

MR. VENTRELL: We're not there.

QUESTION: Why? The vote has been certified. He has been elected. So either you say, "Okay, and we'll work with you," or, "try to work with you," or you say, "We don't think that you're the real winner," or, "We think that there is no winner because the vote hasn't been certified," so -- I mean, are you prepared to work with President Maduro, President-Elect Maduro?

MR. VENTRELL: Well, we said we're prepared to work with whichever government comes out of this electoral process. Having said that, given what happened yesterday, we're consulting with key partners, the OAS, the EU, other regional neighbors as we examine this. We have -- the scenario is you have a deeply divided country, roughly evenly divided, and so we thought it was important to resolve some of these concerns, and that's why we're going to consult with some of our partners and concerned parties.

QUESTION: Well, do you -- so do you or do you not recognize the result, the certified result, as being reflective of the wishes of the Venezuelan people?

MR. VENTRELL: We're not making a judgment one way or another. This is a Venezuelan process under the Venezuelan constitution. The CNE does have this responsibility, but again, we've had our concerns, and many others, including the OAS and the EU, have had their concerns, too.

QUESTION: All right. Well, Colombia, Mexico, Brazil have all kind of -- have all accepted the Maduro -- Maduro's victory. These would seem to be -- at least Mexico and Colombia and to a certain extent Brazil -- would seem to be some of your top friends in this region. I just am not sure why -- when you reserve judgment, what are you reserving it for, because the vote's already been certified?

MR. VENTRELL: Look, we're just not there yet, Matt. Obviously, we have nearly half the country that had a different view. And so we'll continue to consult, but we're not there yet.

QUESTION: Do you have anything on – do you have anything to say about the violence that apparently – I think that several people were killed.

MR. VENTRELL: Yeah. Let me be very clear on this. Violence has no place in a democratic electoral process, so we join in others in calling on all Venezuelans to refrain from violence at this time.

QUESTION: What about protests? There is a call for --

MR. VENTRELL: People, as we say in all countries, should be allowed to peacefully protest and make their views and their voices heard, but there's no place for violence.

QUESTION: And what – following all these questions of Matt, yesterday the Foreign Minister of Venezuela Jaua rejected the OAS position. He also rejected Spain's position. He said that Spain should care about their unemployment and not about what happened in Venezuela. These kind of comments that he's saying, I want to know – tomorrow there is a special session of the OAS – if the U.S. is going to present the case tomorrow in the permanent council tomorrow.

MR. VENTRELL: I don't have anything to preview about our activities at the OAS. As I said, we continue to consult, but I don't have anything to preview in terms of tomorrow's session one way or another.

QUESTION: But you are aware that there is high division in the OAS where Venezuela – it seems not to care about the OAS position, because they didn't care about what Insulza said proposing – following the Inter-American Charter, right, to recount the votes and have the democracy of Venezuela in high standard?

MR. VENTRELL: One of our concerns – and this is broadly shared and this is, I think, why the OAS Secretary General made the statement that he did is – we didn't have the kind of independent and respected international monitors that are common in so many other countries throughout the hemisphere. So that's part of the concern that we've expressed, and the OAS was clear too.

QUESTION: If the U.S. has to evaluate the democracy of Venezuela from 0 to 10, where do you put it in this moment?

MR. VENTRELL: We don't give grades from this podium, but thanks for the try.

April 15, 2013

Patrick Ventrell, Acting Deputy Spokesperson
Daily Press Briefing, selections on Venezuela
Washington, DC

QUESTION: What do you have to say about Mr. Maduro's election?

MR. VENTRELL: Thanks for the question, Matt. So first of all, we congratulate the Venezuelan people for their broad participation in this electoral process. Given the extraordinary tightness of the result – around 1 percent of the votes cast separate the candidates – the opposition candidate, Henrique Capriles, and one member of the electoral council have called for a 100 percent audit or recount of the results. Governing party candidate Nicolas Maduro also welcomed the full recount. This appears an important, prudent, and necessary step to ensure that all Venezuelans have confidence in these results.

We note that the opposition has called for an investigation into allegations of irregularities. The results reveal the Venezuelan electorate that is roughly evenly divided. In order to meet all Venezuelans' democratic expectations, it makes sense that such a recount should be completed before any additional steps, including official certification of the results, occurs. So that's our position on --

QUESTION: Do you have any concerns about the way the election unfolded?

MR. VENTRELL: Well, again, this recount process is ongoing, so I don't it would be --

QUESTION: No, no, no, no. I mean, are you having concerns about alleged irregularities or fraud or anything like that?

MR. VENTRELL: While this recount process is going on, Matt, I don't have anything for you one way or the other. I will say that while our Embassy is very active in Caracas in terms of outreach to the Venezuela people, the Venezuelan authorities do not allow for the full type of observation that some other countries do. So I'm not sure we would have a characterization one way or another.

I will say that it appears that we had somewhere around 14 million voters, nearly 80 percent of the population. So really the context is you have very high voter turnout, you have broad participation, and so we do congratulate the Venezuelan people for their broad participation. But in terms of making any judgments about how the vote happened, we'll of course be in consultation with our regional partners and other interested parties, but I don't think we're going to characterize it one way or another.

QUESTION: Well, so – do you have any reason to believe that the votes that were cast, that it was a credible exercise?

MR. VENTRELL: Well, again, the recount process is going on, so let's let that process continue.

QUESTION: Well, that's – we're not talking about the recount. We're talking about the actual initial vote.

MR. VENTRELL: Yeah.

QUESTION: Do you have any reason to believe that there were – that it was problematic? You regularly comment on other elections about – even when they do go to a recount. I mean, do you think that the recount is important simply because the vote is so close, or do you think that there might have been some funny business going on and that that's why the vote is so close?

MR. VENTRELL: Well, again, I noted that the opposition has called for an investigation of allegations and irregularities.

QUESTION: Yes, and --

MR. VENTRELL: And so we encourage that investigation to happen. And Matt, we also very much note the broad participation.

QUESTION: But you don't necessarily believe yourself that there were irregularities.

MR. VENTRELL: Again, let's let the recount go forward. We're not going to be making judgments one way or the other.

QUESTION: Can I just --

MR. VENTRELL: Shaun, go ahead, welcome back to the State Department. We haven't seen you in a while.

QUESTION: Yes. Just to follow-up on that, would the United States not accept the election results if there's not a recount?

MR. VENTRELL: Again, you're – that's a bit of a hypothetical. I mean, it looks like Mr. Maduro himself has said that he's welcomed a full a recount. So let's let the process play out a little bit here.

QUESTION: And just a follow-up: Has the United States been in contact with either party, with Mr. Maduro or Mr. Capriles, in the past --

MR. VENTRELL: I'm not sure if our Embassy has been in direct contact with either the parties here in this election. I mean, obviously throughout – broadly speaking our Embassy has wide outreach to Venezuelan society, but I'm not sure about particular communication with the parties. This is working its way through the Venezuelan process.

QUESTION: Are you concerned about --

MR. VENTRELL: Go ahead, Elise.

QUESTION: -- there's a bit of a tense situation in the streets. There have been military tanks in the streets. And are you wonder -- are you concerned that if the election does not go the way of Maduro that the Chavistas may make trouble?

MR. VENTRELL: Again, this is sort of putting the cart ahead of the horse. We want the recount process to go ahead, and we're not going to make judgments one way or the other.

QUESTION: Well, it's a very tense situation on the streets is my point.

MR. VENTRELL: We obviously call for calm and urge calm and restraint. But right now where we are is it's working its way through the Venezuelan recount system and appropriate channels. So that's what we encourage.

Let's go to EFE in the back. Go ahead, Lucia.

QUESTION: Yes. Actually -- thank you -- actually the electoral national council has not said that there will be a recount. It's something that the opposition has asked for and Maduro has said that he's for an audit, which is a regular process that they do over there. But the electoral national council has not said anything on that, and actually they said today that they will announce Maduro as an official winner. So are you worried about that?

MR. VENTRELL: Again, it's our opinion that it makes sense that a recount should be completed before any additional steps, including official certification of the results, occur. So that's what we're urging at this time.

QUESTION: So would it be worrying if they announce Maduro as a winner without a recount?

MR. VENTRELL: I mean, I think I've stated as clear as I can that any -- the recount should be completed before any additional steps are taken. That's the U.S. position.

QUESTION: Well, does that mean that the legitimacy -- in your eyes, the legitimacy of the election will be compromised if the council goes ahead and certifies the vote before a recount?

MR. VENTRELL: Well, they haven't yet, so we're not there yet.

QUESTION: Well, yeah, but Patrick, this is one of those hypothetical questions that you're inconsistently choosing not to answer.

MR. VENTRELL: All right.

QUESTION: You wouldn't -- so it would be fine with you if they go ahead and do the recount -- don't do the recount before certifying. Is that what you're saying?

MR. VENTRELL: We're not going to be getting into hypotheticals. I mean, your hypothetical had like a triple negative in there. I'm not even sure I followed it. But the bottom line is --

QUESTION: Oh, okay. So if North Korea tests a nuclear device, there won't be any response from the U.S? That's a hypothetical.

MR. VENTRELL: Thanks for --

QUESTION: So why can you not answer? There's certainly -- you must have an opinion one way or the other. If you say that you think that it makes sense and there should be a recount before the vote is certified, surely you can say something about if there isn't a recount and the vote is certified.

MR. VENTRELL: I mean, we want --

QUESTION: Would that --

MR. VENTRELL: Matt --

QUESTION: -- be problematic for the United States?

MR. VENTRELL: Let me be very clear. We want the recount to happen.

QUESTION: Yes.

MR. VENTRELL: If it doesn't, then we'll address it at that time. We're not there yet. We're very clear that we want the recount to happen.

Go ahead.

QUESTION: Does Venezuela's comparative lack of oversight of their elections -- you said the -- your Embassy is involved, but they don't have this oversight. Does that give you any concern about the recount going forward?

MR. VENTRELL: Throughout the region, throughout the hemisphere, the inclusion of domestic and experienced international election observers like the OAS, the EU, and others, do help affirm a free and fair election process. We've wanted free and fair elections in Venezuela, but right now we're calling for a recount. We think that's what needs to happen.

QUESTION: If I could just check on something that you said --

MR. VENTRELL: Said.

QUESTION: -- if I may.

MR. VENTRELL: We're outside of your normal area of the world of interest, but I'm happy to take your question.

QUESTION: That's okay. I'm a man of the world, let's put it this way.

MR. VENTRELL: Okay.

QUESTION: Yeah. You said that you want the recount before the certification. Is there, like, a precedent where the recount happens before certification or after certification?

MR. VENTRELL: Historically speaking in Venezuela, or --

QUESTION: The way I understand it is that if you have certification, then it's a done deal, right?

MR. VENTRELL: Again, I'm not familiar in the Venezuelan case exactly what the local electoral authorities' processes are. But before they certify, we have the opposition candidate and we have the governing party candidate who are less than 1 percent apart, and they're both agreeing that they're willing to have an audit of the vote. So we'd like that to go forward.

QUESTION: Hi. How are you? I'm sorry I am late, and I know that you already talked about Venezuela, but I would like to know if -- probably the OAS already spoke about the recount of votes in Venezuela. I was wondering if the U.S. is going to take a more strong position in that regard.

MR. VENTRELL: Well, I think we took a very strong position, which I already said here. I have not seen the OAS statement since I came down here. It must have been very recently. Maybe you were just receiving it as news moments ago.

QUESTION: But General Secretary Insulza, he said he's for a vote recount, so I wonder because the U.S. is also member of the OAS, so it's going to support this position, it is trying to get some support from other countries like showing more support for the democracy?

MR. VENTRELL: Again, I stated our position already. I haven't seen the OAS comments, one way or another.

QUESTION: But this could change the position of the U.S. or in that regard?

MR. VENTRELL: Well, we're certainly consulting with the OAS, with regional partners, with countries in the hemisphere about the situation, absolutely.

March 18, 2013

Victoria Nulan, Spokesperson

Daily Press Briefing, selections on Venezuela

Washington, DC

QUESTION: The Maduro government has made claims that the U.S. is plotting to assassinate the opposition leader Capriles in order to blame it on the Maduro government. Your reaction to that? And secondly, has there been a request, as President Maduro said, for the U.S. to investigate this? And third, has there been any contact between State and former ambassadors Otto Reich and Roger Noriega in terms of working with the opposition?

MS. NULAND: Let me say it here extremely clearly, looking right at you: The United States categorically rejects allegations of any U.S. government involvement in any plots to destabilize the Venezuelan government or to harm anyone in Venezuela. With regard to our former ambassadors, they have spoken for themselves quite clearly.

QUESTION: Toria, just briefly – pardon me – the Maduro government has not made any requests, right, to investigate this one?

MS. NULAND: To my knowledge, there haven't been any requests that are viable in the – within the context of what I said earlier.