Daily Press Briefing: Discussion on Afghanistan

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August 12, 2014

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

QUESTION: The two presidential candidates in Afghanistan today announced the formation of a joint commission for the unity government. Do you have anything on that?

MS. HARF: Was that today?

QUESTION: Yes.

MS. HARF: I'm not sure that was today.

QUESTION: It was announced – setting up the commission, along with the members, were announced today.

MS. HARF: Okay. Well, I will check on that. I hadn't seen that. I know that progress has continued with the elections audit. The Secretary was obviously there recently, and we felt they made progress, that both candidates had agreed to work towards a goal of completing the audit and inaugurating a new president by the end of August. We are moving forward with the ballots being counted, so I can check on that specifically. But we are encouraging the process to keep moving, and the two candidates to keep working together on this.

QUESTION: And does --

QUESTION: What's the impact on getting a BSA signed, because of the delays in counting the vote, auditing the vote?

MS. HARF: Well, they've both said they'll sign it shortly after – if either – who's inaugurated, so I think we're expecting it will be signed as soon as we have a new president.

QUESTION: Has this made it clearer in any way for the U.S. Government to organize the drawdown of combat forces and to stand up whatever the residual force would be, as well as additional Foreign Service USAID personnel?

MS. HARF: Well, I don't have any updates from when the President made the announcement in May about what our post-2014 presence would look like. I don't have any new updates on planning, either for the Defense Department or for us. I know we're looking right now at that, and I can check and see if there's anything new.

QUESTION: Because it would seem that, especially in light of the agreement which the Secretary helped broker, that it would be giving your people more certainty now about who's going to be assigned, who's going to be there for how long --

MS. HARF: Well --

QUESTION: -- what kinds of missions might need to be worked on.

MS. HARF: Both of these candidates have said for many months that they would sign the BSA, so that's not new. I think that's a separate question, quite frankly, and the staffing's a separate question from the fact that we believe the political process needs to move forward and there's an audit in place now, and it's moving forward. So they're not exactly related, but I can see if our folks have more.

QUESTION: But there wouldn't be any sort of legal prohibition on planning to do X unless you had an agreement signed and --

MS. HARF: Well, obviously, we have to have a BSA signed to do certain things, but both of these candidates have said they will. I'm not a lawyer, but, obviously, planning continues.

QUESTION: I have one more on Pakistan. Do you have anything on the Azadi March? Is it being planned by main opposition party, PTI, on August 14th?

MS. HARF: I don't. Let me check with our folks.

QUESTION: Are you concerned that this is going to have any kind --

MS. HARF: I don't have anything on it. Let me check.

QUESTION: Okay.

MS. HARF: Yes.

August 8, 2014

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

MS. HARF: Hello. Welcome to a rare Friday press briefing during August at the State Department. I have three items at the top, and then we will open it up for your questions.

Just a travel update first. Secretary Kerry held meetings in Kabul today with both Afghan presidential candidates Abdullah Abdullah and Ashraf Ghani. I'm sure you've seen his press avail. After their meetings, both candidates signed a joint declaration outlining the path forward, reaffirming their commitment to the July 12th political framework agreement and agreeing on a path forward for finalizing the elections audit process, including a timeline for conclusion of the election's audit and inauguration of a new president. We commend the candidates for continuing to work together in the spirit of collegiality and statesmanship to maintain national unity during this historic transition process.

August 7, 2014

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

MS. HARF: First, a trip update: As announced earlier, Secretary Kerry is currently in Kabul, Afghanistan to meet with Afghan leaders, including presidential candidates Dr. Abdullah Abdullah and Dr. Ashraf Ghani and President Hamid Karzai as well, in addition to the head of the UN mission there. Secretary Kerry's meetings will focus on the current elections process following up on a trip he had there fairly recently, including encouraging both candidates to help accelerate the audit process that they are both participating in to make progress on the details of the political framework that they agreed to, as I mentioned, during his last visit there. The Secretary will urge both candidates to continue working together to ensure national unity and continued progress in Afghanistan.

August 5, 2014

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

QUESTION: Violence still continues in Afghanistan, and what is the future of Afghanistan after these 30 years of war and civil wars and all those --

QUESTION: And make it short. (Laughter.)

MS. PSAKI: I was going to say, that's an extensive question. I think, obviously, Goyal, our focus now is on working with our – the candidates and the election commissions to see if we can come to a conclusion on this process, the election audit that's ongoing. That's where our focus remains. We remain committed to the Afghan people and to their prosperity in the future.

Let's do --

QUESTION: Wait, wait. Do you have anything to add to what the Pentagon said about this incident today in which the --

MS. PSAKI: I do not have anything to add from here. I saw a little bit of John Kirby's briefing. I think he gave as extensive a comment as we can give at this point.

QUESTION: Do you know if there were any non-military Americans around? No one from the Embassy who was involved or nearby?

MS. PSAKI: Not that I'm aware of, Matt. Obviously, we're still gathering information, but if more becomes available we can put something out to all of you as well.

QUESTION: Last one for me. The Associated Press has this report that the U.S. Government database of known or suspected terrorists has doubled in size in recent years. And I was wondering, is that due to the superior United States IT complex, or is it because you see terrorism growing?

MS. PSAKI: That's a good question, Lucas. I haven't taken a close look at that. I can – we can connect you with our experts in our CT Bureau and get you a more extensive answer.

QUESTION: Thank you.

August 4, 2014

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

QUESTION: Almost 15 years ago, people of Afghanistan were very thankful to the U.S. for getting freedom from the Taliban and al-Qaida. Again today they are asking the international community or the U.S.'s support or UN help to have a relief because they are still in the limbo – I mean, as far as this presidential election and all those things, and al-Qaida is still coming back and all that. So what is the future they are asking now?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I would – I'm not sure what I can speak to what they're asking as much as where things stand now. The Secretary has been very engaged in this, as you know. He recently visited Afghanistan. We have senior officials who've been consistently on the ground. After a break for the Eid holiday, the election audit has resumed, and notably, both candidates are participating and sent candidate agents to observe the process. The IEC, along with the UN, has continued to improve the audit process so it will move forward more quickly and efficiently. We remain confident that the two candidates and their supporters will be able to work together effectively in the government of national unity. I think, of course, the people of Afghanistan want to see the conclusion of this process so that they can move forward. And the United States will, of course, continue to be an important – play an important supporting role of the Afghan – for the Afghan people.

QUESTION: Thank you.

July 31, 2014

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

MS. HARF: On Afghanistan, as Secretary Kerry said in his op-ed yesterday, "The time for politics is over. The time for cooperation is at hand." With cooperation among the campaigns, the international community and Afghan authorities, this process can be concluded in a way that reflects the wishes and aspirations of the Afghan people.

Therefore, we welcome today's announcement by the Afghan Independent Election Commission, or the IEC, that the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, or UNAMA, that the IEC has adopted the recount and invalidation criteria proposed by the United Nations and based on Afghan law and international best practices. The audit is an immense undertaking requiring hard work and commitment from many people involved. With the adoption of the invalidation criteria and the other efforts the IEC is making to improve the audit process, the audit must now move forward more quickly and efficiently. Now we urge both candidates to instruct their teams to participate fully and constructively in the audit when it resumes on August 2nd.

…

QUESTION: -- Madam, I'm just going back to your statement, what you said about UN audits and all those things and – because people in Afghanistan are still confused. They have no president or they have no government and – functioning. What my question is, that – one, what role the U.S. is playing as far as these audits are concerned? And two, if these two candidates now are ready to form the government or if they have accepted the audit?

MS. HARF: Well, they do still have a government in place. Let's be clear. President Karzai is still president of Afghanistan. We have urged the candidates to continue to demonstrate leadership, to try to get here to a legitimate outcome of this election. We want them to instruct their teams to participate fully in the audit when it resumes on August 2nd.

Just some statistics here: All ballot boxes from 24 of the 34 provinces have been transported to the IEC. More than 17,000 ballot boxes are at the IEC. This is 75 percent of the total. Fifty-five USAID implementing partner observers are in country, expected to reach 73, I think, by today. They took a pause for the Eid holiday to allow staff to celebrate with their families. They'll be doing training on July 31st and August 1st and the audit will resume on August 2nd.

We do hope that the audit will be completed by the end of August. We know that the candidates would like the process to be completed, and a president inaugurated in time for the NATO summit that will be taking place in Wales. But the summit's not a deadline; we just know that the parties would like it to be resolved by then, and both candidates, as we have said, have

consistently indicated they will sign the bilateral security agreement soon as a priority after their inauguration.

QUESTION: Thank you.

July 30, 2014

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

MS. HARF: A second op-ed I would draw your attention to – and I have helpfully tweeted links to both of these if people want to go check that out – was from Secretary Kerry published in the Afghan press today online on TOLOnews. It's been online in English, Dari, and Pashto, which is, I think, important for the Secretary to speak directly to the people of Afghanistan in their language. And the Secretary highlights that Afghans want and deserve a future full of promise, really highlighting how important this democratic moment is for both of the candidates here to come together and to forge a path forward here so they can count votes and hopefully get a new government in place as soon as all those votes are indeed counted.

…

QUESTION: Close to a hundred militants from across Afghanistan border – they attacked a military check-post today in Pakistan's tribal areas on the border. Pakistan was able to repel that attack and also lodged a protest. What are you doing to assist Afghanistan from misuse of its soil by anti-Pakistan militants who have fled from Pakistan and have taken refuge in Afghanistan now and are carrying out attacks against Pakistan?

MS. HARF: Well, I hadn't seen those reports from today. But clearly, we've worked over many years with the Afghan Government on the threat inside their country that it poses not just to other countries in the region, but to the United States troops that remain there, so – and to the Afghan Government and people, most importantly. So we've worked with them very closely, and we'll continue to.

QUESTION: Just to follow up on this same, India, you said that one of the points was a civilian nuclear deal. Who is the expert in the Secretary's team who has gone along to sort out this? Because there is --

MS. HARF: Work on – who works on energy issues?

QUESTION: Yes, please.

MS. HARF: Let me check. I don't have the full delegation list in front of me. I can check for you.

July 23, 2014

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

QUESTION: Madam, if I may go back to Afghanistan and Pakistan, please. Afghanistan. If these two candidates doesn't come to an agreement, let's say, from UN and international community pressure, why don't – let them – let the both candidate run the country? First time in the history two presidents, country – a country have two --

MS. HARF: You're proposing a new government structure for Afghanistan. Well, that's an interesting idea. We have in place a process to audit all of the votes that both candidates have agreed to, as you know, when Secretary Kerry was there. That process is moving forward and we look forward to the conclusion of that process and having a new president of Afghanistan at some point.

July 18, 2014

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

MS. PSAKI: So a quick morning update. There were 30 teams of auditors this morning; 102 boxes were reviewed. There are – let's see. Sorry, I just want to make sure I have the accurate numbers right in front of me. There were 156 accredited auditors in Kabul; 160 will be coming; 60 will be USAID implementers. ISAF has also begun moving the boxes from other parts of Afghanistan, but go ahead.

QUESTION: So are you satisfied with the progress being made on auditing of ballots?

MS. PSAKI: Certainly, and as I mentioned yesterday, we anticipate that will be ramped up, and we're anticipating a pace of about 1,000 boxes a day as it ramps up.

QUESTION: So you expect the results would be accepted by the two candidates?

MS. PSAKI: They have stated that, certainly, and obviously we're in the early stages of the review. It's ramping up quickly, though.

QUESTION: So how many – if you've done 102 boxes, that's out of a total. Do you know the total of boxes to be reviewed?

MS. PSAKI: That was just as of this morning, and I believe as of yesterday, there were just over 30. But again, because observers are – the number of observers are increasing rapidly, we're expecting to get to a pace of about a thousand boxes a day, so we're --

QUESTION: But how many total?

QUESTION: Thirty thousand; she just answered that.

QUESTION: Oh, okay. Sorry. Okay, 30,000 boxes.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: All right. Thank you.

July 17, 2014

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

MS. PSAKI: In our effort to provide you updates on what's happening in Afghanistan, today the Afghan IEC began auditing ballots from the Afghan presidential runoff. The audit is being conducted in Kabul by the IEC under close supervision of the United Nations in accordance with international best practices, utilizing an IEC checklist supplemented by UN best practice recommendation. At today's kickoff, 33 boxes were audited, each in the presence of international and domestic observers. UN personnel, IEC and Electoral Complaints Commission representatives and candidate agents all were there. Live television covered the process, so it's also publicly available to all of you. And the first day of audits proceeded professionally, setting a good tone for the process.

These are the first 33 boxes of approximately 23,000 that will be audited in the next few weeks. There is a planned ramp-up, of course, of the auditing process. This is just the first day. Once it's up to scale, the audit will involve a hundred teams operating simultaneously. The process is set to ramp up tomorrow, and there are over a hundred accredited international observers already in Kabul. We note that the EU also plans to bring in an additional 100 professional observers from Europe next week to continue to support and ramp up this process. And --

QUESTION: Wait, how many did you say were done today?

MS. PSAKI: Thirty-three.

QUESTION: Thirty-three. So when you say ramp up, you would expect them to do more than 33 in a day?

MS. PSAKI: Significantly more. This was just the first day. It was a kickoff. Obviously, there were a great deal of media present. So it will significantly pick up in the coming days. The purpose of the audit is to finalize, of course, the election, honor the millions of Afghans who participated. Clearly, there's still work to be done. We're working closely with both candidates, with Afghan officials, and with the UN Mission in Afghanistan to ensure the agreement is translated into action.

…

MS. PSAKI: QUESTION: In view of the two series of big terrorist attacks inside Afghanistan this week, including on the Kabul airport, what is the assessment of the security situation in Afghanistan?

MS. PSAKI: Well, we condemn in the strongest terms the Taliban attack on facilities at Kabul International Airport early this morning. We note the Afghan national police led a successful

operation to secure the airport. I would certainly direct you to them for additional information, but security officials in Kabul are currently surveying the area and assessing the situation, so they would have more information.

As I noted at the top, the process of moving forward on the audit has started today. That's proceeding. That will increase – or ramp up, I should say, in the coming days, and there hasn't been an impact that I'm aware of of these incidents on that.

QUESTION: The ministry Afghan – Minister of Interior today said that those was – the terrorists who were in the Kabul airport attack were Urdu-speaking people from Pakistan. Do you have any information on that?

MS. PSAKI: I don't have any information on the individuals or beyond what I just stated, and I'd certainly point you to Afghan authorities on that.

QUESTION: Are these attacks anyhow linked to the Pakistani actions in north Waziristan?

MS. PSAKI: I don't have any other information. Again, the Afghans have the lead on any process of surveying and assessing the situation.

QUESTION: On the agreement that the two presidential candidates reached on the auditing of ballots, what is the expectations once the results are declared? Do you expect a nation government to be formed, or --

MS. PSAKI: What do we expect the outcome to be?

QUESTION: Outcome would depend on the counting of ballots. But once the results are declared, do you expect a national government to be formed in Kabul or --

MS. PSAKI: Well, as you know – and we will leave it to the candidates to speak to their agreements – obviously, the Secretary was there just this past weekend facilitating that. The purpose of the audit is to finalize the election, and of course, honor the millions of Afghans who participated. And both candidates have agreed to abide by the results of the audit, and the winner of the election will certainly serve as president and will immediately form a government of national unity.

In terms of additional specifics, I – we are going to leave it to them to spell out anything in addition.

QUESTION: National unity means members from the opposition camp too?

MS. PSAKI: Well, again, that's typically what the word means, but we'll let the candidates there describe it in more detail.

QUESTION: So you do expect Abdullah Abdullah to become the prime minister in any new government?

MS. PSAKI: We're not prejudging the outcome. That's the purpose of the audit, as to make sure that both candidates – that there's a restored legitimacy to the process and to Afghan democracy.

QUESTION: But you don't have any timeline to this auditing of ballots?

MS. PSAKI: To the process of counting? Well, we have – let me – I have a quick update on this. We do anticipate that the process will take a number of weeks. The UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan has requested that President Karzai – as well as the candidates have, and they did this this past weekend – postpone the inauguration date to accommodate the requests. As you know, President Karzai has agreed to do that, and the timeline, of course, will be determined by when this is concluded. And we still believe there's time to sign the BSA.

QUESTION: But this will also push back – or push the signing of BSA with U.S, the new president will sign.

MS. PSAKI: Well, it would push the inauguration back, but both candidates have said they would sign it, and we still feel comfortable with the timeline to sign the BSA.

QUESTION: Are you surprised that President Karzai would agree to stay on a little longer as president, delay the inauguration? (Laughter.)

MS. PSAKI: Well, Matt, I think everybody wants to see legitimacy restored to democracy in Afghanistan.

QUESTION: My question –

MS. PSAKI: Go ahead.

QUESTION: My real question on this is: Are you not concerned at all that this might drag on past the NATO summit, at which – I mean, I presume you would like to see this to be done and have the BSA signed before the summit, so that NATO members could make decisions on how they're going to proceed. Is that not correct?

MS. PSAKI: Well, it's ramping up significantly over the coming days. We think it will take a number of weeks. Obviously --

QUESTION: You got six.

MS. PSAKI: -- we have I think six or seven weeks. But certainly we want to see – we've long wanted to see the BSA signed as quickly as possible, but we still feel comfortable with the timeline with that in mind.

QUESTION: Okay. But does that mean comfortable like you think it can be done before the summit, or comfortable in that if it's not done by the summit it – that's not a hard and fast deadline?

MS. PSAKI: I just don't have anything more on the timeline at this point in time.

QUESTION: On the same subject.

MS. PSAKI: Let's just do – go ahead.

QUESTION: A Pakistani news channel journalist who had gone to Afghanistan on assignment to cover events – he has been jailed by Afghan authorities. Pakistan has called for his release and said that he was a journalist working on an assignment. What is your reaction?

MS. PSAKI: I hadn't seen those reports, so why don't we talk to our team, and we'll get you a comment on it.

QUESTION: Okay. You'll take the question?

MS. PSAKI: Okay. Sure.

July 16, 2014

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

MS. PSAKI: I just have a couple of items at the top. We welcome today's announcement by the IEC that auditing of ballot boxes will begin in Kabul tomorrow, July 17th. As the Secretary announced while in Kabul last weekend, the audit process began immediately following his visit and has been ongoing since July 13th, with preparatory meetings, trainings, and working on the logistics of moving 8 million ballots in a difficult environment.

The purpose of the audit is to finalize the election and to honor the millions of Afghans who participated. The audit will be conducted by the IEC under close supervision of the United Nation in accordance with best – with international best practices, utilizing an IEC checklist supplemented by UN best practices recommendations. International and Afghan observers, along with representatives of the campaigns, will provide oversight and transparency. International observers have been trained and will be ready when the audit starts.

As Secretary Kerry promised this weekend, the United States is working very hard, hand in hand with both candidates and with Afghan officials to ensure that the July 12th agreement is translated into the actions that the people of Afghanistan expect, and ensuring the full legitimacy and credibility of this audit process.

So just to give you a few numbers: Already thousands of boxes are in Kabul ready to be counted. ISAF forces are guarding these boxes, and there are about a hundred international observers who have been trained, including 10 USAID contractors. So just a brief update on that.

July 10, 2014

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

QUESTION: So James Dobbins said yesterday that a winner-take-all system in Afghanistan is not workable, and he called for a government of national unity that includes all elements. Is that the view of the U.S. State Department?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I think there's no question that the United States Government wants to see a unified Afghanistan and wants to bring unity to the people of Afghanistan. It's for the next president of Afghanistan to determine the composition of the government, which will need to be broad-based and inclusive to lead to a unified Afghanistan. Obviously, we're encouraging a range of steps in the process so we can get closer to that conclusion.

QUESTION: So is it – so he was calling for something specific, a government of national unity. So is this – is it the State Department's view that it's something more general than that?

MS. PSAKI: Well, national unity, I would say, means unified – leading a united Afghanistan. Right now, what we're – what we don't want to see is a divided Afghanistan. We don't want to see any candidate or entity in Afghanistan continue down any path that would lead to a divided Afghanistan. So I think it's – he was making the point about the contrast to that.

QUESTION: But should it be a coalition government or is it up to the president?

MS. PSAKI: It's up to the president to determine the composition of his government. But certainly – I know there's a lot of use of "unified," "unity," and what that all means, but I think what we're focused on as the United States Government is continuing to encourage all candidates and entities in Afghanistan to work towards bringing unity to the country and to the Afghan people.

…

QUESTION: -- I wanted to ask – VICE News recently put out three different investigations that were looking into interpreters being denied visas into the United States. Is the State Department working on that? And what kind of steps are they taking in order to help these people that helped the U.S. who are now being potentially attacked by the Taliban get out of a hostile situation?

MS. PSAKI: Well, SIVs and our effort to address that and to improve and increase the review of that has been a priority of the Secretary's. Deputy Secretary Heather Higginbottom has been running point on this issue, and there have been significant increases and improvements over the last several months, and I'm sure we can get that directly to you and anyone else who is interested in that.

Obviously, each of these cases is considered on a case by case basis. We don't speak to that as a matter of policy, but we can get you some more information and statistics on that if that's helpful.

…

QUESTION: Several times this week you've spoken of the need for Afghan candidates to refrain from counter-production – counterproductive efforts in declaring victory.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: Is it your assessment that Afghan politicians are following that advice?

MS. PSAKI: Well, we've expressed concern a couple of days ago about some of the comments that we had seen happen on the ground, including rumors of calls for parallel governments and declaration of victory. You can tell me or you all can tell me if there have been new calls for that, but obviously we're continuing to communicate our concerns about any candidate or party going down that path. And to be very crystal clear about it – and we've talked this a little bit in here – but any extra constitutional actions which would impact the unity of Afghanistan would result in the immediate end of U.S. assistance to Afghanistan. That's not our preference. That's not what we want to do, but that has certainly been communicated to the candidates.

July 9, 2014

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

QUESTION: Has Secretary made additional phone calls to the Afghan leaders?

MS. PSAKI: I don't – there have not been new, additional calls today, no.

QUESTION: So what is the assessment of the situation in Afghanistan right now? Do you believe that the two candidates are heading towards any kind of reconciliation?

MS. PSAKI: Well, in all of the discussions, whether it's the Secretary or Ambassador Cunningham or Ambassador Dobbins, in all of the conversations we're continuing to urge both candidates and their campaigns to refrain from statements and actions that could jeopardize the electoral process. As we've said, we expect allegations of fraud to be reported and investigated by the relevant commissions. And so we continue to talk to the parties involved and deliver our message that both sides need to remain engaged with the electoral institutions to avoid violence or threats of violence, and to avoid any move towards or call for extra-constitutional measures, and also to engage with each other. So these are messages that we're consistently sending through our senior leadership on the ground, and I expect that will continue in the coming days.

QUESTION: So what kind of action do you plan to take if they go ahead with the extra-constitutional measures which they have announced --

MS. PSAKI: Well, I don't --

QUESTION: -- like announcing a cabinet or --

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm. I don't want to speculate on that, other than to say it certainly is not our preference. Our preference is to continue providing the type of support and assistance that we have been to Afghanistan. Our preference is to continue to move forward, and we fully expect we can with the planned presence that the President announced just a few weeks ago.

I stated this yesterday, but we have – we remain confident – and I spoke with our team this morning about this – that the audit process can be completed in time to allow the inauguration of the next president. And in the meantime, the fact is that there have been reports – really, not new this morning but over the last couple of days – of plans to declare victory or create a parallel government. And those are steps that we don't think would be productive or beneficial to the Afghan people or the future of Afghanistan. And we won't be able to provide the type of support that we would like to if things continue down that path. But that's certainly not our preference.

QUESTION: And finally, given the current situation right now that Afghanistan is in, is the Administration considering it to review the policies that it has in Afghanistan regarding post-2014 presence, number of troops that you're planning to draw?

MS. PSAKI: As I noted, we have every confidence that an audit process can be concluded in plenty of time for the presidential inauguration that's scheduled for August 2nd. And as you know, both candidates have committed to signing the BSA, so we'll look forward to hopefully moving this process forward.

QUESTION: And one more. If the U.S. is in talks with the regional countries like India, Pakistan, possibly Iran, too, on bringing the situation under control in Afghanistan.

MS. PSAKI: I don't have any contacts along those lines to read out for you. I'm happy to check and see if I think – if we're in – if we've been in touch on the ground with India and Pakistan about these issues. Not that I'm aware of at this point in time.

QUESTION: Thank you.

QUESTION: (Inaudible) aid message? At first blush, it looks like a threat: If you don't do this the right way, the U.S. is not going to provide aid. But I'm wondering whether there are – what the legal restrictions are on providing foreign aid when there is a disputed election and there are questions about what is the legitimate government in country X.

MS. PSAKI: It's not a threat. I wasn't trying to make a legal point. I think the fact is that if they're not abiding by their constitution, it makes it difficult for us to continue to provide the kind of support that we have been and we would like to. But that certainly is not our preference and not what our focus is on at this point in time.

QUESTION: How does it make – what is it that makes it difficult? Is it U.S. law that a government has to be properly constituted in order for the U.S. to provide foreign aid?

MS. PSAKI: It's our policy, Roz. But if there's a legal component, I'm happy to check on that as well for all of you.

QUESTION: Okay.

QUESTION: So this is not a threat. This is soft warning kind of thing?

MS. PSAKI: It's neither. It's a statement of fact.

QUESTION: All right. (Inaudible.)

…

QUESTION: Madam, just quickly. Just – is Secretary planning to visit the region, including Afghanistan, any time soon?

MS. PSAKI: I don’t have any travel to outline for or announce for all of you today.

QUESTION: Thank you, ma’am.

MS. PSAKI: Go ahead.

QUESTION: Ambassador Dobbins is still doing his special envoy message or is --

MS. PSAKI: He is. We expect he’ll be here until about the end of the month, and Dan Feldman will be transitioning in over the course of that time.

July 8, 2014

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

QUESTION: With other statements that came out yesterday, beyond expressing "gravest concern," which I think was the phrase in the statement last evening, can you tell us what the U.S. is doing to try to resolve the standoff on the ground?

MS. PSAKI: Well, first – and I know you've seen some of these readouts, but President Obama, Secretary Kerry, as well as S-Rep Dobbins, Ambassador Cunningham have been speaking with the candidates, the electoral bodies and Afghanistan's political leadership over the past couple of days to try to come to a resolution. And Secretary Kerry has been in touch with both candidates, President Karzai over the course of the weekend, and I expect that will continue. And we've been – and as was noted in our statement last night or some we've issued over the last couple of days, we're calling on both campaigns and their supporters to work towards a resolution which will produce a president who can bring Afghanistan together and govern effectively and avoid steps that undermine Afghan national unity. And clearly our engagement shows our level of commitment to not just the future of Afghanistan, but to a resolution to this issue.

QUESTION: In the – one of the statements yesterday there was also the – I mean, threat is what it appeared to be, but the mention that at risk here is a tremendous amount of aid and potential other forms of U.S. support. What exactly was that referencing?

MS. PSAKI: Well, it's not our preference. It's not the preference of the United States; it's certainly not the preference of the Afghan people. That statement was in response to the fact that there have been reports on the ground of plans to declare victory, to create a parallel government. Both of those steps would be illegal, and it's not a threat, it's a fact that certainly we wouldn't be able to provide the kind of support that is our preference to provide if those type of steps were taken. So it was conveying that.

QUESTION: Because it would be a coup, essentially?

MS. PSAKI: Well, those are illegal steps, and obviously we're talking about a broad range of assistance that we provide.

QUESTION: Senator --

QUESTION: So if there were illegal steps taken to form a new government in Afghanistan, they would lose aid, but not in Egypt, huh?

MS. PSAKI: Matt, every circumstance is different --

QUESTION: Right.

MS. PSAKI: -- and you know where we stand on that particular issue.

QUESTION: Do you know – do you regard – does the Administration regard the steps that candidate Abdullah has taken already just by declaring himself the winner of the election, even though he didn't name a – hasn't tried to form a government – are those – isn't that a step that undermines the – what you called the – what you called Afghan national unity and what one might say – one might ask if Afghan national unity actually exists, given the situation – but is that the kind of step that you think is bad? Just the (inaudible).

MS. PSAKI: Well, certainly – I want to say acting on that step, yes. And one of the reasons the Secretary has been in close touch and we issued the statement last night is to convey that that is not acceptable.

QUESTION: That what – sorry --

QUESTION: Sure.

QUESTION: -- which is unacceptable? The proclaiming oneself the winner --

MS. PSAKI: Correct. There are proper entities and bodies in Afghanistan who will --

QUESTION: Okay.

MS. PSAKI: -- who can determine that. And this also – the rumors or reports that there were plans to create a --

QUESTION: Right.

MS. PSAKI: -- parallel government.

QUESTION: But what is – is that – that is a strike against Abdullah Abdullah in your – now, I'm not saying that there are three strikes; I'm not saying anything like that. But that is a checkmark on him; he's done something that you think crosses the line?

MS. PSAKI: No, I wouldn't say it that way at all, Matt. Obviously, we're concerned about having – about the fact that Afghanistan has made tremendous progress. We want to preserve that. Any of these steps, the implementation of them would not be good for the future of Afghanistan, the future of the Afghan people. We're not doing a day-by-day grading system here, but certainly we don't think that would be a productive step moving forward.

QUESTION: Is the – Ghani agreeing to the audit of, I think, it was 3 million votes or something. Is that something that's a step in the right direction?

MS. PSAKI: Well, we think there are two things that need to happen here that need to – that the candidate – that needs to happen on the ground, I should say, moving forward. The electoral

commission and the complaints commission need to examine all of the allegations of fraud. There are serious allegations. They need to be looked into. There needs to be a review of all the ballots that may or may not be legitimate. There are – were the proposal of the couple of options, Margaret, that you reference, but there are also some UN proposals that we think the electoral bodies should be working with them on. And at the same time, the candidates and their supporters need to be in conversations with each other about the formation of a government of national unity and a government that includes all of the relevant parties and important groups, and we feel both of those steps are important moving forward.

QUESTION: Has anyone been in touch with Ashraf Ghani?

QUESTION: Senator Inhofe said --

QUESTION: I'm sorry.

QUESTION: Sorry. Has anyone been in touch with --

MS. PSAKI: Ladies first, Said.

QUESTION: Yes.

MS. PSAKI: You're normally so polite. Go ahead, Roz.

QUESTION: Jen just said that he had called him.

QUESTION: He called – okay. Sorry.

MS. PSAKI: Go ahead.

QUESTION: Senator Inhofe told reporters a short time ago that he's very concerned about these allegations of fraud and he started reading off some numbers about vote disparities between the first round and the second round – 10 times, 12 times the gap in the first election to the second election.

He's also very concerned that efforts to hew to the July 22nd final declaration may be stacking the victory in Ghani's favor, and he wants to see more time so that these allegations of fraud can be fully explored. Otherwise, Inhofe is arguing, whoever becomes the new president won't be considered credible. Does this building – does this Administration – share his concern about a rush to declaring someone the president?

MS. PSAKI: Well, we, one, feel there are serious allegations that – of fraud that need to be looked into, and we were disappointed. And I know that Matt asked this question yesterday, that the IEC went ahead with yesterday's announcement – serious – because these serious allegations were not sufficiently investigated and we would have preferred that the announcement be postponed until there was agreement on further audit measures that need to be taken to address the substantial allegations.

All of that being said, there are proposals on the table that would help to address that. Our view remains that the audit process can be completed in time to allow the inauguration of the next president to proceed as scheduled on August 2nd.

QUESTION: Is there concern – and maybe this came up yesterday – is there concern that a resolution on the BSA could be in jeopardy because of this dispute over who was the actual victor?

MS. PSAKI: Well, again, we view – we feel that an audit can be completed by – an audit process can be completed in time to allow the inauguration of the next president. As you know, both candidates have made clear that they would sign the BSA. We are proceeding with our planning accordingly.

QUESTION: Is it – you say that you were disappointed that the IEC went ahead with this and that you would have preferred that they had waited.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: Was that conveyed to the IEC itself?

MS. PSAKI: I believe not through the Secretary, but I believe on the ground in some capacity, yes.

QUESTION: Okay. So in fact you – the U.S. has been involved in this process.

MS. PSAKI: Well, not exactly. I mean, I think obviously there's – we're not involved in the process of considering allegations or considering – or counting ballots. That's what I'm referring to. But certainly, when there's a partial result announced, which we've expressed a concern about --

QUESTION: Right.

MS. PSAKI: -- because it doesn't represent or doesn't necessarily represent the outcome, that can cause confusion. And that was one of our concerns.

QUESTION: Right. Okay. But I'm just trying to get it – so if you expressed your concern about that to the IEC, they clearly didn't listen to you. They clearly didn't buy – it's a bit like calling for restraint from people who never show restraint. So I'm just wondering: Are you – when you say that you're disappointed, are you – you're disappointed that they didn't heed your advice? You're disappointed that – disappointed at what?

MS. PSAKI: That they went forward with yesterday's announcement when there was serious allegations of fraud that remained on the table that hadn't been properly investigated.

QUESTION: Okay. But you still think, as you said before – I just want to make sure – that there is time enough to resolve all the fraud complaints, inaugurate a new president, get the BSA signed by the time you all and NATO have to figure out what you're going to do.

MS. PSAKI: Yes.

…

QUESTION: I mean, I'm trying to understand who is – both sides are ready to make this count or recount process? Because one of them is declaring that he's the victor, and the other one is saying that I'm going to make a parallel government. Who in those two sides or other sides is ready to continue the process until they come to the 2nd of August?

MS. PSAKI: Well, we'll let them speak for themselves.

QUESTION: Okay.

MS. PSAKI: But obviously, the – not the candidates, but the election commission and the complaints commission are the ones who would look in – the complaints commission specifically is the entity that would look into the allegations of fraud and examine those allegations.

QUESTION: So you believe – as United States believe that they want – you want them to recount the process, right? Recount the votes.

MS. PSAKI: Well, there are serious allegations, and we think that more can be done to examine the allegations.

QUESTION: Keeping in line with this country's own special experience with the 2000 election, what would be an acceptable audit – and I'm using your word – for reviewing these allegations?

MS. PSAKI: Well, there have been a number of proposals put out there. There have been some that the complaints commission and the electoral commission have referenced; Margaret referenced those a little bit earlier. But there are also some proposals put forward by the UN. We think they should all talk about the best way to move the process forward.

QUESTION: So just to be clarified: So U.S. and UN and others believe that this process has to be done, right? Is – am I correct or wrong?

MS. PSAKI: We think there are serious allegations of fraud. They need to review all of the ballots that may or may not be legitimate.

QUESTION: So --

QUESTION: Is two weeks really enough time? Two weeks from today?

MS. PSAKI: I would stand by what I just said. We feel there is enough time to conclude an audit process by that time.

July 7, 2014

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

QUESTION: Okay. Thank you. Following up your statement you issued on Afghanistan elections, have you been in touch with the two presidential candidates officially, both Dr. Abdullah Abdullah and Ashraf Ghani?

MS. PSAKI: We have been in touch with both candidates, but I don't have more details I'm going to share beyond that.

QUESTION: But do you worry that the way there have been resistance to the Independent Election Commission by these two candidates is leading to some kind of political strike inside the country – strong differences, ethnic conflicts inside the country?

MS. PSAKI: Well, as I noted in my statement, but just in case other people haven't seen that, we want to – I want to reiterate that today's announcement is of preliminary results. These results are not final or authoritative and may not predict the final outcome. There are serious allegations of fraud, which I think you referenced there and they've been raised, and in our view, they haven't been sufficiently investigated. So right now, our focus is on encouraging a full and thorough review of all reasonable allegations of irregularities. We think that's essential to ensuring that the Afghan people have confidence in the integrity of the electoral process.

There have – also noted in the statement were four additional measures that have been accepted by both camps, and we certainly encourage movement forward on those. But there have also been a range of steps proposed by the UN. The UN has proposed a series of additional audits of suspected – suspect ballots, and it's essential that the IEC and the ICC and the UN – work with the UN to execute these additional audits.

QUESTION: There were some reports earlier today that the ambassador, the U.S. Ambassador, had gone to the Electoral Commission. Those were refuted by the Embassy. I'm wondering if there was – did the U.S. have a position on whether the head of the commission should come out and announce these results given the fact that they are so preliminary, they're subject to change, and don't really settle anything?

MS. PSAKI: I don't have anything more to outline for you, Matt. I would obviously stand by the refuting by the Embassy of where their ambassador – where our ambassador was at the time.

QUESTION: But you don't know if the U.S. took a position on whether they should go ahead and make the announcement of these?

MS. PSAKI: I just don't have any more details to share.

QUESTION: So right now, Ghani is leading by a million vote, so it looks like he will be the next president. Are you willing to work with him, he's a good --

MS. PSAKI: Well, let me reiterate what I just said. These are preliminary results. These results are not final or authoritative. We don't support any individual candidate, as you know, because we state it frequently. But we have long stated our support for a credible, transparent, and thorough process, and obviously, there are additional steps that need to be taken in that regard.

QUESTION: Thank you.

QUESTION: Just to follow quickly, Madam, U.S. had played a great role as far as the democracy and previous elections are concerned also. Isn't this also a threat to the foreigners living there and working under constructions and plus also to the future of the Afghanistan democracy if these things doesn't get resolved because of international relations and so forth? But finally, what role you think UN can play that U.S. cannot play?

MS. PSAKI: Well, the UN has proposed a series of additional audits of suspect ballots, and we encourage the IEC and the ICC to move forward and working closely with them. And in terms of the long-term impact, we believe that the audit process can be completed in time to allow the inauguration of the next president to proceed as scheduled, which is on August 2nd.

And certainly, both candidates have made clear that they would sign the BSA. Obviously, there are a range of steps we would take or we're planning on taking, and beyond that we're going to let this process play itself through.

July 1, 2014

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

QUESTION: Today they delayed the release of the election results because of the allegations primarily by Abdullah Abdullah about fraud.

MS. HARF: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: Is this of concern to you, that we're seeing these results being delayed? And how seriously does the United States take his allegations of fraud?

MS. HARF: Well look, we know there's a process here, and we have urged both sides to remain engaged with the electoral institutions who can ensure that all allegations of fraud are – brought to them are given careful and impartial review and adjudication. There are legal mechanisms for going through, receiving, investigating, and adjudicating these complaints, and we think that's an important process, even if it takes some time. So what we've said is throughout this process, we want both sides to remain engaged with it, to be talking to the electoral institutions to help work this out. We know it may take some time, though.

QUESTION: Do you have any evidence yourself to back the allegations of fraud?

MS. HARF: I don't want to make a judgment one way or the other. It's really up to their electoral institutions to go through all of that.

QUESTION: And how does this tarnish the hopes that you had for a very – a relatively smooth handover and the installation of a president pretty quickly in the country?

MS. HARF: Well, as I said, democracy is complicated and at times messy. But it's important, and I think we are still – what we're focused on is the electoral institutions doing their jobs, looking at fraud allegation, having both sides remain engaged in the process, and eventually getting to an outcome here.

As I would remind people, both candidates have committed – said they would sign the BSA, which we think is a good thing. And so we'll just keep working with them and hope the process can continue moving forward.

June 25, 2014

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

QUESTION: Okay. It's on the report that the State Department had given out upgrading or whatever – changing the status of LET.

MS. HARF: There's no change in the status, but yeah.

QUESTION: The change of status means you have got all these new names, Jama'at --

MS. HARF: We've added some aliases.

QUESTION: Yeah.

MS. HARF: Yeah.

QUESTION: And so – and you have given a list of attacks which are – you're saying that Mumbai attack, this, and then the recent attack in Afghanistan --

MS. HARF: In Herat?

QUESTION: Yeah.

MS. HARF: Yeah.

QUESTION: So how are – is the U.S. going to deal with it now?

MS. HARF: Well, just to give everyone else the background, what we did today was add – designate a number of aliases for LET under the Foreign – FTO designation, and also amend the EO to add some to that as well. We also did the mandatory every-five-year review process and re – continued to have them designated as well. So those two things happened today.

And we did, as you note, list a number of attacks that they were responsible for. In terms of the Herat attack, we have said this now: Based on credible information – can't get into more specifics about what that means – the U.S. Government has assessed that LET was responsible for the attack in Herat on May 23rd, 2014. This is the attack on the Indian consulate.

QUESTION: Now the question, right, is that in – with respect to the Benghazi, the repeated thing that is coming out, that if somebody harms an American citizen we don't leave them scot – go scot-free.

MS. HARF: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: So if you remember, in the Mumbai 2008 attacks there was a number of U.S. citizens who were killed.

MS. HARF: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: So – and we have identified LET. So how are we going to get these people --

MS. HARF: Well --

QUESTION: -- and bring them to book?

MS. HARF: Yeah, a couple points. First, the designations help us cut off support and funding to LET so they can't undertake future attacks. Also, cooperation between the United States and India has already led to several Mumbai terrorists – including David Headley, if folks remember him – being brought to justice. So to date, the Department of Justice and FBI have provided extensive assistance to the Government of India in their investigations into the Mumbai attacks, including access to interview David Headley and substantial additional evidentiary evidence as well. The President and everyone have been very clear that we will continue working to bring other perpetrators of this attack to justice.

QUESTION: On that same thing?

MS. HARF: Yeah.

QUESTION: The credible thing that was said, is it based on your own assessment of the (inaudible) information, or based on information received from (inaudible) that you gained after the attack (inaudible) and LET (inaudible)?

MS. HARF: Well, we make our assessments based on a wide range of all-source information. In this case we believe, based on this information, it's credible. We look at number of different sources that we gather on our own. We have assessed that LET did perpetrate this attack.

QUESTION: And have you shared that information with India?

MS. HARF: We share information with them all the time. I'm not sure about this specifically, but I'm happy to check.

QUESTION: Just to --

QUESTION: On the Mumbai terrorist attack, India has sought for the second time access to David Headley and Tahawwur Hussain Rana. Is U.S. considering giving them another round of access to --

MS. HARF: I don't have – DOJ would probably be better able to speak to that, and the FBI. But I know we have given them access in the past.

QUESTION: One quick one on that.

MS. HARF: Yeah.

QUESTION: Do you have anything – any update on what you are going to do with (inaudible) --

MS. HARF: I don't have any update on that.

QUESTION: -- who is going around --

MS. HARF: No, I know we've – you asked about it before and we've talked about it a little bit, but no update on that.

QUESTION: Thank you.

June 16, 2014

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

QUESTION: I don't know if you saw this morning that the frontrunner presidential candidate Abdullah Abdullah has suggested there could be some serious fraud and is calling for the sacking of the head of the independent election commission. Do you have a reaction to this? Do you believe that he's correct? Was there serious fraud in the second round of this runoff?

MS. PSAKI: Well, it is far too early, in our view, to make pronouncements regarding this election. We continue to feel that it's important to give the Afghan electoral bodies the time they need to do their work in processing the outcome of these elections. As you know, there are a couple of different entities that are responsible for doing that. Afghan and Afghan institutions must ensure the quality of the elections and the acceptability of its outcomes and adjudicate the complaints that emerge before, during, and after election days. Candidates have avenues of pursuing allegation of fraud through the IEC and the ECC, and we encourage them to work through those bodies to address their concerns.

June 13, 2014

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

QUESTION: Marie, can I just ask, just passing forward a bit, what lessons from what's happening in Iraq today should the United States and Afghanistan be drawing? We've got a second round of presidential elections this weekend in Afghanistan.

MS. HARF: Mm-hmm. Tomorrow, yeah.

QUESTION: That's right. The President has said that American troops will be withdrawn at the end of 2016. So from 2017, the Afghan army is on its own.

MS. HARF: Well, not on its own. The President – look, they're very different situations. I think the biggest difference – well, there are a number of differences. But the biggest difference is in 2011, the Iraqi Government made clear they did not want U.S. troops to stay, very clear. And we were not going to leave our men and women in uniform there without the legal protections that we believe are necessary. In contrast, the two candidates running for president of Afghanistan have both committed to signing the BSA and have talked about a longer-term presence there. Obviously, we've talked a little bit what that will look like after the President's decision recently.

So those, I think, are – that's for starting from just very, very different positions.

QUESTION: So – but at the same time, there will be a drawdown of American interests in Afghanistan. I mean, there'll be a physical, military drawdown --

MS. HARF: Well, it'll look different, right. It'll look different.

QUESTION: So what are you going to do? What can the – I'm sorry. I'm veering a little bit off Iraq now --

MS. HARF: No, it's okay.

QUESTION: -- but what can the – or what should the Administration and the administration that comes next do in order to fill that vacuum that's going to be left to a certain extent?

MS. HARF: Right. And I think – I'm going to put it into a little bit of a broader context. But when it comes to Afghanistan, obviously we believe there needs to be a political reconciliation effort between the Afghans. But what we've said is we're going to keep building their capacity, and that as the threat – and actually, I think what's happening in Syria and Iraq is the perfect example for why we need to focus – to take some resources we had had in Afghanistan and focus on the counterterrorism threat around the world. When you heard the President talk at West Point about the Counterterrorism Partnership Fund, about fighting the threat where it exists, not just

where we've had troops in our longest war – obviously, we'll still focus on Afghanistan, but I think, if anything, this just underscores the fact that much of the locus right now for the terrorist threat isn't in Afghanistan. We'll stay focused there, we'll keep building their capacity, but we need to have resources elsewhere, and I think that's what you'll see going forward.

June 10, 2014

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

QUESTION: Going back to Secretary Kerry's interview with Elise here from CNN --

MS. PSAKI: Yes.

QUESTION: -- over the weekend, Secretary Kerry – great interview. Secretary Kerry declared that our combat role in Afghanistan is over. And I was wondering: In light of the friendly fire incident – five U.S. service members were killed – if that wasn't combat, what was it?

MS. PSAKI: Well, Lucas, I think I would refer you to the statements that the Department of Defense as well as ISAF put out as it related to this. Investigators are looking into the likelihood that friendly fire was the cause, as you know, and DOD has put out in their statements, so I'd refer you to them for more details.

QUESTION: But weren't – those soldiers were engaged in combat, were they not?

MS. PSAKI: Again, Lucas, I would point you to them for any other details. And I think it's important to note here contextually, even broadly speaking, that what the Secretary was referring to was the planned wind-down that the President outlined last week. And you're familiar with where we stand with our presence in Iraq – I mean in Afghanistan.

June 9, 2014

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

QUESTION: Over the weekend, Secretary Kerry said, quote, "Our combat role in Afghanistan is over."

MS. HARF: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: If that's the case, how can you reconcile that there's 32,000 combat forces there today, 24 soldiers – American soldiers being killed in 2014, including two this month? Is Secretary Kerry getting ahead of himself?

MS. HARF: Not at all. I think the President was very clear when he came into office that we were going to put – we were going to lay down timetables for how we were going to end the war in Afghanistan. First step, as he did: undertake a review. Send more troops there. Surge troops there to try to do some of the things we should have been doing, quite frankly, when we were bogged down in Iraq. Then, after that, he laid down a plan for how we're going to bring those troops home. And there are certain milestones on that. When our official combat role ends, when we transferred security to the Afghan – the lead for security to Afghan forces. And now we have in place a plan to bring home troops over a staggered timeframe. And I think what drove the President's decision to choose this number over this timeframe was so we could keep troops there to train the Afghan security forces, to continue counterterrorism operations, to give them more time to step up and lead, as we saw them do on the election. And we will continue standing by them as we do.

But it's important to remember that as we draw down our forces, it will increasingly force the Afghan forces to step up. And that's part of what drives much of our decision making as well.

QUESTION: If we're still taking casualties in Afghanistan because of direct action, not by accident --

MS. HARF: Doesn't mean it's not dangerous. Doesn't mean it's not incredibly dangerous.

QUESTION: But then our combat role in Afghanistan is not over.

MS. HARF: It's a different role, right? Our role has evolved throughout the decade-plus we've been there, and right now we're very much focused on training and counterterrorism. It doesn't mean that people won't – there won't be casualties, unfortunately. But I think the fact that there are still casualties underscores why it's imperative to do our job, finish what we need to do there, and then bring our kids home.

QUESTION: A few years ago, when we were engaged in combat in Afghanistan and the Taliban and other insurgent groups were attacking our soldiers, shooting our soldiers, and they were shooting back, and that's clearly the case today. How has that changed? How is combat over?

MS. HARF: It's a little different, Lucas. As we've always said, our role there is going to evolve. What we call it, what point in the operations we are, doesn't, quite frankly, matter as much as the fact that we know that our men and women in uniform are still in harm's way. We know they're still in incredible danger. But we have set in place a timetable for winding down our role in this war because we believe that's the best way to get the Afghans to stand up, to take even more control of their security – that's why we're training them; that's what we're training them to do – and that we will, at some point eventually, end the longest war in American history. This is up to the Afghans to pick their future.

QUESTION: What's the U.S.'s plans for monitoring the runoff on Saturday?

MS. HARF: In terms of whether we'll have monitors?

QUESTION: Right.

MS. HARF: Let me check. I'm not sure. It's a good question, though.

June 6, 2014

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

QUESTION: I wondered if you have any reaction to the news today that the presidential candidate, Abdullah Abdullah, escaped an assassination attempt --

MS. HARF: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: -- which killed at least six people ahead of next week's second round runoff.

MS. HARF: The 14th --

QUESTION: Yeah, the 14th.

MS. HARF: -- for the second round. Of course we condemn today's attack against Abdullah Abdullah's campaign event he – where he was also located. As we've made very clear, the Afghan people deserve democracy, which they'll be exercising next week, not violence. And we've also said that's why we'll continue with our presence there at a level we feel appropriate to help the Afghans increase their capacity themselves to fight this threat.

QUESTION: Do you believe that the security atmosphere is such that the elections can actually be held safely, the runoff can be held safely?

MS. HARF: Yes, we do. Look, we know Afghanistan is still a dangerous place. We've been clear about that. But we saw in the first round and certainly expect in the second round the Afghan security forces step up and provide security for their own elections. We think that's important. We're hopeful that the second round will be transparent, inclusive, and credible – obviously, that's been important throughout – all along – and believe that the security forces can work again with the electoral bodies, which they work with very closely to provide security, as they carry out this second round, and I think have probably learned a few lessons about security from the first round and can apply them to this one.

QUESTION: Is there any involvement by the U.S. or ISAF forces in providing security for the elections?

MS. HARF: It's my understanding the Afghans have responsibility for the security for their elections. Yes.

QUESTION: (Inaudible.)

QUESTION: Quick follow-up on the assassination attempt?

MS. HARF: Uh-huh.

QUESTION: Do you think this assassination attempt against Abdullah Abdullah, who's a fierce anti-Taliban critic – the timing is coincidental with the release of the Guantanamo five?

MS. HARF: I think the timing has nothing at all to do with what's happened in the last week. I think we've seen assassination attempts against officials like Dr. Abdullah Abdullah for many, many months, and I don't think it has anything to do with it.

QUESTION: But Abdullah Abdullah was a colleague, a friend, a right-hand man of Ahmad Shah Massoud, who was himself assassinated two days before 9/11 by al-Qaida, knowing that after the 9/11 strikes, the United States would come in and be allies with the Northern Alliance and the Tajiks. You think this is just a coincidence?

MS. HARF: I don't think it has anything to do with another. We've seen the senior officials in Afghanistan since the beginning of the war, quite frankly, be targeted for assassination. I think it has absolutely nothing to do with what happened over the past few days.

…

QUESTION: I was wondering, Marie, if you've seen the real-time details of Sergeant Bergdahl's status during captivity as compiled by my colleague James Rosen's reporting, in which – who have said to have been afforded the top intelligence commander at – excuse me, the top intelligence officer at CENTCOM. Were those ever available to the Secretary of State or other top officials in this building?

MS. HARF: Well, I've seen Mr. Rosen's story. I haven't seen the actual documents, which I think were put together by a private security company outside of the government led by Dewey Clarridge. Hold on. And we've seen – this included such accusations as – that he did to – things that he had declared and things that he had done in captivity, and I've seen those evidence to support the notions that are outlined in those private company's reports. Obviously, we believe that trying Sergeant Bergdahl in the court of public opinion before he's even had a chance to tell his side of the story is not what we should be doing right now for a soldier that was in captivity for five years. As we've said for a long time, if there was misconduct, it will be dealt with. But we're not going to get the facts here by trying him on cable TV – no offense, Lucas --

QUESTION: None taken.

MS. HARF: -- on any cable TV station, or in the press in any way. That's not how we treat people that volunteer to serve their country.

QUESTION: Had the State Department heard of reports of Sergeant Bergdahl's alleged conversion to Islam?

MS. HARF: I'm happy to check and see if those reports were – if that private company's reports were ever sent here. I'm not sure if they were. But again, I've seen no evidence to back up the assertions in that report.

QUESTION: And how about – last question on this subject – his attempts to escape and his alleged escape, and then put in an animal cage?

MS. HARF: Again, right now part of what we're doing is trying to establish the facts of what happened both with how he got into the Taliban's captivity and also what happened while he was there. We're trying to ascertain all those facts right now.

QUESTION: And going to the release of the Taliban five, The Washington Post is reporting that when the senior Taliban leaders were released at Qatar, Qatar had promised the United States they would be subject to strict bans on militant incitement or fundraising. Can the State Department confirm?

MS. HARF: I'm not going to go any further in terms of the specific assurances we were given other than I have said over the past few days here about the Government of Qatar. What they have assured us is that there will be severe restrictions that have sufficiently – or substantially – mitigated the threat that they will pose a threat to the United States, which is the standard for when we transfer Guantanamo detainees.

QUESTION: So could the Taliban leaders, could they host Iftar dinners or go to Hajj or anything like that?

MS. HARF: They have a travel ban, as we've said. So obviously, they can't leave the country and Hajj, I think, occurs in a different country. But the standard here – every – all of the assurances we needed and we demanded and we got before we transferred them to Qatar, all led to the notion that they could not threaten the United States. That's the standard, that we have substantially mitigated that threat. Can it ever be zero? No, of course not.

I would also make – and I meant to make this point yesterday – for the very small number of detainees who've been transferred that have re-engaged in the fight, many of them have either been recaptured or taken off the battlefield after they re-engaged. So I would remind people that we keep a very close eye on these guys once they leave Guantanamo.

QUESTION: But Marie, if there's even a chance they can go back to the battlefield, why take that chance?

MS. HARF: Well, there's always a chance, Lucas. You can never 100 percent mitigate risk. But what's important here --

QUESTION: If you don't let them out you mitigate the risk 100 percent.

MS. HARF: Okay. So we've made clear all of the reasons for our national security that we need to close Guantanamo, and part of that is determining who can be transferred while substantially

mitigating the risk. And I think if you have the Secretary of Defense and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs and the head of the DNI and the head of DOJ and the head of – the Secretary of – the State Department – excuse me – all certifying that we have substantially mitigated the threat to U.S. national security, I think they look very closely. They take that responsibility very seriously, and they would never make that assessment if they did not believe it to be true.

QUESTION: And last question**:** You said that there was no precedent in releasing captured combatants from Afghanistan and returning them to a terrorist organization. Is that true?

MS. HARF: I don't think I said that.

QUESTION: Well, you said that during World War II --

MS. HARF: Sorry, I'm not sure what you're referring to.

QUESTION: No problem.

MS. HARF: Uh-huh.

QUESTION: You said during World War II we had released – exchanged in prisoner swaps --

MS. HARF: Prisoners. And certainly, I think, Vietnam, Korea – there's a long historical precedent for prisoner swaps during time of war that goes back, quite frankly, to the Revolution.

QUESTION: But those were prisoner swaps between countries.

MS. HARF: Mm-hmm. Well, in this case, we're fighting a non-state actor. And the bottom line is it was a non-state actor that was holding Sergeant Bergdahl. That doesn't make it any less imperative that we get him home, and it doesn't change the notion that he was a prisoner during a time of war and that there is a long history for the principle of prisoner swaps in time of war.

QUESTION: But we are setting – the United States is setting the precedent, though, that you are releasing a fighter back to a terrorist group, not a known nation.

MS. HARF: Again, you're using some words here that we wouldn't use. Obviously, the Taliban is who we are fighting in a time of war. So there is a long history for that kind of prisoner swap throughout United States history, and we feel like that principle is sufficiently historically – with a great amount of historical precedent. So in fact, we're not changing the precedent; it's something we've done throughout our time here.

QUESTION: So you do not think you are legitimizing the Taliban by giving these fighters back to people who want to one day take over Afghanistan again?

MS. HARF: I don't – I'm not sure exactly how you're using the word "legitimize." We've said the Taliban has a role to play in how we end the violence in Afghanistan, that obviously, what

we would like to see is Afghans talking to Afghans, Afghan-led reconciliation about how the war eventually ends there. That's how you end wars.

That doesn't mean we think anything the Taliban has done is in any way not horrific, and that they were not – for these men particularly; these five, who again, were picked up pretty early on in the war, were really senior folks and mid-level folks in the regime – that they didn't do horrific things. Of course they did.

QUESTION: Is there any chance that these five that were just released from Guantanamo Bay helped plan the assassination attempt against Abdullah Abdullah in Afghanistan?

MS. HARF: No.

QUESTION: They had 5, 10, 12 years to plan it.

MS. HARF: The one that just happened?

QUESTION: Right.

MS. HARF: I think there're pretty strict restrictions on what Guantanamo detainees can or can't do when they're --

QUESTION: But they are allowed to communicate in Qatar, correct?

MS. HARF: I'm not going to get into the specifics of the restrictions we have in place.

QUESTION: Do you find appalling this hate frenzy that is being directed against his family --

MS. HARF: Absolutely. I find it --

QUESTION: -- his town by certain media outlets? And how are you responding to that?

MS. HARF: Well, I don't want to single anyone out, Said. I find in general the level of vitriol that has been directed at Sergeant Bergdahl and his family – his parents, who had a son in Taliban captivity for five years – I find it repugnant. I find it appalling. It's not okay. We don't judge people in the court of public opinion, certainly not people that signed up to wear the uniform of the United States and certainly not parents who waited for five years for their son to come home. That's not what we do.

QUESTION: Do you find it morally repugnant that certain media outlets are trying to profit out of this situation?

MS. HARF: I'm not going to single out anyone, Said. Anyone. I'm not.

QUESTION: But does signing up – does enlisting in the military – does that mean he can never be charged with dishonor or --

MS. HARF: No, and as we've – what it means – enlisting and volunteering to fight for your country – what it means is if you go missing, we will bring you home. That's the pledge we take when people sign up to serve their country. It does not mean, as the Army has said, that if there was – and General Dempsey has said that if there was misconduct, it won't be punished. We've been very clear. The two just aren't related. We bring our folks home and then we determine the facts. And if there was misconduct, it will be dealt with.

…

QUESTION: Just a couple of practical things maybe. I saw a report yesterday that Sergeant Bergdahl still hadn't spoken with his parents. Is that correct, or --

MS. HARF: Hadn't spoken with?

QUESTION: Yeah, not spoken with his parents.

MS. HARF: I don't believe that – let me double-check on that. The Department of Defense would know the most up to date. Obviously, he hasn't been reunited with them.

QUESTION: No.

MS. HARF: But let me check on that.

QUESTION: So a follow-up on that: Is there any date for him to come back yet?

MS. HARF: DOD would know better. I haven't seen one.

QUESTION: And I just – I wondered if I could go back to a question I asked at the beginning of the week, which was about the propaganda value of the Taliban video Tuesday when it came out, I think it was. Anyway --

MS. HARF: It was. It was Tuesday, the first day I briefed this week.

QUESTION: Yeah. I mean, you said you were not too concerned about the propaganda value of it; it was just a film and it showed a U.S. soldier coming home. But it has actually gone viral now on jihadi sites. It's apparently one of the most popular videos that these – shown on these sites and downloaded on these sites. Do you repeat your lack of concern about the propaganda value of this video?

MS. HARF: I'm not going to put it past the Taliban to try and use things for propaganda value. We know that they care about propaganda and they've tried to do this throughout the conflict in Afghanistan. What I would say is I think it's important for the United States to say very clearly to the Taliban or anyone else who would take American soldiers captive that we will do everything to bring them home, that we will get them home, that we will demand that certain concession and restrictions are – concessions are made and restrictions are put in place, that we

take this very, very seriously. And I think that's the message that the world should see from what we've done over the last week.

QUESTION: So this Administration wasn't angered by the sight of the video that went up online by the Taliban?

MS. HARF: I don't – I wouldn't use the term angered. Obviously it's – I mean, we are looking at a man who has been in Taliban captivity, an American soldier, for five years. Obviously that's difficult to watch. This is a man who's clearly been through quite a bit by any measure. So that's how probably I would look at it.

QUESTION: But it does also show a degree of organization on the part of the Taliban. You've got sort of 18 Taliban fighters there, they've got a white flag; they obviously had to control the airspace before the helicopters could land. I mean, you could see on the other side for Taliban and people of likeminded ideologies, this could be seen as the Taliban – a Taliban strength, a jihadi strength.

MS. HARF: I don't think this video in any way changes anyone's assessment of the Taliban's strength. I don't. I don't think that it changes the assessment of the fact that they are able to control some territory like this, right. I'm not sure it changes anything anyone knows about their strength or their leadership structure or their structure on the ground. I just don't think it changes what anybody knows about the Taliban already. And we have said that in order to get him home, this was how we had to do it. And yes, the fact that it was executed peacefully without any Americans – further Americans being put in danger, without having to fire any shots, we think on balance --

QUESTION: But it does feed into --

MS. HARF: -- that that's good.

QUESTION: Sorry, my last one.

MS. HARF: Yeah, yeah.

QUESTION: It does feed into the Taliban contention that they are a proper functioning government, which is – a government, which is what they've said.

MS. HARF: Well, not a government, certainly not a government. I don't think this video shows that they're a government or have a governing structure. But we have been very clear that in order for us to move forward in Afghanistan that – look, the way forward here is a political settlement that will include the Taliban. It's clear that they have some – a huge, in some ways, role to play in terms of the future of Afghanistan and making it more peaceful and stable. So we've been very clear about that for many years. This video in no way changes that.

QUESTION: In a leaked copy of Secretary – former Secretary of State Clinton's book --

MS. HARF: This is the last one on Bergdahl, and then we're moving on.

QUESTION: Okay. Secretary Clinton said that, at the time, negotiating with Taliban captors would be hard to swallow for Americans. Can the State Department comment?

MS. HARF: Will I comment on a leaked version of a book that I haven't seen? I think probably not.

…

QUESTION: Yes. The Taliban spokesperson has been telling the local Afghan media that Sergeant Bergdahl was treated well and he was also even allowed to play football. Is that your assessment? The video, the proof of life video, does it say about (inaudible)?

MS. HARF: So what we've said – and we're looking into whether it might be possible to release the proof of life video more widely. Obviously members of Congress have now seen it. And from the proof of life video, we've been very clear we were concerned about his health for a variety of reasons. And beyond that, we were concerned about his physical security, which again, plays a lot into this idea that time was of the essence here.

QUESTION: Can I ask you something about –

MS. HARF: Let me – can I just --

QUESTION: I thought you were finished.

MS. HARF: Yeah, yeah. And so in general, we are attempting to determine the facts about what his life in captivity was like. But to be very clear, we were concerned about his health. The proof of life video from about six months ago absolutely made us even more concerned.

Yeah.

QUESTION: Ukraine?

QUESTION: Do you need a Privacy Act waiver from Sergeant Bergdahl to release the proof of life video?

MS. HARF: He's not a private American citizen, so the rules are a little different. The Privacy Act pertains to private citizens. Obviously, there are other considerations we take into place, including privacy writ large. But the Privacy Act as I understand it is for private citizens.

QUESTION: Interesting. And do you --

MS. HARF: But there are still privacy concerns.

QUESTION: Yeah. So why would you violate his privacy by releasing it, even if you're not legally obliged to obtain his consent because he's not a private citizen? Why would you release it?

MS. HARF: Well, I don't think we would, as you said, violate his privacy. Obviously, he now is in the United States. He's here, so --

QUESTION: If you released a video of me that was taken when I was detained by a third party and I was videoed without my consent, and you released it --

MS. HARF: Right.

QUESTION: -- I think, whether I'm a private citizen or not, you would be violating my privacy if you didn't get my permission.

MS. HARF: Right. And we haven't released it yet --

QUESTION: No, so why would you, though?

MS. HARF: -- for a variety of reasons, including privacy. But obviously, we are now able to have conversations with him – I'm not saying we have about the video. I'm just saying now that he's back with the United States, there's ways to do this. And if there's a compelling national interest and if hypothetically we do the calculation on the privacy issue, whether or not we talk to him about it, we might. But --

QUESTION: What national interest is served by releasing a video that shows him, as you have said and as many other officials have said, that has shown a marked deterioration in his condition?

MS. HARF: Well, I'm not saying there is one. I'm saying the discussion is happening right now. I think most people in this room would argue for more things being in the public domain in general.

QUESTION: I know. I'm just trying to figure out --

MS. HARF: And it would – what we've – I mean, again, we want to get all the facts out there as much as we can. But there are privacy considerations, and we're balancing those. And I don't know if we will, but those conversations are happening.

QUESTION: Some people might question whether the release of such a video would be designed to blunt criticism of the Administration for its decision to – well, some people might say you're doing it to sort of get people off your back. This is why we moved fast, because he looked so bad. Look how bad he looks.

MS. HARF: Well – and to be clear, it's not just that we thought he looked bad which is the reason we moved fast, and I think there's been a little confusion about this, so I – just let me make a few points on that, then we can continue this conversation.

After we saw the proof of life video in January, it appeared his health had deteriorated. That led, obviously, to an even greater sense of urgency.

QUESTION: Sorry, after you saw the video, or when you saw the video it appeared that his condition had deteriorated?

MS. HARF: When we saw the video.

QUESTION: Right.

MS. HARF: Right. At the same time, and separate and apart from the decline in health – and I think this is an important point to make – we had reason to believe that Sergeant Bergdahl's recovery and potentially his life could be jeopardized if the detainee exchange proceedings were disclosed or derailed. So we talked a little bit about this yesterday, about why that may be. So then when presented with a very near-term opportunity to recover Sergeant Bergdahl, we believed time was of the essence to move very quickly.

So again, look, it's not that we're trying to blunt criticism. It's that we believe it's important for the facts to be out there. And some people have questioned the notion that we really did have a sense of urgency and that we really did have to keep it secret, and that we could've either on the notification question taken more time. And so I think just making very clear why we acted quickly is important. Whether or not that includes the video, I don't know.

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

QUESTION: One other one on this.

MS. HARF: Uh-huh. Wait, Lucas, let me --

QUESTION: Can I – just last one from me on this.

MS. HARF: Yeah.

QUESTION: Yesterday, I asked whether the Taliban had threatened to kill Sergeant Bergdahl if the agreement for his release became public. Were you able to check on that, and do you now know the answer as to whether there was an explicit threat from the Taliban to kill him if it was released, or if, as you seemed to suggest yesterday, it was more a question of if it were released, his life could be in danger because some rogue actor might decide to kill him, not that the Taliban explicitly made that threat?

MS. HARF: Same place we were yesterday, in that what I can confirm for you and what we do know is that we had indications that his life very much could be in jeopardy, particularly if the deal was made public.

QUESTION: But you can't confirm that there was an explicit threat made by the Taliban?

MS. HARF: I cannot confirm that, but in no way does that take away from our sense of urgency.

June 5, 2014

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

MS. HARF: First, a travel update: The Secretary met today with Foreign Minister Lavrov this morning for an hour and 20 minutes. It was a productive conversation. Secretary Kerry encouraged the Russians to take seriously and to engage seriously with Ukraine with the support of Europe and the U.S. and to work directly towards de-escalation. As a reminder, Secretary Kerry and the President met with President-elect Poroshenko yesterday. Secretary Kerry reiterated U.S. support for the people of Ukraine. Secretary has – is following in many respects the President's schedule, and then, as we know, will be going on to Saint-Briac for an event later in the week.

...

QUESTION: As we understand it, the Administration has told members of Congress that Sergeant Bergdahl would have been killed by the Taliban had the details of the negotiations made public before the handoff happened. Is that your recollection of the situation as – or not your recollection, but your understanding of the situation as well?

MS. HARF: Uh-huh. A couple points on that. As you know, there was the classified briefing last night. I'm not going to be able to go into all the details of what we told Congress. But in terms of concerns about his physical security, just a few points: Of course, partly because of the video, there were concerns about his health, but separate from that is physical security, right. But in terms of health, we've made our concerns very well known that there were a number of reasons in that video to believe that his health was declining.

But further, in terms of physical security, we – once we had in place the agreement with the – through the Qataris about how this could proceed, there were real concerns that if this were made public first, his physical security could be in danger more by either the Taliban walking away or about an individual Taliban member who perhaps was guarding him – again, I'm speaking generally, not in reference to any specific piece of information – but someone guarding him that possibly wouldn't agree and could take harmful action against him. So as we needed to move quickly, all of these factors played into that.

QUESTION: Do you have any sense – when we're talking about the conditions under which he was held, do you have any sense of how many people were guarding him?

MS. HARF: I can – I don't have that in front of me.

QUESTION: Okay. Any kind of details on --

MS. HARF: We know that the conditions weren't great, obviously. For five years, he was held by the Taliban. We know that the conditions, obviously, were not particularly good. I'm happy if there's – to see if there's more detail to share.

QUESTION: It's been noted that he came out kind of squinting and shying away from the light, raising questions of whether he was kept underground or in some kind of very dark area for a while.

MS. HARF: I don't have more details. I'm happy to see if there are more to share.

QUESTION: Can we go back to the original question? Because the way it was phrased talked about "would have been killed." My understanding of what the Administration's representations have been to Congress is not that he would have been killed, but he could have been killed.

MS. HARF: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: Is that your understanding?

MS. HARF: I'm not going to get into all of the specifics about --

QUESTION: No, no. No, no. Yeah --

MS. HARF: -- exactly what we told Congress or what we knew about his physical security. Obviously, some of that is based on information we can't share.

QUESTION: Right.

MS. HARF: So I think I just laid out the reasons we were concerned about it and the possibility that harm could come to him, particularly if, once we concluded the agreement, it was made public.

QUESTION: No, no, I get it. I just --

MS. HARF: So – and I'm not just going to go into any more details about what we did or didn't tell Congress.

QUESTION: No, that's fine. But the point I'm trying to get across is that what you – your concern was about a possibility that he might come to harm, not a certainty, correct?

MS. HARF: Well, I don't think we can ever be certain of anything, but I think we were gravely enough concerned by information we had, both from the video about his health and other information about his physical security, that we needed to move very quickly.

QUESTION: Yes, got it.

QUESTION: Do you think it's accurate to say that there was a threat against his physical security?

MS. HARF: I think it is absolutely accurate to say that. I think there was – there's – I mean, you're being held by – captive by the Taliban; I think that should go without saying. But there were reasons, particularly recently, where we were increasingly concerned and we believed time was of the essence.

QUESTION: Marie, just to follow up on the proof of life video. If you were so concerned about Bergdahl's health, why did you wait six months to rescue him?

MS. HARF: Well obviously, as folks know – and we talked about this a little bit yesterday – there have been talks about how we could possibly get him home for years now. So we've been concerned for some time; we've been in talks for some time. Nobody was waiting for anything. These are complicated negotiations.

To Arshad's question yesterday – he asked if we'd ever directly talked about the Taliban with this – we had. Those talks ended in early 2012. These were part of the broader talks, but we had talked directly about this with the Taliban. So no one was waiting. We knew time was of the essence. Again, recently – we believe new information came to light that meant it was even more of the essence, and we were able to move forward.

QUESTION: But the impetus of the deal – and many would argue it's a bad deal – is because his health was deteriorating; you had to act. What took so long?

MS. HARF: I first take notion with the issue that – or take issue with the notion that many would argue it was a bad deal. I haven't seen a lot of polling on it. I think many people would argue that it was important to get him home.

Second, there were health concerns, but there were also the concerns about physical security, as we've said. And look, this is the one American POW we had in Afghanistan. This – as General Dempsey said, our best and probably last opportunity for a variety of reasons to get him home, and I think I'll defer to the head of the Joint Chiefs of Staff on that assessment.

QUESTION: But the fact that it took six months, when you say "last opportunity" --

MS. HARF: What do you mean by six months?

QUESTION: Well, the proof of life video was released in December.

MS. HARF: Mm-hmm. And we've had several proofs of life for him throughout his time in captivity, and we've been negotiating through that time.

QUESTION: Has there been videos released since December?

MS. HARF: Since – proof of life videos? No, not to my knowledge. Maybe I'm missing something here.

QUESTION: So that's the question. His health was in such grave danger in December when the video was released and government officials saw it. What took so long?

MS. HARF: Well, first – two points, Lucas. The first is when it was released we were negotiating. We were trying to get him home. So it's not like we were sitting here doing nothing and the video came out and we thought, "Oh, we should try to get Sergeant Bergdahl home." That's absolutely not the case.

Secondly, health was a part of this, right, but the other concern recently was about his physical security. So as I think other folks have said, you can't make definitive health judgments based on a video. It appeared that it was much worse. That's why we believed it was important to move forward with this.

We wanted to make sure we got the assurances from the Qataris, and I have a little more on that today: that we demanded a complete travel ban; we demanded certain security measures be put in place to substantially mitigate the threat that these individuals may pose to the U.S. and our interests. Those demands were met prior to doing this. Those demands were important to us. We wanted to make sure we negotiated for them.

This isn't to say – I think Elise asked yesterday about house arrest. Not under house arrest. It's possible someone will see them on the streets of Qatar. But those types of activities don't threaten our national security interests, and that's the standard here about substantially mitigating the threat that they will pose. We're confident in the Qataris that the restrictions agreed upon, and these individuals will be restricted from activities that pose a threat to our national security.

QUESTION: But yesterday you also said, quote, "I think people have confusion about – that eventually what was going to happen anyway."

MS. HARF: Yep.

QUESTION: Can I --

QUESTION: So if these Guantanamo --

MS. HARF: Well, let me finish his, and then we'll – yes, please.

QUESTION: If these detainees or prisoners of war, whatever you want to call them, were going to be released anyway, why was this such a great deal?

MS. HARF: Because we got the one American POW in Afghanistan home. And my point yesterday – and this is a broader conversation I think at some point we will all be having about Guantanamo Bay and how we eventually close it – is that the notion that these were the worst of the worst – and look, these were not good guys. I am in no way defending these men. But being

mid- to high-level officials in a regime that's grotesque and horrific also doesn't mean they themselves directly pose a threat to the United States.

So I think when we were talking yesterday about eventually Guantanamo Bay will have to be closed, we've said that's important. Even former President Bush said that was important. It was opened under his tenure. And we have identified the worst of the – I mean, Khalid Sheikh Mohammed is the worst of the worst. These people that we've identified, about 30, will be tried, will be prosecuted. So we need to be very clear when we talk about this. And if you look at the recidivism rate under this Administration with the protocols we've put in place – with the standards we've put in place, it's dropped dramatically from where it was in the previous administration. So I think we need to be very clear when we talk about this issue and the threat from here on out, Lucas.

QUESTION: Last one. Earlier today the President said that this was a – Sergeant Bergdahl's release was a controversy whipped up in Washington. Do you – does the State Department believe that?

MS. HARF: Well, I do think it's illustrative that the President and the Secretary overseas, working on Ukraine, working on Syria and other issues, and that people overseas haven't really been focused on that. People in the rest of the world are focused on other issues and they're focused on the future of Afghanistan. I think that there has been a lot of noise in Washington, much of it political, about this.

Look, this is a tough choice. This is an important issue. We should have debates about it. Nobody is saying that. The President wasn't saying that. But I think it's frustrating at times to see – look, none of this – none of this was new. There have been press reports publicly about the notion of a swap for Sergeant Bergdahl particularly with these guys for years. The questions about how he disappeared have been out there for years. And in that time period, many of the people now criticizing this said it was – said it could be a good idea. They said that they would pursue it.

So it just calls into question some of the criticism and the political nature of it. I'm not saying all of it is. I'm not saying it's not right to have discussions about it.

QUESTION: Do you think Sergeant Bergdahl's platoon mates from OP Mest, do you think they're part of the controversy?

MS. HARF: I think – look, I think that the people who served with Sergeant Bergdahl, everyone who served in Afghanistan, has volunteered to go to a really tough place and wear the uniform of their country. Obviously we won't know the full story about what happened to him without his side of it. We've been looking at this and we will look at this. The Army has committed to undertaking, based on all of the information – including his platoon mates, including his – to determine what happened. And if there was misconduct, he'll be punished.

QUESTION: Because according to this controversy and these press reports you're talking about, since June 2009 part of that narrative was Sergeant Bergdahl was left behind and his soldiers had to live with that for the last many years.

MS. HARF: What do you mean?

QUESTION: Since June 2009, you said there's other press reports out there that said Sergeant Bergdahl was captured while on a patrol, and a lot of people assume that the Army had left him behind.

MS. HARF: I don't think anyone – look, I think what I was referring to is there have been – this has been a very publicly discussed case, both what may or may not have happened when he went into captivity by the Taliban and the potential for a prisoner swap with some Guantanamo detainees. So I think what I was referring to is that now, even though all of this has been out in the public domain, now suddenly some people are trying to use this to score political points. Not everyone. It is a fair topic to debate. But I think that's probably what you heard the President refer to. There are people overseas that some of us – some of them look at some of the things that are being said on Twitter right now, including about people like me, and are shocked by it. That's not real discussion and debate at all.

QUESTION: But if the Guantanamo detainees were going to be let out anyway, then we got something for nothing?

MS. HARF: No. Flip it, Lucas. If they were eventually likely going to be released, if we could get the one American POW we had back for something that was going to happen eventually, without firing a shot, without putting another American serviceman in harm's way to get him back through some sort of riskier operation, I think many people, including many members of Congress, have spoken up throughout the years that they think that would be a deal they would take.

QUESTION: Are the suspects in Qatar at the moment going through any kind of reintegration process?

MS. HARF: I don't have more details on that. Again, I had a little more additional details today about the restrictions. We're confident in the assurances the Qatari Government has given us.

QUESTION: Sergeant Bergdahl is having his reacclimation process. I was just curious if they were going through one as well.

MS. HARF: I don't want to equate them, Lucas. Thanks.

QUESTION: Marie, can I --

MS. HARF: Wait. Arshad had a question, and then Jo.

QUESTION: It goes back to the – did the Taliban threaten to kill Sergeant Bergdahl if the deal leaked?

MS. HARF: I'm not going to get into that kind of level of detail about what we may or may not know.

QUESTION: Do you believe that – to your knowledge, do you believe that to be correct?

MS. HARF: I'm not going to comment in any way on that.

QUESTION: Can I go – can I ask you about the buckets of people and the five Taliban who were in this bucket which was eligible for review?

MS. HARF: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: I'm just wondering: Is it not correct that also within this bucket there are people that the Administration doesn't know what to do with because some of the evidence against them cannot be submitted into the courts because it's too tainted because of the procedures under which it was taken?

MS. HARF: I don't have all the details on that middle group of people. But what I do know – and I think some folks – some of – former, actually, prosecutors at Guantanamo and others have been out there talking about the process who know more about it than I do. But where we were able to get enough evidence to charge people there, we have said we're going to, and that's the first bucket of about 30 people. And it's been how many years now – 13, 12 – since many of these guys have been there? We've had a lot of time to build cases. So for that middle group, as I said yesterday, it's unlikely that they will be added to the group that's going to be prosecuted.

QUESTION: But is that not because they're not considered the worst of the worst? I believe there are some people who are considered very dangerous within that group.

MS. HARF: And that is accurate to say.

QUESTION: It's more that you can't get the evidence to prosecute them?

MS. HARF: Well, right. I'm not saying – I'm not speaking for that group broadly. I was speaking for those five when I would say these five aren't the worst of the worst.

QUESTION: You stand by that: They're not the worst of the worst?

MS. HARF: It doesn't mean they're good guys. I am in no way – it's not my job to get up here and defend them. I think – and look, they were mid- to high-level officials in an incredibly repressive, violent regime, and it's because – that's why they were brought to Guantanamo, not because of their ties to al-Qaida – some of them may have had some – but because of their role in the Taliban very early on in the war.

QUESTION: So it's not your --

MS. HARF: But that doesn't mean they directly threaten the United States national security. We feel like we've sufficiently mitigated that.

QUESTION: So it's not your contention then that they were among this group of hardened --

QUESTION: The Camp 7 guys.

QUESTION: -- yeah, terrorists that could not be released, could not be approved for their release, but couldn't be prosecuted?

MS. HARF: I'll see if there's more details for you on that. Again, these guys – we believe for these five what's important now is that we believe we have sufficiently mitigated the risk, through our agreement with the Qatari Government that they will not be able to threaten the U.S. national security in the future.

QUESTION: For one year.

QUESTION: Can I just get back to the proof of life video that --

MS. HARF: Yeah.

QUESTION: -- you mentioned earlier that was shown to the senators last night? Have you seen it yourself?

MS. HARF: I have not, no.

QUESTION: Is it anybody's intention to release it generally to the public to see it?

MS. HARF: I can check.

QUESTION: Can you --

QUESTION: I wanted to ask just because there were some reports I was listening to on the radio this morning that said that it showed Sergeant Bergdahl looking dazed and that had the – presumably, if – when the President saw it, there would have been no doubt in his mind that this was a guy who was under severe – who was severely ill. Is that the --

MS. HARF: Well – in terms of the proof of life video?

QUESTION: Yes.

MS. HARF: Oh, okay.

QUESTION: The proof of life video.

MS. HARF: In general, what we can say about the video is that how he appeared in the video did raise very serious concerns with us about his health.

QUESTION: Can you tell us how he appeared? What was his condition? We haven't --

MS. HARF: I can see if there's more – I haven't seen it, so I'm happy to see if there's more detail I can share. I can say that – like I said yesterday, none of us can imagine what would happen to us after four and a half years in Taliban captivity. I think you saw it from the video yesterday of him boarding the helo. So --

QUESTION: Marie --

MS. HARF: -- I'll see if there's more detail I can share.

QUESTION: Marie, if his health was such a great concern, what took so long to act?

MS. HARF: You're asking the same question over and over again, Lucas. We've been negotiating for his release for years now, and we needed to make sure we had the assurances. We've been in active negotiations through the Qataris on this, particularly on this last round. And as soon as we were able to get in place the agreement for the transfer to Qatar, as soon as we were able to operationalize it, right – so first we made the agreement with Qatar, and then we had to operationalize it. As soon as we could get him on that helo, we did. Believe me, the United States military acts as quickly as it can.

QUESTION: Can you go back to something you said a minute ago? I believe you said that there had been direct negotiations or talks with Taliban about Sergeant Bergdahl.

MS. HARF: Including about Sergeant Bergdahl. We've had them on – broadly speaking, as we know, on the reconciliation issue. Those ended in early 2012.

QUESTION: Do you know how long they went on?

MS. HARF: I can check and see when they started.

QUESTION: Do you know why they broke down?

MS. HARF: We talked about it a little bit at the time. If you remember, the opening of the office came much later. But we talked about it a little bit at the time. I'm happy to go check the historical record.

QUESTION: Okay.

MS. HARF: I obviously was not here.

QUESTION: Thanks. And maybe if they had been receptive to it at that time.

MS. HARF: Well, we do – I mean, look, we have had talks ongoing with them, and we have had – I don't want to use the word "opportunities," but we were talking with them because we believed there was a way we could maybe move forward and get him home. For a variety of reasons they broke down in the past several times, and thankfully we were able to get him home this time. I will see if there's more historical detail. A lot of this is before our time here.

QUESTION: One more question on Guantanamo?

MS. HARF: Uh-huh.

QUESTION: I'm trying to understand the status of the detainees currently held at Guantanamo. So you said the Administration has plans to put 30 of the entire population --

MS. HARF: It's about 30. I don't have the exact number.

QUESTION: -- on trial. So I'm assuming --

MS. HARF: Prosecution.

QUESTION: -- yeah – the rest should be released, right?

MS. HARF: So 78 of the rest are – have already been approved through the review process for transfer.

QUESTION: Okay.

MS. HARF: And there are a handful remaining that we're still determining what to do.

QUESTION: Okay.

MS. HARF: We've been very clear that we will transfer those we can. Part of that involves finding third countries almost always – sometimes the home country, but third countries to send them to.

QUESTION: So it's mainly finding a country? It's not making a decision to release them?

MS. HARF: Well, on the 78 that have already been a decision made, that is – the challenge there is finding countries, either their home countries – some cases they don't want to go back or the home country doesn't want them, so we look for third countries. We've talked about that a lot in here. For the prosecution side, that's obviously a prosecution process which is a little difficult but we'll move forward with as we can. And then there are still decisions to be made about that bucket in the middle, which is not – which is a smaller number.

QUESTION: How is that decision being made?

MS. HARF: Well, it's --

QUESTION: I mean, what's the process?

MS. HARF: It's an interagency process that takes into account a variety of factors. If we have enough evidence to charge people, you've seen we will do so. If we don't and we believe people can be slated for transfer, then there's a whole process in terms of threat mitigation that we go through through the periodic review board, interagency process, and we'll go through that with all of them.

QUESTION: And how were you able to determine that these five Taliban leaders do not pose any threat, but you're still going through the cases of the rest of those people?

MS. HARF: Yeah. Well, it takes a while to go through these. Obviously, we have a commitment to close Guantanamo Bay, and so obviously that's a process we're going through right now.

So the entire interagency national security team – including of course the Secretary of Defense, because Guantanamo Bay falls under the Defense Department – undertook the threat assessment, did a risk assessment of how we could best mitigate it, what assurances we could get from the Government of Qatar; that while these are not good guys and are, in many cases, pretty bad guys, they could not – we've sufficiently – substantially, I think, is the word I'm supposed to use – mitigated the risk that they will return to the fight against American national security interests.

Look, the future of Afghanistan is up to the Afghan people and the next Afghan Government to decide. What – we've said that eventually there needs to be a political settlement there, a solution that involves Afghans talking to Afghans, reconciliation, what they will do with the Taliban going forward. That needs to be decided between them.

QUESTION: Do you think this swap deal will encourage Taliban to try to capture more American soldiers? Because it seems it was successful in releasing some of the detainees.

MS. HARF: I think I'm – I am getting a lot of the same questions for the past two days, and I'm happy to keep answering them. Look, I think the United States military has been crystal clear that they will take action against the Taliban when it threatens our interests. I don't think the Taliban is in any way confused about the power of the United States military to go after them or the willingness of them to do so.

…

QUESTION: Do detainees at Guantanamo Bay, when they leave, have to sign any kind of pledge not to reenter the battlefield, take up arms against the United States or our allies?

MS. HARF: I'm not going to go into more details about the specifics of the agreement with the Government of Qatar. Again, suffice to say we are confident that the details --

QUESTION: I just meant in general.

MS. HARF: I'm – in general, I'm not going to go in to specifics about what they have to do when they get out.

QUESTION: But wouldn't it make sense (inaudible) – can you say that they did not sign a pledge?

MS. HARF: I'm not commenting on a pledge one way or the other, Lucas. What I'm saying is that the processes we put in place and the mitigation that we put in place to ensure they can't return to the battlefield, we are confident in. Our recidivism rate has dropped substantially since the previous administration because of these processes, so we're confident in that going forward.

Yes.

QUESTION: The first question regarding the buckets that you used to – for the Guantanamo Bay prisoners or whatever we can call them – you mentioned 78 and then 30. But this doesn't add up to 146 or 149.

MS. HARF: Yeah, 149. So there's that middle group that we have not made a determination one way or the other about what will happen to them. As I said, it's unlikely that most of them, if any, will be put into the category of prosecution, but we're still looking at their cases.

QUESTION: So the rest are – we don't know what's happened --

MS. HARF: We're not – yeah. We don't know yet.

QUESTION: The question regarding the terms of with Qatar, it is – those terms are valid for one year or more?

MS. HARF: Yeah. So as we've talked about in here, it's one year, certainly. And again, the – we are confident they will enforce the restrictions. We are confident that we will be able to have that in place.

QUESTION: (Inaudible.) And my last question is what Lara asked yesterday. Did they – did Taliban pick those five people? Or how it was then this swap?

MS. HARF: I didn't get any clarity on that. I'm happy to check on that.

…

QUESTION: In the last few days, there have been increased number of attacks on Pakistani military posts along the Afghan borders. The TTP whose leader Mullah Fazlullah is hiding in Kunar province of Afghanistan, he claimed responsibility for attacks on two Pakistani officers who were killed yesterday in Rawalpindi, and also a series of attacks on check posts. What is the U.S. doing to help Afghanistan check TTP from carrying out attacks on Pakistan?

MS. HARF: Well, I haven't seen those specific reports, and I'm sorry about that. I'll check on them when I leave here. But obviously one thing in terms of the Afghan side, we're working very closely with the Afghan Government on the continued threat. And one of the reasons you heard the President announce that he made the decision he did about troop numbers is so we have sufficient time to continue training the Afghan security forces so they can take on more of this fight themselves, and also to continue conducting counterterrorism operations in general.

QUESTION: Are you hopeful that the new Afghan Government will take steps and improve coordination with Pakistan to stop TTP from using its territory against Pakistan?

MS. HARF: Well, we've certainly said that Afghanistan should have good relationships with all of its neighbors, and that this is a shared fight, certainly, on the counterterrorism side that they're going through together and hope they will continue working together.

QUESTION: Are you concerned that it might lead to instability in view of election taking place in Afghanistan?

MS. HARF: I don't have any comment, I guess, on how it would be related to the election. We're looking forward to working with the new government of Afghanistan as soon as it's formed, and we'll have these conversations with them then.

…

QUESTION: Yeah, in the last several days the Government of Afghanistan and even their parliament have said that there has been increased shelling from across the border from Pakistan, and they have been asking the U.S. help in this. Have you heard from them?

MS. HARF: I can check on that specifically. The Defense Department probably is the place that's heard from them. Of course, as I just said in response to that question, it's something we're continuing to be concerned about and work with them on. I can check if there's been specific conversations.

QUESTION: And also on Herat, the incident of the Indian consulate, Afghan President Hamid Karzai has said that Lashkar e-Tayyiba was involved in that attack. Could you have any information --

MS. HARF: I don't have anything on that. I'm happy to check.

QUESTION: Thank you.

June 4, 2014

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

QUESTION: Afghanistan. Have you seen the video released by the Taliban?

MS. HARF: I have.

QUESTION: (Inaudible.)

MS. HARF: Mm-hmm. And you would like a comment?

QUESTION: Yes.

MS. HARF: Or a question? Besides have I seen it? I think I'd probably refer you to the statement by my colleague at the Pentagon, Admiral Kirby, who said we're aware of the video allegedly released by the Taliban showing the transfer. We have no reason to doubt the video's authenticity, but obviously they are reviewing it. Regardless, we know the transfer was peaceful and successful. Our focus, of course, remains on getting Sergeant Bergdahl the care he needs. I think DOD – if they have anything else to say, I'd point you there.

QUESTION: But did you know in advance that the Taliban had done a video recording of that? Was there any --

MS. HARF: I was not aware of that. I'm happy to check with my DOD colleagues.

QUESTION: Was there any understanding between the U.S. and the Taliban that this process would be video recorded, or --

MS. HARF: Well again, we weren't negotiating directly with the Taliban. Qatar was. I don't have any details on that topic. I'm happy to look into it further.

QUESTION: Can I follow up on that?

MS. HARF: Yeah.

QUESTION: Did any U.S. officials ever meet any members of the Taliban in connection with the possibility of Mr. Bergdahl's release?

MS. HARF: Over the five years?

QUESTION: Correct.

MS. HARF: I will have to check, Arshad. I don't know.

QUESTION: I'm pretty sure that – okay. Please do.

MS. HARF: Do you mean one on one, or with other people in the – or just at all?

QUESTION: At all.

MS. HARF: Okay. I'll – I would need to check.

QUESTION: Okay. Because – and just so we're clear, my follow-up is if it proves to be the case that there were actually meetings, then there is then the question of why any such meeting in connection with the possibility of Mr. Bergdahl's release might not be construed as a negotiation.

MS. HARF: Okay. I'm happy to check.

QUESTION: Thank you.

MS. HARF: And there have – as you know now – been multiple sort of phases in this discussion about his release, so I just don't have all the history. I'm happy to check.

…

QUESTION: I just wondered if you had any concerns about the release of this video. Is it being used by the Taliban as some kind of propaganda value? I mean, they had – they blasted across it, "Don't return to Afghanistan again. Next time, nobody will release you," and they call it a ceremony for the handover of the soldier.

MS. HARF: Look, I think what we were focused on here is getting this American soldier home. Again, I think there might've been some confusion yesterday that the – how he ended up in Taliban captivity is wholly unrelated to whether or not we should've brought him home, and I think the Army and military leadership has spoke to that quite eloquently.

So we've been very clear about our feelings on the Taliban. The United States military has been very clear about the lengths they will go to take action against the Taliban. We've seen that. So I don't think anyone should be confused or in doubt about the United States military's willingness to go after the Taliban based on this.

QUESTION: Yeah, that wasn't – thank you, but that wasn't really quite my question.

MS. HARF: So I mean I don't think --

QUESTION: My question is whether it has propaganda value for the Taliban.

MS. HARF: I don't want to venture to analyze that. I think – I was trying to put it in the broader context of our activities against the Taliban, that it's a video of us getting an American soldier

home. And that's important to us, and I think that is an important thing for the United States to say that we do no matter how they go missing, and I think on our – that's how I would view it, at least.

…

QUESTION: On the question of if this is a propaganda video, this video is propaganda for the Taliban – would you say it's just a status update on Facebook?

MS. HARF: I have no idea why – I will not venture to guess why the Taliban does things or why they release videos. As I said, what's been important to us throughout this whole process is his health and safety, which, as you know, is why we had to move very quickly. Determining the facts now, which we just don't know and which is very important to the Army – you've heard other people speak about it now today – not prejudging what those are. And look, if the facts lead one way, there will be consequences, of course. But what we're focused on now really is his health.

…

QUESTION: Would you like to see this, in the broader context, lead to some sort of a negotiation with the Taliban where the United States can achieve some sort of a SOFA agreement where the border with Pakistan – you can negotiate with the Haqqani network and the border in Pakistan is more secure? Would you like to see that?

MS. HARF: That was just, like, 15 hypotheticals in one.

QUESTION: Well, I don't know. Okay.

MS. HARF: I think – no, but more broadly speaking, Said --

QUESTION: It's a good place to ask hypotheticals.

MS. HARF: -- more broadly speaking, what we've said is if this could lead to progress on the reconciliation front --

QUESTION: Right.

MS. HARF: -- that would be good. I don't want to get too far ahead of this now because it's a really tough challenge, right? We need there to be an Afghan-led reconciliation process where they talk about their future and they talk to each other about what would happen next. I don't think I have much more analysis to do about what possibly could come from this. The President very clearly outlined the future of the United States in Afghanistan several times over the past few years, most recently, of course, in his announcement last week about our troop numbers and what our presence will look like there. So I think we've been very clear about the role we're going to be playing.

QUESTION: So it is possible that this is not just an isolated negotiation for exchanging prisoners incident?

MS. HARF: Well, this was an isolated negotiation about the exchange of prisoners. But if it could lead to progress on reconciliation, which we've said is very important, then obviously that would be a good thing. We don't know if it will, but if it could, that would be good.

…

QUESTION: -- former Secretary Clinton has spoken out, calling it one of the hard choices that top policymakers are often called upon to make. As we all know, this concept of a prisoner swap was first broached with the Congress in late 2011, early 2012. What view of the idea did Secretary Clinton take at the time and when she was serving in the President's cabinet?

MS. HARF: I think I'd probably refer you to her to speak – I think she's spoken about it now, and if she has anything else to say, I'm sure she'd be happy to provide it.

QUESTION: Published reports from then and now state that Secretary Clinton opposed the idea of a prisoner swap. Are those reports inaccurate?

MS. HARF: I'm – I know there are a variety of reports out there, and I know that one thing we said very clearly recently is that while we've been talking about this for a long time, the situation has continued to evolve; his health, we believe, continued to get worse; and the decisions we made now are not identical to the conversations that we've been having for years, just broadly speaking. So again, I'm happy to see if there's more from her time here or more that she'd like to add, but she's right. It's a tough choice. I think what you've seen is complete unanimity throughout the Administration, both throughout the last six – or five years he's been a captive, that we need to do everything we can to bring him home and what that looks like. And even some members of Congress, who were today criticizing us, have been on the record saying we'll do everything to bring him home, including prisoner swaps.

So I think she's right that it's a hard choice and the choices we had in the last week were different than the discussions we were having two years ago.

QUESTION: At the time this – the idea was broached, what involvement was there in the intra-agency process from the State Department?

MS. HARF: Broached in terms of what? When?

QUESTION: Did the Department's lawyers provide legal opinions? Did INL provide assessments?

MS. HARF: When are you referring to? Sorry.

QUESTION: In 2011, 2012, any time during Secretary Clinton's term.

MS. HARF: I'm happy to check on what occurred previously. I'm obviously most familiar with what's happened over the past few weeks. But I'm happy to check if there's more detail.

QUESTION: Yes, please.

QUESTION: I have just one more.

MS. HARF: Uh-huh.

QUESTION: You might not – I don't know if you know about this, because I've just been pinged it myself, but apparently --

MS. HARF: I love these.

QUESTION: -- yeah, me too – there's some breaking news. There's another video which shows this young American couple who disappeared in Afghanistan a few years ago. Apparently they're appealing for help. Do you know --

MS. HARF: Do you have a name?

QUESTION: I can't remember their name. You might --

QUESTION: I know more about this. It's – I don't know the name, I will get it for you, but it's a Canadian man and his wife who's from Pennsylvania. They're a young couple. The video shows her in an abaya with a hijab and they're being held.

MS. HARF: Private citizens?

QUESTION: Yes. Civilians.

MS. HARF: Obviously, we have no greater priority than the protection of American citizens overseas. I'm not familiar with this, and obviously, there are always privacy concerns. I'll check on it, though.

QUESTION: She was apparently pregnant, I think, when they disappeared --

QUESTION: Yes.

MS. HARF: Okay. I'm happy --

QUESTION: -- back in 2012.

MS. HARF: I'm happy to check. I know there are some privacy concerns, so let me just check.

QUESTION: Okay. Thank you.

QUESTION: But are there privacy concerns even if they have identified themselves?

MS. HARF: I'd have to check on the specifics.

QUESTION: Okay. Because the video shows them saying, my name is X, Y.

MS. HARF: Okay, I'll check.

QUESTION: Thanks.

MS. HARF: Yeah, I'll check.

QUESTION: Back to Secretary Clinton real quick.

MS. HARF: Uh-huh.

QUESTION: Just in general, was this the only option, the prisoner swap?

MS. HARF: Compared to what?

QUESTION: Well, Fox News' Catherine Herridge is now reporting that this prisoner swap – that this was the second option, this was not the only option, that they had pursued another plan in December 2013.

MS. HARF: I'm happy to check on the details. Obviously, if there were other things considered – I think, broadly speaking, we've considered all options to get him back. This was judged to be – again, recently, we believe as General Dempsey said, this was the best, probably last chance to get him home. This was what we undertook in order to get him home. As we've said very publicly, we've been talking for a long time about a potential prisoner swap and what that might look like. I'm sure we looked at a range of options, but again, as – I will refer to General Dempsey's comment that this was the best opportunity to get him home.

QUESTION: So cash payments were discussed?

MS. HARF: I can check on that. I don't know, Lucas.

QUESTION: And were you – was the United States Government negotiating with the Pakistani Government?

MS. HARF: Negotiating with the – were they – I'm happy to check on those details. Again, I'm most familiar with the recent history here, but I'm happy to dig a little deeper.

QUESTION: On Afghanistan --

QUESTION: To go back to what (inaudible) just sent to me. (Laughter.)

MS. HARF: See, I wish I could have my phone up here because I feel like I'm at a disadvantage. You all have your phones.

QUESTION: And I need to pay tribute. It's an AP story, AP. (Laughter.)

MS. HARF: I need to, like, be able to phone a friend. Yes.

QUESTION: It's Caitlin Coleman and Joshua Boyle.

MS. HARF: Okay, yes. So again, as in these general types of cases, strive to remain in contact with the U.S. citizen's family, provide appropriate consular access. About this case, because of privacy considerations, cannot provide additional details.

QUESTION: Thank you.

…

QUESTION: So yesterday you said you had a very short window of time for the prisoner swap.

MS. HARF: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: And today you are saying that you had the best and the last opportunity. Did the Taliban give you a deadline for --

MS. HARF: I don't have more details for you on the discussion – internal discussions between the Government of Qatar and the Taliban.

QUESTION: And exactly where this happened? Was it around – along the Pakistan border in Afghanistan?

MS. HARF: I'm happy to check if there's more detail we can provide on that.

QUESTION: And did the U.S. also video record and took pictures of --

MS. HARF: Not to my knowledge. I'm happy to check.

QUESTION: Because the video didn't see – I don't see anything in the video that --

MS. HARF: I'm happy to check.

QUESTION: Was it a risky operation, do you believe?

MS. HARF: Was it a – I mean, look, every time – everything we do here in this part of the world entails some risk, absolutely. But we had, through our discussions with the Government of Qatar, come to an understanding about how this would occur. Obviously, there is always risk, but thankfully, this transfer went forward peacefully.

QUESTION: But did you take any backup precaution? Because we see Taliban fire fighters all around --

MS. HARF: I think the United States military always takes a lot of backup precautions, I would venture to guess.

QUESTION: Okay. Thank you.

QUESTION: Just to complete the idea of this contact with Taliban, is Taliban in any way part of the Afghanistan equation?

MS. HARF: Absolutely. They're a huge power player there.

QUESTION: And do you have something for it, or because you – the reason I'm asking: It was 2012, I think, there was an office of Taliban opened in Qatar.

MS. HARF: Uh-huh, yes.

QUESTION: And I don't know – I mean, I think that it was not even – I mean, it was – if not welcome --

MS. HARF: Briefly open.

QUESTION: Yeah.

MS. HARF: Uh-huh. Well, in terms of that, the Taliban did suspend direct talks in 2012, and we have not resumed them. As you mentioned, that office was/is still based in Qatar. Nothing to update you in terms of that. They remain suspended.

QUESTION: But this office was to contact other Afghanis or contact you?

MS. HARF: I think it was to be part of the reconciliation process, which of course we've said needs to really be Afghans talking to Afghans, but we obviously play – have some role here.

…

QUESTION: One more time: Can you confirm that cash options were considered in exchange for Bergdahl?

MS. HARF: I don't know, Lucas. I'm happy to check and see if there are other options that were considered and if we can confirm them. I just don't know.

QUESTION: But you can't deny that cash payments were discussed?

MS. HARF: But I can't confirm – I just – I can't confirm it, so it's not that I'm not denying it. It's that I don't know if it's true or not. Yeah.

QUESTION: I have a legal question on --

MS. HARF: My favorite.

QUESTION: Well, it's just – it's very general, but it relates to this. When people are saying the U.S. does not negotiate with terrorist groups, is that statute or is that general policy? And --

MS. HARF: Well, our line is that we don't make concessions --

QUESTION: That's what I was about to ask you.

MS. HARF: -- which is different. I mean, that's the – you're quoting it colloquial. That's actually not what you'll hear us say from the podium (inaudible).

QUESTION: Okay. And how do you define the difference?

MS. HARF: How do we define the difference? Well, I --

QUESTION: Between making concessions and negotiating.

MS. HARF: I think it's clear that we don't make concessions to terrorists. And that's a judgment, right, that we don't – I think – I don't know. I think those words, using Matt, I think are fairly well defined.

QUESTION: So releasing five of their prisoners or five of their --

MS. HARF: Is not making a concession.

QUESTION: It's not a concession?

MS. HARF: No. It is consistent absolutely with what's happened in previous wars, including Korea, including Vietnam. I think one of the large tranches of prisoners in Vietnam, it was something like around 500 Americans for 1,200 North Vietnamese. So again, this has a long history in the United States of prisoner swaps.

QUESTION: But it allows you to keep – to hew to your policy just by how you define the word "concession."

MS. HARF: No. Well, and let's talk about these five a little bit, because I think it might be helpful. All of these five were eligible for review by the Periodic Review Board of Guantanamo Bay. So there are three buckets of people in Guantanamo that remain. There are those who are approved for transfer. That's 78. There are about 30 who have been referred for prosecution in some way. These five are in that middle bucket and were unlikely – might have been, but

unlikely – to be added to the group that was going to be referred for prosecution. So it is quite likely that eventually, in line with our commitment to close Guantanamo Bay, they would be transferred.

Now, I'm doing some hypotheticals and going out a little bit here, but I think it's important to remember who these five were, what likely would have ended up happening to them. So let's say it was important for us to get Sergeant Bergdahl home. Let's say these guys may have eventually been transferred somewhere anyways. I think many of us would make the argument – I would make it – that we should get something for them.

QUESTION: Marie, so not making concessions does not preclude negotiating. Is that what you're saying?

MS. HARF: I'm saying our policy is not to make concessions to terrorists.

QUESTION: I'm trying to understand, because this is the first I hear this. So suppose someone hijacks a plane and demands an hour on television, for instance.

MS. HARF: We don't make concessions to terrorists.

QUESTION: That would be a concession. But to negotiate exchange of prisoners is different?

MS. HARF: But again, this was an exchange of prisoners in war.

QUESTION: Right, okay.

MS. HARF: Right? Let's be clear about that. Operating under --

QUESTION: (Inaudible) legitimizes the Taliban to take prisoners of war, and now we're doing this exchange with the Taliban?

MS. HARF: It's – well, I don't know what you mean by legitimizing. We have an authorization for the use of military force in Afghanistan partly because of – in large part because of the Taliban. So we are operating under an AUMF, congressionally approved AUMF. We are at war in Afghanistan. The Taliban was holding captive in a war zone our soldier. So operating under the long-established prisoner swaps that we've done – yes?

QUESTION: Yet all of the detainees in Guantanamo were specifically referred to as detainees and enemy combatants --

MS. HARF: Uh-huh.

QUESTION: -- and not prisoners of war.

MS. HARF: And we talked about this a little bit yesterday that it's the underlying principle that we exchange prisoners in war – whatever term we use for them, right? It's not a technical term; it is a concept that these are prisoners we have taken during wartime, factually.

QUESTION: Well, detainees. I mean, every administration since 2001 – or I guess the two administrations since we opened Guantanamo – has made it very – I mean, have parsed it out to --

MS. HARF: Uh-huh. I understand that.

QUESTION: -- ad nauseum that these are not prisoners, these are detainees.

MS. HARF: Right.

QUESTION: You're not calling them prisoners of war. You've changed your language today and called them prisoners in war.

MS. HARF: I am not – right. I'm not changing the technical definition of what we call people incarcerated in Guantanamo Bay. I'm not changing that in any way, nor was this decision changing that in any way, period. And these five detainees went through the routine process we do for all Guantanamo detainees before they are transferred in terms of the mitigation to the threat, undertaking a review to make sure we are sufficiently assured that we've mitigated the threat as much as we can. We can never mitigate it 100 percent.

And again, that's why I gave a little of the backstory on what's happening to the rest of these prisoners at Guantanamo Bay and who's slated for what. It was also, I think, important to remember that these five were taken and brought to Guantanamo very, very early on in the war in Afghanistan. It doesn't mean they're not bad guys, but it's important for context to remember who these guys are in comparison. They weren't, for example, on the list of about 30 that have been referred for prosecution.

QUESTION: Right. These are guys who were swept up on the battlefield --

MS. HARF: Mm-hmm. Very early on.

QUESTION: -- and they were combatants.

MS. HARF: Very early on.

QUESTION: So let me ask this: I'm sure this is the case or I assume this is the case, but I just want to make sure. These five who were released, were they – did the Taliban specifically by name ask for these five, or did the Administration pick these five?

MS. HARF: I'm not probably going to go into more details about the back-and-forth negotiations. This was the agreement we ended up coming to.

QUESTION: Because it begs the question whether or not some of them could have come from the 78 who have already been cleared for transfer.

MS. HARF: None of them were in the 78 already cleared for transfer. They were all in this middle – and so everyone who's not cleared for transfer already or has been referred for prosecution is eligible for review by the Periodic Review Board.

QUESTION: Correct. No, maybe I should be more clear.

MS. HARF: Yeah.

QUESTION: I mean, if given the choice, I assume the Administration would have picked five people who had already been cleared for transfer who have already been deemed not a threat to --

MS. HARF: I think we wanted – given the choice, we wanted to find an acceptable agreement where we could get our soldier back and feel like we sufficiently mitigated the risk for whoever we transfer.

QUESTION: So can I just ask --

QUESTION: Marie --

QUESTION: -- you're making the argument that you should get something for these people, for these --

MS. HARF: I'm making the argument that if – if, and this is an if – I'm breaking my own rule – they someday were eventually going to be transferred, then if we could get something for them now, that is, of course, something that I think most people would agree with. But that – to be fair, the broader context about why this decision was made was because we felt like, again, we had a short-time window with Bergdahl --

QUESTION: Sure.

MS. HARF: His health was declining. We needed to get him home and wanted to get him home, and that the Secretary of Defense had made, based on the interagency assessment we do when any – whenever a Gitmo detainee is transferred, had made the assessment that we had sufficiently mitigated the risk and it was in our national security interest to make this prisoner swap.

QUESTION: Yeah, okay. I understand that.

MS. HARF: Yeah.

QUESTION: But I'm just wondering more broadly now, does that mean that the others who are eligible for review or approved for transfer who remain in Guantanamo are now American bargaining chips?

MS. HARF: Well, there's no --

QUESTION: In other situations.

MS. HARF: Well, there's no other American POWs in Afghanistan being held by the Taliban.

QUESTION: No, but I mean there are other situations where there are Americans being held. Does that mean – I mean, I just think --

MS. HARF: I mean not --

QUESTION: -- that their lawyers might have an issue with that if --

MS. HARF: Not – again, I'm not saying it's a bargaining chip per se. I'm trying to put these five – I think people have – there's been a little confusion out there about who they are and what was eventually going to happen to them. I was trying to put that into the broader context.

QUESTION: But you said that the argument was that we should get something for them, which means equally the argument could be made --

MS. HARF: No.

QUESTION: -- for all those others.

MS. HARF: That's not --

QUESTION: It could be made. I'm not saying it's going to be made.

MS. HARF: Right. And I think every situation is different. We have a broad goal of closing Guantanamo Bay. If we can charge people, we will. When we can approve people for transfer through this interagency process, we'll do that because we do at the end of the day want to close Guantanamo Bay. We had one American soldier who's been a – who's a POW in Afghanistan, so this is an incredibly unique situation, I would say, and wouldn't compare it to any other detainees. And I wasn't trying to set a precedent. I was just – I think people have had a little confusion about eventually what was going to happen to these five at the end of this.

QUESTION: Marie, a follow-up question to Arshad's: How do you define concessions?

MS. HARF: I'm happy to see if there's a legal definition for you.

QUESTION: And Marie, critics are – have said that this is a very bad deal, that these weren't just five guys swept up on the battlefield in 2002, they were high-ranking Taliban officials, direct ties to al-Qaida, it was essentially the Taliban's war cabinet – how is this a good deal?

MS. HARF: Well, first of all, our American POW is home and he's going to be reunited with his family. So I think by any measure, that's something that's good.

QUESTION: Most would --

MS. HARF: Second --

QUESTION: Most would argue that an alleged deserter, outside of him being reunited with his family, that was not a good deal.

MS. HARF: I don't think most would argue that, Lucas. I think you can look at what – first of all – well, I think you can look at what military leadership has said. Regardless of how he went missing, it is our duty to bring him home regardless. And I would trust our military leadership, Chairman Dempsey, the Secretary of the Army McHugh, and others who have spoken to this, Secretary Hagel. So that's a separate conversation. They are doing an investigation now to determine the facts.

And I'm not saying we don't believe anyone that's come out. I think there's been some confusion about this, too. I'm not saying that we – certainly we at the State Department aren't doing the investigation, but people who are looking at it need to get all the facts. They will look at a variety of sources to get them. If there's been misconduct, Chairman Dempsey was clear there will be consequences.

QUESTION: In 2010 the Pentagon did conduct an investigation and concluded that Sergeant Bergdahl walked off the COP.

MS. HARF: I think you're misrepresenting that. First of all, DOD can probably speak more clearly to that. But again, in 2010 we didn't have all the facts. Many more facts have emerged since then, including now the person at the center of this.

QUESTION: So if you didn't have all the facts, why did you agree to this deal?

MS. HARF: I'm sorry?

QUESTION: You didn't have all the facts when --

MS. HARF: Because as I said, the facts of how he got into Taliban custody have no bearing on whether or not we bring him home, period. Those are two separate questions. And we will look at all the information. We – I'm sure that people are talking to people he served with, they're talking to him when they can when he's in good enough health. And they – the Army has said that it's launching a review. And look, if there was misconduct, there will be consequences.

QUESTION: Did the State Department know about these alleged allegations about him being a deserter?

MS. HARF: I think there have been – as I said yesterday, perhaps not as eloquently as I should have – there have been a range of reports about what happened to him and how he ended up in Taliban custody – there really have – a range of them since he went missing. You can read press reports going back several years to attest to that. So obviously, we were aware of some of that. But again, what we were focused on was getting him home. Determining how he went missing is for a later time.

QUESTION: And what evidence did you have that his health was in danger?

MS. HARF: I mean, we had a variety of evidence. Some of it you've seen publicly in terms of proof of life. I'm not going to go into details about all the information we had about him.

QUESTION: Does the State Department think – back to the Taliban video – that when he was walking to the bird he looked like he was in pretty good shape?

MS. HARF: I'm not going to make a medical assessment based on a video. This is a United States soldier who has been in captivity for five years. I can't – none of us here can imagine what that would do to you or how you would come out of that on the other end, and that's why I think we all owe him and his family, regardless of our feelings on this, a little bit of time so he can get in better health, he can reunite with his family, and then we'll figure out what happened. But I think we owe it to him to do that.

QUESTION: Will the investigation be --

QUESTION: (Inaudible) question? You have consistently referred to Mr. Bergdahl as a prisoner of war.

MS. HARF: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: Who decides who is a prisoner of war and who is not a prisoner of war?

MS. HARF: What do you mean, "who decides"? I mean, he was an American serviceman --

QUESTION: Well, the U.S. Government --

MS. HARF: -- taken by the enemy in an armed conflict where we're operating under an AUMF.

QUESTION: Right, I get that. But the people who are imprisoned at Guantanamo Bay were – although they could by some people be construed to be prisoners of war, and some of them were indeed taken on the battlefield in the course of a military conflict – they were deemed by the United States government not to be prisoners of war. They were very carefully defined to be enemy combatants, I think the historical record shows, so as to be able to strip them of the right --

MS. HARF: Well --

QUESTION: Let me finish – the rights that would have been --

QUESTION: Afforded --

QUESTION: -- granted to – or afforded, exactly – prisoners of war. So you guys can call – you say that Sergeant Bergdahl was a prisoner of war, but maybe from the Taliban's point of view he was not a prisoner of war.

QUESTION: He was just swept up on the battlefield of Afghanistan, just like the Taliban, right?

MS. HARF: Yeah, wait – can I make a few comments, though? So first of all, I can speak for what's happened during this Administration, the decisions we've made about what we call people. Obviously, we inherited a situation with respect to Guantanamo Bay that we have tried through various mechanisms to rectify. The Supreme Court has held that Common Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions protects Taliban and other detainees captured in non-international armed conflicts like the one in Afghanistan. So they have – the Supreme Court has weighed in on this. Obviously, we inherited a situation where we were dealing with Guantanamo Bay that was operating a certain way – and again, we've tried to rectify it to the extent that we can.

Whether or not members of the Taliban meet particular prisoner of war criteria, including, I think, that it has to be between states – the prisoner of war term, I believe, in the Geneva Conventions refers to conflict between states. Obviously, the Taliban is not a state.

QUESTION: Right. So how then, if I may ask, is --

MS. HARF: In terms of the Geneva Convention.

QUESTION: -- Mister Bergdahl a prisoner of war --

MS. HARF: Because he's a member of a --

QUESTION: -- because you're an ally of the state of Afghanistan, correct me? So how is he a prisoner of war?

MS. HARF: So he is a member of the United States military --

QUESTION: You talked about conflict between states.

MS. HARF: Right, but he is a member of a state army being held during a time of war where we're operating under an AUMF in American law.

QUESTION: That you --

MS. HARF: I'm happy to check with the lawyers if there's more details --

QUESTION: No, no, I get it. It's just --

MS. HARF: -- and I'm not re-litigating why the Bush Administration called people a certain thing when they got to Guantanamo.

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

QUESTION: No, no. But the point I'm trying to make is when you justify your – the President's decision to secure his release in the manner that he did – I take no position on the merits of that --

MS. HARF: Yeah.

QUESTION: -- by using certain terms like "prisoner of war" for your guy and not prisoner of war for the Taliban people, you're using language in a way that tries to justify something, but it's not clear to me at all whether the use of the language – and maybe it is – is actually justified.

MS. HARF: So can I – just speaking, I think, to your – I think your broader point: that we believe that prisoner swaps during a time of war – forgetting about the legal definitions under the Geneva Convention or international law – are – have a long historical precedent and are justified, and this was one of them.

I think the President has been clear when it comes to Guantanamo Bay that we inherited a situation we did not agree with; that we are bound in some respects by some of the legal rulings, by what Congress has tried to do. But the fundamental notion that we want to close the prison, that we want these – charge or transfer where we can, and that we have improved the situation there is something that is in line with, I think, what you're getting at. I think. And I can't defend what was done in the previous eight years when Guantanamo Bay was open, but the President has been very clear about the incredibly hurtful nature of Guantanamo Bay to the United States – how we're seen overseas, how it in many cases has not been in line with our values, and that's why he has committed to close it.

So I'm trying to get, I think – I mean, language is important, absolutely. And here we very much stand by the notion that this was prisoner swap during a time of war. But I think actions and how we're treating these people and how we're trying to rectify the situation is in some ways more important.

QUESTION: So are we now prepared to afford the remaining 160 or whatever number of detainees --

MS. HARF: Hundred and forty-nine.

QUESTION: -- hundred and forty-nine detainees that remain at Guantanamo – are we now willing to afford them POW status?

MS. HARF: This in no way changes the system we are operating under at Guantanamo Bay today. This in no way – which has been the subject of many legal cases, congressional action – again, we inherited a situation; we've attempted to rectify it. Congress has done quite a bit, as has the court system, to put in place how Guantanamo Bay operates today, and this in no way changes that, period.

QUESTION: Marie, just a follow-up real quick --

MS. HARF: Uh-huh.

QUESTION: -- about the Taliban prisoners at Guantanamo. Can you restate how you classified them? Were they part of a detainee group scheduled for release?

MS. HARF: No. As I said, there have been – just give me one second.

QUESTION: How many are (inaudible) --

MS. HARF: There are 78 prisoners at Guantanamo Bay that are approved for transfer. These five were not part of that. There are also about 30, I think, who have been referred for prosecution. They weren't part of that group either. So what's 149 – I'm not going to do all the math here.

QUESTION: So if they weren't prior scheduled for release, why would they be part of the negotiations with the Taliban?

MS. HARF: Well, again – but I think it's more important that they weren't on the list that had been referred for prosecution, and it's unlikely – unlikely, not totally wouldn't happen – but unlikely that they would be added to that.

So we saw an opportunity to get back the one American POW. This is – without getting into the specifics of the negotiations, these are the five people that we ended up with, where we could get an agreement. We felt we mitigated the risk from these five, and the assurances the Government of Qatar gave us – that's the decision we came to in order to get this man home.

QUESTION: Has the Secretary commented on reports that they're – these suspects are going free now?

MS. HARF: Well, the Government of Qatar gave very specific assurances about how we will – they will and we all will be keeping an eye on them, and at the very highest levels to the President of the United States, which is I think assurances the Government of Qatar, as we do, takes very seriously. So without, obviously, getting into the specifics of what that looks like, we've been given the assurances that we've mitigated the risk.

QUESTION: But there have been reports out now --

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

QUESTION: But there have been reports out there that after a year they'll be eligible to return to Afghanistan, and I think some people in Afghanistan are actually quite worried about that.

MS. HARF: Well again, we feel like we've sufficiently mitigated the risk to American – the Americans, American national security, American troops. Obviously, you know our position going forward on our role in Afghanistan, and I think that the United States military has been very clear that they will take action against anyone who threatens the United States in Afghanistan.

QUESTION: So it's correct then; then they will be eligible to go home to Afghanistan?

MS. HARF: I'm not going to go into specifics about what the agreement looked like, but suffice to say, we are confident in the assurances we've been given.

QUESTION: Can we change topic?

QUESTION: No, I have two more on Afghanistan.

QUESTION: No, I have – we have more.

QUESTION: (Inaudible) 31 minutes on Afghanistan.

MS. HARF: Yeah, guys. We're going to do like --

QUESTION: (Inaudible) topic?

MS. HARF: Wait. Hold on, Said. We're going to do one more from you on Afghanistan and one more from Lara on Afghanistan.

…

QUESTION: In addition to these five, which you said are in the middle bucket, are there anyone else from the Gitmo prisoners – detainees in the middle bucket?

MS. HARF: I mean, do the math. What's 149 minus 78 minus approximately 30?

QUESTION: I think a few are left in there.

MS. HARF: Yeah. And our goal – again, this is under the goal of closing the prison at Guantanamo Bay, which, as I said, we've been very clear hurt America's reputation overseas. I think the President has been clear – probably created more terrorists than it ever took off the battlefield because of the way it's been able to be used for propaganda and is not how we do

things in the United States of America. That's why we're going to close it. We're at 149 today and hopefully we'll be able to make some more progress.

June 3, 2014

Marie Harf, Deputy Spokesperson
Daily Press Briefing, selections on Afghanistan and the Department
Washington, DC

QUESTION: Just going back yesterday to our discussion about Sergeant Bergdahl.

MS. HARF: Uh-huh.

QUESTION: Doesn't the deal to free him further legitimize the Taliban?

MS. HARF: No.

QUESTION: You don't think you've made them a power broker in the region?

MS. HARF: No. Not at all.

QUESTION: I thought the United States does not negotiate with terrorists.

MS. HARF: I think Jen was very clear yesterday that this was a situation of an exchange of prisoners during a time of war. Sergeant Bergdahl was a combatant who was obtained in the course of an armed conflict. We have done this throughout our history. You heard the President speak to this today. From Revolutionary times, we exchange prisoners of war in times of war. The Secretary of Defense, as we always do, undergoes a process in coordination with the interagency to determine the risk factors associated with Guantanamo releases, as we've done with every detainee who's been released.

QUESTION: But the Guantanamo --

QUESTION: Can you explain, though, real quick – Arshad, real --

QUESTION: -- detainees are not prisoners of war, correct? They're enemy combatants, specifically excluded from all of the protections and rights that are normally given to prisoners of war. They're not prisoners of war, correct?

MS. HARF: The exchange of prisoners in a time of war, whether or not technically we use that term or we use the term enemy combatants, has a deep historical context and is one we're comfortable with using those diplomatic means to make the exchange. We believe that was the right approach. Again, this is a long-accepted standard in international times of --

QUESTION: Can I --

QUESTION: Can you – one more real quick?

MS. HARF: Yeah. We can all – we can do more than one.

QUESTION: Can you explain to me how this deal to free five Guantanamo detainees does not set up the Taliban to be a power broker?

MS. HARF: Explain to me how it does.

QUESTION: I think it's pretty self-evident.

MS. HARF: I don't. I would disagree with the premise. Look, we've said that in Afghanistan the process forward here needs to be Afghan-led reconciliation, Afghans talking to Afghans, between Taliban, between the government. We've long talked about that being the path forward here. The bottom line here is they had an American citizen – an American serviceman – in captivity for five years. And as you heard the President say today, we have a responsibility to bring these people home. We had a short window here. This is the situation that we were able to undertake to get him home.

QUESTION: And is there a reason your counterpart in the Taliban issued statements rejoicing about the freeing of these prisoners?

MS. HARF: I don't think that I want to comment on my counterpart in the Taliban.

QUESTION: Why are you calling the --

QUESTION: (Inaudible.)

MS. HARF: Let's wait, Lucas gets --

QUESTION: One more real quick.

MS. HARF: Uh-huh.

QUESTION: Do you – has the State Department since yesterday – I noticed yesterday, you said that Sergeant Bergdahl was taken captive during an armed conflict.

MS. HARF: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: Yesterday, Jen said, "during combat." Do you – does the State --

MS. HARF: There's no difference.

QUESTION: There's no difference?

MS. HARF: Uh-uh.

QUESTION: Walking off the base without a weapon on his own accord, that's not combat.

MS. HARF: Well, I think you need to be careful before you get ahead of the facts, Lucas, because one, this – he hasn't even been reunited with his family yet. He's undergoing treatment. I don't know if some of you saw General Dempsey, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, comment on his Facebook page today. He said, "As for the circumstances of his capture, when he is able to provide them, we'll learn the facts." So I would really caution people from jumping to conclusions based on hearsay or third-hand discussions about what the facts might have been.

But also, I would point out my counterpart from a different place, from the Pentagon. Admiral Kirby made a good point in an interview yesterday where he said – he's an admiral in the Navy and he said: Look, whether someone jumps, is pushed, or falls off of a ship, if someone falls off of it, you turn the ship around and you get them and you bring them home. Doesn't matter why.

QUESTION: But you don't – you usually don't have to give five Taliban detainees to turn the ship around, just a rudder order.

MS. HARF: I would point to previous wars, the – and prisoner exchanges. If you want to go back and look at the numbers of prisoners exchanged in Vietnam for American POWs or in World War II, they're actually much, much higher.

QUESTION: Does the State --

MS. HARF: So the historical precedent is actually very different.

QUESTION: Does the State Department consider Sergeant Bergdahl to be a deserter?

MS. HARF: The State Department – no, Lucas. Look, what we said is we are going to learn the facts about what happened here. We said very clearly in a statement from the Secretary on Saturday that Sergeant Bergdahl was a member of the United States military who volunteered to serve his country. We don't know the facts about what happened yet on that day.

QUESTION: (Inaudible) according to those around him, his platoon mates, his squad mates, company mates, they said he walked off the base.

MS. HARF: Lucas, some of them – other – there are conflicting reports out there about this. Look --

QUESTION: Are there?

MS. HARF: There are. Go Google it on the web and you'll find a ton of conflicting reports. The fact is we're still establishing a fact pattern about what happened, how he ended up in Taliban captivity. So when he is able to share those, as Chairman Dempsey said today, he will. He also said, like any American, he is innocent until proven guilty. Our army's leaders will not look away from misconduct if it occurred. In the meantime, we will continue to care for him and his family.

So I think people need to be really careful about believing every second or third-hand report out there, and also what the President, what the Secretary, what Chairman Dempsey have said: Regardless of how he went missing, it is our responsibility to him to bring him home, period.

QUESTION: And when you say second- and third-hand reports, when his squad mates who served with him overseas said he walked off the --

MS. HARF: Lucas, I'm sure some of them – I mean, look, there's a lot of rumor and telephone game that's being played here about what happened. Not all --

QUESTION: So you're saying that the guys on television last night – his squad mates, platoon mates – were not correct?

MS. HARF: I'm saying we don't know the fact pattern yet here. We don't. Nobody knows exactly what happened that night. As the facts emerge, as he's able to discuss them with the Department of Defense, we will see where that takes us.

QUESTION: Going back to --

MS. HARF: That happened five years ago. This is a situation --

QUESTION: So you've had all this time, five years, to determine whether he was a deserter or not. That's a long time.

MS. HARF: He's been in captivity, Lucas. I think he's probably the person who knows best what happened on that night.

QUESTION: But – well, I think that his squad mates have the best indication what happened that night.

MS. HARF: I don't think that that's the case.

QUESTION: Can we move – can we try something else? On the five --

MS. HARF: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: -- on the detainees that were released to Qatar, can you talk a little bit more about what gives you the assurances that these Taliban will not re-enter the battlefield? Our understanding is that they are not under any kind of house arrest, that they're able to move freely without – within the country. And so what gives you that --

MS. HARF: Yeah, so a couple points on that. The first – and the President spoke about this today as well – but the first is, obviously, we're not going to get into the specifics of the agreement. But this is an agreement between the head of the Government of Qatar and the President of the United States, a very high-level agreement about working to mitigate the notion that these five guys will be able to return to the battlefield.

So we always undertake a threat assessment, we attempt to mitigate that in the best way possible. In this case, we certified that we had mitigated sufficiently that risk because of the assurances, again, given at the highest levels of the Qatari Government to the highest levels of our government. And the President spoke to it today where he said, and I quote, "We'll be keeping eyes on them."

Is there a possibility some of them trying to return to actions that are detrimental to us? Absolutely. There's always that possibility with everyone we release from Gitmo, but we would not have undertaken this if we did not believe it was in the national security interest of the United States to do so, period, starting with the President and the Secretary on down.

QUESTION: And some of the detainees that have left to go to their – to be expatriated to third countries or to go to their home countries have been put under some kind of house arrest or under detention --

MS. HARF: We're not going to get into specifics --

QUESTION: -- are they able to roam free throughout Qatar?

MS. HARF: We're not going to get into the specifics of what the agreement with Qatar looks like in any way.

QUESTION: Do you still consider them for the next year or however long – can you say how long this agreement is in effect?

MS. HARF: The Government of Qatar – for a year, and the Government of Qatar has been very clear, again, to the highest levels of this government, that there are going to be severe restrictions in place on them. I'm not going to outline what those are.

QUESTION: Marie --

QUESTION: Are they – are you saying whether you consider them "detainees" for the next year? Or do you consider them free from detention?

MS. HARF: Well, they've been released from Guantanamo Bay --

QUESTION: They've been released to the custody of Qatar, but I don't think it's been made clear whether they're still be detained or whether they're – they've, in fact, been released.

MS. HARF: I'm not going to go into the details of their situation in Qatar in any way.

QUESTION: What about some kind of rehab center? The Administration has spoken about that for Yemenis going --

MS. HARF: No details on this case specifically.

QUESTION: But there's reports --

QUESTION: But you can say they're under strict restrictions.

MS. HARF: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: But there's --

QUESTION: And – sorry. And after the year, it's not clear yet whether they'll be able to return to Afghanistan or not?

MS. HARF: I don't have any more details about what the agreement looks like. As we said, we received sufficient assurances from the Government of Qatar that mitigated the risk here and that we believe led to the fact that we would be able to bring our one American POW in Afghanistan home. The President said very clearly yesterday there's always a risk. But we have all of these guys in Guantanamo Bay; we need – we have said it is our goal as an Administration to close the prison in Guantanamo Bay. That's why we take a very – in some cases – very slow, methodical look at who we release, where we release them, and what the restrictions are in place.

QUESTION: Is that why it's five to one deal?

MS. HARF: Lucas, you're trying to boil this down to something that it's not. Look, in previous wars we've exchanged prisoners of war in vastly different ratios. That's not the point here, right? The point here is that we had an opportunity and a very small time window to get our American serviceman home with his family.

QUESTION: But I think the Taliban also probably realized there was this fire sale in Guantanamo.

MS. HARF: I'm sorry?

QUESTION: I think --

MS. HARF: Is that a technical term?

QUESTION: No. When you said that you'd been wanting to close Guantanamo --

MS. HARF: Yes, we do want to close the prison at Guantanamo Bay.

QUESTION: So was that negotiating from strength when we were negotiating with the Taliban?

MS. HARF: Look, we got our one American POW in Afghanistan home. He will be home with his family. The Taliban don't have him in captivity any more. They don't have control of him. They can't use him for any kind of purpose they would want to use someone in captivity for. So I

think that that is an important step, yes. It was in our national security interest to do so. Look, there's not much more I can say on it than that.

QUESTION: But when Susan Rice on Sunday said that he served with honor and distinction, clearly that was not the case, based on many accounts on this --

MS. HARF: I think we need to wait to see the fact pattern here. I really do. I think people need to be cautious about assuming everything – no offense – they read in the paper or see on TV. This is a man who signed up to serve his country, who went to battle wearing the uniform of the United States. We don't know what happened in the time he was there. We don't know what happened.

QUESTION: Allegedly he changed his mind.

MS. HARF: There are --

QUESTION: Isn't there an investigation going on?

MS. HARF: There is. There is an investigation going on. We're looking into the fact pattern right now and we need to get all the facts before we make assumptions about this guy who's been in captivity by the Taliban for five years. Let's remember that.

QUESTION: I've got a follow-up going on Dana's – I'm just curious, and if you can't answer this, maybe you can take the question. Why wouldn't the State Department or the Obama Administration be public about the terms of the agreement with the Qataris? I mean, there's no Privacy Act requirement or something with the detainees, and it's --

MS. HARF: Matt told you to say that about the Privacy Act, didn't he?

QUESTION: No, he did not. (Laughter.) Contrary to popular belief, I --

MS. HARF: I know you don't – Matt doesn't tell you what to say.

QUESTION: Matt doesn't tell me everything.

MS. HARF: I know. (Laughter.)

QUESTION: But it would also – I think people would agree it would assure the U.S. public that their safety is – has been assured.

MS. HARF: So I think, to counter that a little bit – look, this obviously involved very sensitive diplomatic negotiations here involving the Government of Qatar, who was the one negotiating with the Taliban, and getting to a place in a very short time window – as I've said, as General Dempsey said, the last best opportunity to save his life – where we could get an agreement here. So there are reasons not to put out all of that, I think, for probably very good reasons. But as more details are able to be shared, we will. But we as an Administration looked at the agreement

and certified – as we have in many other cases of Guantanamo detainees being sent home, both in this Administration and last, that the threat had been mitigated.

QUESTION: But surely if everything was on the up and up, the Qataris wouldn't care if the details, at least some of the details --

MS. HARF: That's not a fair assumption to make. We don't talk about the details of many detainees we send back to their countries for a variety of reasons.

QUESTION: But these aren't as high-profile cases as this one was.

MS. HARF: Again, we feel assured by the agreement we've put in place.

QUESTION: Sorry. As a follow-up, do you have any comment on the reports that the Afghanistan Government has filed a complaint – or lodged a complaint about this agreement and not being made aware in the terms?

MS. HARF: So as we said in the statement Secretary Kerry released on Saturday, he had a call with President Karzai where he discussed this with him, talked to him about it. In general, the Afghan Government, of course, knew that we were working through the Government of Qatar to negotiate the return of Sergeant Bergdahl, broadly speaking, right? And as we've all said, as Secretary Hagel said, this was an operation that had to be very closely held for very good operational security reasons. We wanted to get this American home.

QUESTION: And I have a second question that's more technical. Does the State Department consider the Afghan Taliban to be a terrorist organization?

MS. HARF: They are not designated as a Foreign Terrorist Organization. They are designated as a Specially Designated Terrorist Organization under an executive order, which is different. That is a technical question. I think that's probably as far as my technical knowledge takes me.

But in this case, we were negotiating – in a prisoner of war situation, people that have been taken during armed conflict, and that's the basis under which we were negotiating here. And we were not directly negotiating with the Taliban either. The Government of Qatar was.

QUESTION: Can you talk a little bit about what the difference is between being the FTO and – is it sanctions or --

MS. HARF: I'm happy for our folks to get you some details on that.

QUESTION: Okay.

MS. HARF: It's my understanding that the Specially Designated Terrorist Organization refers mainly to funding and financing within the United States and cutting off the ability for people to finance. I'm happy to check.

…

QUESTION: Is this leading to direct talks with the Taliban, the contacts that you maintained during these talks?

MS. HARF: Well, again, we didn't negotiate directly with the Taliban; the Government of Qatar did.

QUESTION: But do you consider holding direct talks with the Taliban?

MS. HARF: The Taliban, as people know, suspended direct --

QUESTION: Because you have said this is leading to a political opening, the talk --

MS. HARF: Well, they suspended direct talks in 2012 and we have not resumed them. Obviously, we appreciate the support of the Government of Qatar in playing a mediating role here.

Look, we've been very clear that if this could open the possibilities for Afghan-led reconciliation, Afghans talking to Afghans, that that would be a good thing for the future of Afghanistan, but nothing new to update on direct talks.

QUESTION: And Congressman Mike Rogers in an interview this morning said that the sergeant was under the custody of Haqqani Network and he was not under the custody of Taliban. Would you --

MS. HARF: Well, it's my understanding that the Taliban --

QUESTION: Is that your understanding?

MS. HARF: -- is the one who gave him back. That's not my – I'm happy to check. That's not my understanding. On the congressional side --

QUESTION: Because he's head of the House Intelligence Committee.

MS. HARF: I'm aware of the positions he holds. We will be briefing all members of the House and Senate in the coming days in a classified session, so – we – interagency team, not just the State Department on this, just to update folks.

…

MS. HARF: I know. We're still trying to schedule it.

QUESTION: I have one more Afghan --

MS. HARF: The House is out of session, I think, right now.

QUESTION: Yeah. I have one more Afghan related. Are you aware of the – an Indian aid worker being kidnapped in the Herat Province?

MS. HARF: Let me see what I have on that. I believe we've seen those reports. Let me see. Hold on one second. Sorry. I need to clean out this book a little bit. Let me see afterwards if I can get you something.

QUESTION: Okay.

MS. HARF: I thought I had something, but I'm not sure I can find it. Let me just see.

QUESTION: And if I can add to that question: If the U.S. is providing any --

MS. HARF: Yeah, I'm sorry. I don't have it in here.

QUESTION: If the U.S. is providing any other assistance to the Indian Government on this (inaudible)?

MS. HARF: I'm not sure we've heard from them on this.

QUESTION: Okay.

June 2, 2014

Jen Psaki, Spokesperson
Daily Press Briefing, selections on Afghanistan and the Department
Washington, DC

QUESTION: Today, can we start with the Bowe Bergdahl situation and what the Department's role was in this, aside from the Secretary's phone call to President Karzai?

MS. PSAKI: Well, you noted the Secretary's phone call, which was included in the statement he provided – or we sent out this weekend. Obviously, this was an interagency process and we worked closely with the Department of Defense, the White House, and others where applicable. I don't have any other details to share beyond that at this point.

QUESTION: There are reports of a small team of negotiators, including people from the State Department, going to Qatar back last month. Well, last month isn't that long ago. But is that – are those correct?

MS. PSAKI: Well, there have been – we have long expressed an interest in discussing with the Taliban this issue, as well as other issues. And obviously our team, as the diplomats who are representing our government in this regard and any other regard, would be a part of that effort. I can check with them and see if there's more details they'd like to share.

QUESTION: Did – does this mean that that representative office that they were going to have in Doha is up and running?

MS. PSAKI: This was the only issue discussed with the Taliban, obviously through a third party, as you all know from the reports this weekend. We're hopeful that this will be an opening, but we have received no assurances to that point.

QUESTION: I understand that. But does this – but remember when the office was going to be opened --

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: -- and then it didn't because they wanted to call it something? Then --

QUESTION: The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan.

QUESTION: Did it --

QUESTION: It did open briefly. They closed it.

QUESTION: Did it ever open?

QUESTION: They closed it.

QUESTION: Right. It closed.

QUESTION: Yeah.

QUESTION: Does this mean now that that office has been opened under --

MS. PSAKI: It doesn't. We worked, again, through the Qataris, who were the third party, who were the negotiators on our behalf.

QUESTION: So there was – okay. So there was no direct contact, are you saying, between U.S. officials and the Taliban representatives? It was all done through the Qataris?

MS. PSAKI: The negotiations were done through the Qataris, yes.

QUESTION: But does that mean that there was no direct contact between U.S. officials and the Taliban?

MS. PSAKI: I don't have any other details to share beyond that.

QUESTION: All right. And I just have one more on this. And that is since you, the Administration, has decided to do this, does it have any implications for other cases where Americans are held, specifically two of them, Alan Gross and Bob Levinson? There's some discussion in the ether that it might be appropriate to trade the three remaining Cuban Five for Mr. Gross, given the fact that he was, while not a soldier serving in uniform, was working for – indirectly for the U.S. Government, as was Bob Levinson when he was – went missing on Kish Island.

MS. PSAKI: Well, as you all know, but it's worth repeating, Sergeant Bergdahl was a member of – is a member of the military who was detained during an armed conflict. That obviously is a unique circumstance in any case. Whether it's Alan Gross or Kenneth Bae or others who are detained American citizens, we take every step possible to make the case and to take steps to ensure their return home to the United States.

QUESTION: Right. But this seems to be – especially in the Alan Gross case, the Cubans have made it perfectly clear – not just privately, but I mean, they're screaming it from the rooftops – that if there can be a resolution to the three remaining of the Cuban Five, that then Alan Gross will be freed.

MS. PSAKI: I – again, every circumstance is different, Matt, and I'm not going to speak to every circumstance from the podium. But this is a case where he was a member – is a member of the military. He was detained during an armed combat – armed combat. These were a unique set of circumstances.

QUESTION: So working for another agency of the government makes a difference? You're not prepared to trade people for someone who was not serving in uniform?

MS. PSAKI: Again, Matt, we take every circumstance and every case of an American citizen being detained overseas incredibly seriously, and we do everything we can to assure their return.

QUESTION: And then my last one then is: So that means that the Administration is still opposed to any deal with the Cubans for Alan Gross that involves the three remaining Cuban Five?

MS. PSAKI: Nothing has changed in that case, no.

QUESTION: How do you address the argument that the Administration violated the provision of the National Defense Authorization Act under which it was obliged to give Congress 30 days' notice prior to the release of anyone from Gitmo?

MS. PSAKI: Well, this situation here – it was a – due to a near-term opportunity to save his life, so a case dealing with the life and health of an American citizen who is a member of the military who was detained while in combat, we took steps and there was a decision made to move as quickly as possible to secure his release and return home. I would note that there is – the President did sign a signing statement when he signed the NDAA which made clear that the Executive Branch must have the flexibility, among other things, to act swiftly in conducting negotiations with foreign countries regarding the circumstances of detainee transfers. And in this case, there were concerns about his health, about his safety, and we took the steps needed to return him home.

QUESTION: But in the United States system, the President doesn't get to write the laws. It's Congress that writes the laws, and then he has the opportunity to sign them or not sign them. Candidate Obama, I think, spoke against the Bush – the George W. Bush Administration's use of signing statements to try to reinterpret the law as written by Congress. So is it your position that the fact that he, the President, wrote a signing statement means that this is not the law?

MS. PSAKI: I felt it was a helpful piece of context that many people wouldn't be aware of. We – in this case, when you're the commander-in-chief and you're sitting at your desk and you are dealing with the question of the life and safety of an individual who has served our country in the military, you make choices. And that was what was – what happened in this case.

QUESTION: So it's okay to violate the law in an instance where the life and safety of a member of the Armed Forces is at risk?

MS. PSAKI: There was a determination made that given these unique circumstances such a transfer should go forward notwithstanding the notice requirement of the NDAA.

QUESTION: And if that were the case, and since you talked about the importance of speed, did you notify any member of Congress prior to the release of the Guantanamo Five? Even if it

wasn't 30 days, did you give them a day, an hour, a minute, any kind of advance notice, or none whatsoever?

MS. PSAKI: Again, we took steps that were needed in order to assure his safe return to the United States, and there'll be a notification process that will be ongoing in the coming days.

QUESTION: Would you say that this was actually just a prisoner of war exchange, just a POW exchange?

MS. PSAKI: I would characterize it exactly as I – as exactly as the Secretary did in his statement, the President did in his statement on Saturday.

QUESTION: Did you expect – is the view from this building that as talks go forward with – about U.S. presence or future presence in Afghanistan, is this a good step, a positive step?

MS. PSAKI: Again, I think in that case we have – the President made his announcement regarding the ongoing presence. There'll be a political process that will continue in Afghanistan. Both candidates have indicated they'll sign the BSA. I don't see a connection at this point.

QUESTION: Jen?

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: While DOD has a role of managing the detention of Guantanamo Bay prisoners, this building typically deals with the resettlement and repatriation of those when they were released from Gitmo. So what is this building's role now with those five Taliban prisoners – former prisoners in question and their year ahead in Qatar?

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm. Well, I can't discuss all of the special assurances we received from Qatar, but I can tell you that they included, among other things, a travel ban and regular information sharing on the detainees between our governments. I can also tell you and point you to the fact that there was sufficient – that these assurances were sufficient enough to allow the Secretary of Defense, in coordination with the national security team, to determine that the threat posed by the detainees to the United States would sufficiently – was sufficiently mitigated, and that the transfer was in the U.S. national security interest. So as you know, we have long – that is a bottom-line requirement of ours, and we took every precaution in this case.

QUESTION: But after the year, when they in theory could go back home to Afghanistan, will this building play a role in this? Is this a special case where they're going to be handled differently when it comes to repatriating former prisoners?

MS. PSAKI: We're in close contact, obviously, as part of our agreement about regular information sharing with the Government of Qatar. I don't have anything to read out for you in terms of what will happen at the end of a year.

QUESTION: Jen, why did the Administration agree to so few restrictions with releasing the Guantanamo five?

MS. PSAKI: I would not characterize it that way at all. Again, I can't outline all of them, but there were sufficient assurances in our view. We're going to be in regular contact with regular information sharing with Qatar, and we also have – there's a travel ban that will be in place.

QUESTION: But can you guarantee that that travel ban, after a year, they will not return to the region?

MS. PSAKI: Again, we're in very close contact. The assurances were sufficient enough that the Secretary of Defense signed off on the transfer.

QUESTION: From the Qataris?

MS. PSAKI: Yes, from the Qataris, yeah.

QUESTION: In what kind of a situation are they going to be held in – or living in Qatar? Are they going to be living as virtually free people despite, we say, the travel ban? Or are they going to be in a minimum security jail? I mean, there's lots of range of options of how they could be kept.

MS. PSAKI: I don't have any other details on that specifically. I'm happy to see if there's more we can share from this building, or the Government of Qatar may have more specific details.

QUESTION: And Mr. Berghdal, he's now in Landstuhl? Is that right?

MS. PSAKI: That – I believe that's the case. I haven't received an update.

QUESTION: When is he due to be heading back to the United States?

MS. PSAKI: I don't have any update on that. I believe they're going through a regular processing there. But I don't have an update on when he'll be returned.

QUESTION: And when you say that his life was in danger, are you able to tell us exactly what condition he was suffering from, why you believe that he – his health was failing so badly?

MS. PSAKI: I don't have any other details on his health than I can outline. Obviously, he is now with U.S. Government officials. There'll be an entire process to determine answers to those questions and what will be next, but right now our focus is on returning him to his family.

QUESTION: One more – statistics say that one-third of all Guantanamo Bay detainees go back to the battlefield. So that means roughly one of these guys is headed back. Can you comment on that?

MS. PSAKI: I think I spoke to how confident we are about the assurances. Margaret?

QUESTION: Can I just quickly – is Envoy Dobbins still lead in any potential peace negotiations? You said there's hope there's an opening. Is he the U.S.'s man on that still?

MS. PSAKI: He certainly continues to be one of the main points of contact or point people on that issue, yes.

QUESTION: Was he involved with this particular prisoner swap issue?

MS. PSAKI: I don't have any other names to read out. I'm happy to check on the question – I understand why you're asking it – and see if there's more we can share on specific individuals from this building.

QUESTION: But – I'm sorry --

QUESTION: The Taliban have – sorry, Elise – the Taliban have characterized this as a victory. Is that the U.S. Administration views it? Is it a victory for the Taliban?

MS. PSAKI: Certainly we would not. I've seen those comments. Our focus – and has long been our focus; we've spoken about this publicly in here and in other buildings in the Administration – has been securing the safe return of Sergeant Bergdahl. This, in our view, is a – was an exciting day. It was a tremendous relief for the family, and that's what our focus was in these discussions.

QUESTION: And how do you respond to the critics that – who say that now one American is worth five Taliban?

MS. PSAKI: Again --

QUESTION: Or other terrorists?

QUESTION: Or other terrorists, obviously?

MS. PSAKI: There is a long history, as you all know, of – when there are prisoners of war of cases that are similar. I'm not going to go into all of that history from here. I know you're all familiar with it. But again, in this case, we took steps needed to secure the return and release of a prisoner of war who was a member of the military, and that's why we made the decisions we did.

QUESTION: You don't regard the inmates at Guantanamo Bay as prisoners of war, do you?

MS. PSAKI: I don't think we've characterized them that way, no.

QUESTION: No, but you talked about it as being prisoners of war, and it was my understanding the people at --

MS. PSAKI: I was referring to Sergeant Bergdahl.

QUESTION: So there's a prisoner of war who was traded for five --

QUESTION: Prisoners.

QUESTION: -- what was the actual term?

…

QUESTION: Enemy combatants, yes. So it's not actually a prisoner of war exchange; it's one prisoner of war.

MS. PSAKI: Perhaps I should've taken an 'S' off the end.

Go ahead, Elise.

QUESTION: You talked about – that you hope that this might spur some kind of progress in the larger reconciliation negotiations. Now that the U.S. has resolved this issue with the Taliban, what now would the U.S. role be, should there even be one now that this is a kind of Afghan-Taliban issue?

MS. PSAKI: Well, we've always felt that in any reconciliation process, it would be Afghans talking to Afghans. And as you know, the Taliban cut off their direct talks with the United States back in 2012, and in this case there weren't direct talks. They were through the Qataris.

QUESTION: And they're limited to the Bergdahl case.

MS. PSAKI: Right, exactly. So I don't want to get ahead of where we are, and I have talked to our team about this. And some of them have addressed this. Obviously, this was a big priority for the United States. We'll see what happens moving forward. There aren't assurances that I am aware of of a broader dialogue.

QUESTION: But – I understand, but now that the U.S. and the President announced the U.S. troops are leaving, like what is there now for the U.S. to be involved with in this?

MS. PSAKI: In terms of a reconciliation process? We've long indicated we'd be open to playing a supportive role, but that it would always be Afghans talking with Afghans. So I don't think we're at that point in the process.

QUESTION: Jen, can you explain to us whether – I mean, considering that Qatar is really a small country and may not be able to control this guy or the Taliban, will the United States have like an observer role to make sure that he's exactly – they are exactly where they are supposed to be? Will they have like bracelets --

MS. PSAKI: There'll be an ongoing dialogue, as I mentioned, with the Qataris --

QUESTION: Not a dialogue. I'm saying that will you be able to see that they are there; they are not being removed, they are not to go before the year is up?

MS. PSAKI: Again, I think I've spoken to our assurances, and that's why the Secretary of Defense and others signed off on this agreement.

QUESTION: Just a quick follow-up to Matt's **QUESTION:** You mentioned because Sergeant Bergdahl is a member of the military you went after him. If you have a Marine reservist in Mexico, why can't you do a similar swap for him?

MS. PSAKI: I understand the desire to make comparisons, but we wouldn't compare them. This is – was a Marine who was taken while in combat, and you're talking about a situation of an individual who the Mexican authorities are accusing of violating the law.

QUESTION: But I'm sure we have five cartel members or somebody in jail we could swap in exchange for this Marine. Would that be a good trade?

MS. PSAKI: Thank you for your advice, Lucas --

QUESTION: Okay.

MS. PSAKI: -- but every situation is different.

…

QUESTION: Yes. Is the State Department – would you categorize Sergeant Bergdahl as a deserter?

MS. PSAKI: We would characterize him as a member of the military who was detained while in combat.

QUESTION: What strikes me about this is that you guys can say – you can shout it around the world that this is a unique case individually, but that doesn't mean that the Taliban or any other group that's like the Taliban are going to accept that, that this is a unique situation and the U.S. doesn't negotiate with terrorists. Is there any concern in this building for the safety of U.S. diplomats now in Afghanistan, who will be essentially on their own with a limited amount of security post-2016 – after the end of next year – because of this decision?

MS. PSAKI: Well, as you know, Matt, we consider – outside of this decision, we'll consider the needs of our diplomats who will continue serving in Afghanistan and what their security needs are. And that's been an ongoing process that will continue leading up to 2016.

QUESTION: Okay. So you – so people around the world – terrorists or whoever might seek to do harm to this country – should know that if you're – if an American isn't in uniform, it's a waste of time to abduct them, to take them prisoner, because you're not going to do anything? There's not going to be any trade?

MS. PSAKI: I think there's been a consistent position of the United States that we make every effort not to leave any man behind --

QUESTION: Right.

MS. PSAKI: -- who is serving our country in combat, and this is consistent with that.

QUESTION: Okay. And I just want to make sure one thing: You said – you talked about the life, health, and safety of Sergeant Bergdahl. But do you not have similar concerns about Alan Gross, about Bob Levinson, about people who are being held – people who were actually working either covertly or through an indirect – through indirect means, a contractor for USAID? Do --

MS. PSAKI: Certainly. Certainly, we do, Matt. And I did not mean to indicate anything other than that. And obviously, in each of those cases we remain --

QUESTION: Right.

MS. PSAKI: -- very focused on securing their return.

QUESTION: But in the Alan Gross case, the Cubans have made it very clear that if these prisoners are released who have served 15 years in prison already – if these guys are – these three guys, remaining three are released, that they will – that they'll basically release Gross, who you have similar concerns about his health and safety, as you did with Sergeant Bergdahl. And you wouldn't actually be breaking the law, or going around the law, in releasing these guys who have served – in releasing these three guys, the Cubans. I just don't understand --

MS. PSAKI: We look at each case differently, Matt.

QUESTION: Well, I understand. But what I don't understand – why you rule it out completely in the case of someone who was working for the government indirectly when he was arrested, taken prisoner in Cuba. Why is that a different – I just don't understand why, if you have the same concerns and you can deal with the situation with the snap of a finger by releasing people --

MS. PSAKI: As you know, there have been – there has been work on this case for years, as you know. So only in the last week has there been an opening that we looked into, and obviously pursued. But in any case, we're taking every step needed behind the scenes. Oftentimes those aren't steps that can be spoken about from the podium, so I will leave it at that.

QUESTION: Where does the opening come from? What was the opening?

MS. PSAKI: I don't have any other details to lay out beyond that.

QUESTION: Back to the Alan Gross, I mean, there is an opening. The Cubans have said – as we've been discussing, the Cubans have said that they'd be willing. And these Cuban Five don't pose nearly as much threat to the U.S. national security that these Taliban presumably did.

MS. PSAKI: Well, other than to say, Elise, that we remain concerned about his safety, that we would like to see him returned to his family, that we continue to press this issue, I don't have anything to update all of you on on that case.

QUESTION: Was there a there a precedent --

QUESTION: But you continue to – let me – but you continue to press the issue, but can you say that you'd be willing to do anything it takes to bring him home --

MS. PSAKI: I have nothing --

QUESTION: -- like you've been able to say on the Bergdahl --

MS. PSAKI: I have nothing to update you on on this issue.

Go ahead.

QUESTION: Jen, would you say that a precedent was – did you look into precedent like when the – when Hamas, for instance, captured the Israeli soldier and ended up trading him for maybe a thousand Palestinian prisoners? Did you use that – did they use that as precedent?

MS. PSAKI: I don't think I have any more precedent to offer other than there have been many cases throughout history, Said.

QUESTION: On the subject of precedent, maybe a better comparison for prisoner would be Charles Robert Jenkins. He was a deserter in 1965 and was held in North Korea for close to 40 years. And when he got out and surrendered, he did face jail time. He did 30 days and was reduced in rank. Would you like to see similar charges against – leveled against Sergeant Bergdahl?

MS. PSAKI: Again, I think I stated what our view is here. There'll be plenty of time to determine what the next steps are. That would be the purview of the Department of Defense.

QUESTION: But the State Department cannot call him at this time a deserter?

MS. PSAKI: I think I characterized as we characterized him.

QUESTION: Okay. And is there any --

MS. PSAKI: Go ahead.

QUESTION: -- evidence that he was collaborating at all with the Taliban?

MS. PSAKI: I don't have any more details.

QUESTION: And is it just a coincidence that Sergeant Bergdahl, this prisoner exchange, happened after a week of – VA scandal? General Shinseki was – resigned. And then at the – President Obama at West Point wanted to end – to close, finally, Guantanamo Bay. Is that just a coincidence that this rescue happened?

MS. PSAKI: I believe it is, yes.

…

QUESTION: I just wondered if you'd reached out to the families of Alan Gross and Bob Levinson today given that – and any of the other families who have people held in Iranian jails. Because there must be – all those families must be – their feelings must be in turmoil today. I just wondered if you guys had reached out to them to sort of try and reassure them somehow.

MS. PSAKI: We are making every effort to reach out to the individuals, the families of American citizens held overseas. I don't have any update for you on that, but we can venture to get you an update.

QUESTION: And particularly after this release, do you mean, or just that you have ongoing dialogue?

MS. PSAKI: We have ongoing dialogues with all of them.

QUESTION: But are you particularly – to Jo's question, are you – when you say that you're trying to reach out to families of Americans held overseas, do you mean in this particular relation?

MS. PSAKI: I mean we have ongoing dialogues with all of them and --

QUESTION: So you're not calling all the families of Americans held overseas in relation to the Bergdahl case?

MS. PSAKI: We are in touch with all of them on a regular basis, Elise. So we'll continue that this week.

Go ahead.

QUESTION: With regard to the travel ban, is that just – are they not allowed to leave Qatar or are they not allowed to leave their home, or – I mean, how far ranging or how constricting is the travel ban? How is it being carried out?

MS. PSAKI: Well, travel ban typically means not allowed to leave the country. I don't have any other specific details. I can check on them for you if you'd like.

QUESTION: Was the State Department aware of his father Bob Bergdahl's tweets leading up to the rescue?

MS. PSAKI: I'm sure that our team – our team has been in touch with his family, so I don't have more details than that.

QUESTION: I'm just wondering if this – if the Secretary supported the President standing alongside both parents in the Rose Garden yesterday.

MS. PSAKI: Certainly he did. It's parents happy to see their son returned.

QUESTION: Even though the father was communicating with, purportedly, a Taliban spokesman?

MS. PSAKI: I don't think I have any more to add.

QUESTION: Including links to attacks on U.S. forces, tweeting those out?

MS. PSAKI: I haven't looked at his tweets. But again, these are parents who haven't seen their son in five years, and I think the Secretary's heart – as did the President's – went out to them.

May 23, 2014

Marie Harf, Deputy Spokesperson
Daily Press Briefing, selections on Afghanistan/India
Washington, DC

QUESTION: Seeing the terrorist attack on the Indian consulate on Herat, what do you make of – do you suspect anyone on – behind this?

MS. HARF: Do we suspect anyone behind it? I don't have anything in terms of who perpetrated this attack. Obviously, you probably saw the statement from the Embassy condemning the attack, noting that Indian and Afghan security forces performed courageously in stopping the attack. I believe that no one but the attackers was killed; there were some injured. And obviously, are concerned about these kind of situations, and we'll keep working with folks there on the security situation.

…

QUESTION: There were some reports in Afghanistan and Pakistan that those groups are sending a message to the – it will not – the new administration is not yet there – Mr. Modi, the prime minister, that their message is for him and for his administration, because he made some tough statements on the terrorism and terrorists, that when he comes he will be tough on terrorism and terrorists, and we don't want anybody to attack us and we will not attack anybody else.

MS. HARF: Well, I don't want to guess at what the motivations of terrorists like this are. I guess I'll let them speak for themselves there. I don't know what was behind the attack. Obviously, we've seen other horrific attacks like this in Afghanistan and believe that Afghanistan has a better path forward here, and we'll keep working with them on security.

QUESTION: And finally, madam, this is the third time that you – Indian mission or even Embassy had been attacked in Afghanistan, and even the civilian workers. So there's a fear now in the future for those who are there, either diplomats or even the civilian workers working there. So how they will be protected when U.S. has announced already to be out of Afghanistan?

MS. HARF: Well look, Afghanistan is still in many respects a dangerous place. We have people who serve there – both U.S. officials and also private citizens – who do so like Indian citizens do, at risk, because they believe it's important. So one thing we're focused on is, even as we transition to a different period with our efforts in Afghanistan, to keep working on security, to keep trying to build Afghanistan's own capabilities to keep their own people and people working there secure. But it's absolutely a tough place to work.

QUESTION: One more finally. In the past this question was asked that how the Indian Government will play a role in Afghanistan after U.S. withdraws and NATO. Now, since there

will be a new administration of Mr. Narendra Modi, new government, you think there will be change in the --

MS. HARF: I think I would let Mr. Modi speak for what his own policies will be in Afghanistan.

April 28, 2014

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

QUESTION: On Afghanistan. Now it looks like they will (inaudible) for the presidential elections, that means the new – it'll be still some time before a new government is formed. Does this mean that your chances of staying in Afghanistan is further reduced?

MS. PSAKI: It doesn't. We obviously have said from the beginning that we would allow the Afghan elections officials to see the process through, and we completely respect the process, that it continues to be underway there. As it relates to the BSA and signing the BSA, we obviously leave it up to the individual who will be elected, but all of the candidates have said that they would sign the BSA. We made a decision a couple – several weeks ago that we would be certainly open to that, so we'll let the process see its way through, and certainly continuing to have a presence where we advise and assist and train the Afghans and continue to work with them could be in the interests of the United States as well as the Afghan people.

QUESTION: I have one more on Afghanistan.

MS. PSAKI: Okay.

QUESTION: To what extent the developments in Ukraine is going to have an influence on deciding your presence in Afghanistan post-2014?

MS. PSAKI: I'm not aware of a connection. Obviously, we – there are a range of global issues we work on at the same time, and certainly our desire to see a prosperous future for the Afghan people is no different from our desire to see a prosperous future for the Ukrainian people. Obviously, the circumstances are different, but we remain committed to both.

More – okay.

QUESTION: And is your routing the U.S. armed forces to get material through northern route is having impact – is having an impact on your – on the – due to the Ukrainian condition? Because there you coordinate with the Russians for – and other (inaudible).

MS. PSAKI: I'm happy to check on that for you. I haven't talked to our team about that in a little while.

QUESTION: Thank you.

April 24, 2014

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

QUESTION: Was wondering if you could say anything about the attack of three –

MS. PSAKI: In Afghanistan?

QUESTION: -- in Afghanistan, including three Americans, and whether – this is the latest in a string of attacks against foreigners. I mean, this must be very concerning as the U.S. prepares to pull out, and it kind of makes you wonder whether the security situation is much better.

MS. PSAKI: Well, let me first say, of course – and of course, the White House also put out a statement, which I would point you to. But let me reiterate that we condemn the attack that took place today in Kabul that killed three Americans working to provide healthcare to Afghans. Any such attack on civilians at a hospital is despicable and cowardly. We send our deepest condolences to the families of those killed and injured. We also continue to strongly support those in Afghanistan who abhor this violence and are working to build a peaceful, prosperous future for themselves. These were – these individuals were working on providing medical care, including to children, and so it is an especially horrific event that occurred.

In terms of specifically what it means, Afghanistan has been and continues to be a war zone, and there are certainly efforts that are underway every day to work with Afghan security, to work with officials on the ground, to continue to prepare for the future. It's unfortunate that these events have taken place. Of course, it's tragic, but we will continue to work with the government and work through our military with their counterparts on the ground.

QUESTION: Jen --

QUESTION: Do you have any reaction to the news yesterday that they had to delay the first round of results because there were some shenanigans going on? And then they're now expected to come out, I believe, at the weekend.

MS. PSAKI: We've seen those reports, and obviously, we fully expected from the beginning – or we have planned for the beginning to allow for the process to see itself through. So we're going to do that. There's no concern on our end.

QUESTION: No concern. Okay.

QUESTION: Jen, a few questions on Afghanistan.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: One, in light of this recent attack, I mean, more broadly with the NATO and the U.S. drawdown and this trend of attacks on civilians, is the State Department reconsidering perhaps bringing in private security contractors to help protect U.S. diplomats, as it has used in other theaters and other war zones?

MS. PSAKI: In relation to this specific attack this morning?

QUESTION: This was on three doctors, but obviously, you've got civilians in the field, personnel here at the State Department, who have also come under threat. And given the reduced military presence that we're expecting, aren't you concerned about their well-being?

MS. PSAKI: Well, certainly, the safety and security --

QUESTION: -- and taking these steps?

MS. PSAKI: -- of individuals who are serving in Afghanistan or any place around the world is our top priority. And we work, as you know, in close partnership with the Department of Defense, with ISAF, with teams on the ground about how to take every step possible to ensure security. And obviously, that's something that's evaluated every single day, not just as it relates to what may happen next year.

QUESTION: But in other theaters like Iraq, there have been private security contractors that have been brought in to help buttress that. Is that something that's being explored specific to Afghanistan?

MS. PSAKI: I have nothing for you on that. I'm happy to talk to our team and see if that's something that is part of our discussion that we can speak to.

QUESTION: Can I ask you a few questions about the report in the Chicago paper --

MS. PSAKI: Sure.

QUESTION: -- if people don't have other Afghanistan stuff?

MS. PSAKI: Go ahead.

QUESTION: One more just to follow quickly. Can you confirm that this is the work of the Talibans are working against foreign workers in Afghanistan because they don't want any foreigners to work or help, including aid workers?

MS. PSAKI: I can't confirm the reasons or the source of the attacks. No, I can't.

QUESTION: And finally, under the new government in Afghanistan, you think what will the future of these foreign workers working there, I mean, for the peace and security and also development in Afghanistan?

MS. PSAKI: Well, certainly, one of the important roles we've played as diplomats in Afghanistan is – or also NGOs, I should say – is providing, whether it's health services, education services. And that's been an invaluable part of our effort in the past, and certainly, that's one of the factors we think about moving forward.

QUESTION: But these kind of attacks are really discouraging more and more people going and working there in the future for the government.

MS. PSAKI: I think we have to move on because we just – I just have a – we have a bilat and I know I want to get to Scott, too. Go ahead, Margaret.

QUESTION: So quickly on that Chicago paper report citing the army military unit investigation of the death of Anne Smedinghoff and other injuries there linked to State Department. The report makes a lot of accusations that point back to the State Department. "State says that there was coordination with DOD in advance of the mission."

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: The Pentagon says Ambassador Addleton was a last-minute addition to the group, that this was a scramble, that while there had been planning in advance, there was a change to the established plan, a late add, and new requirements that required them to bring in additional military resources.

So when State says there was coordination in advance, was there additional coordination after the addition of this higher-level diplomat, Ambassador Addleton?

MS. PSAKI: Well, at every stage in the process, as you know, the decisions about whether movement takes place rests with the military commander at the base. I don't have the level of detail about the specifics here, but we were closely coordinated at every point in the process. The State Department did our own review of the events that happened, and we have instituted since then a checklist in order to be as coordinated as possible at every step in the process. But from our own looking at the events and our team that was on the ground, we – every step taken, no rules or regulations were broken. Every step that was needed to be taken in that regard was taken.

And let me say first of all too, of course, that regardless of that piece, the attack on – that took the life of Anne Smedinghoff, an Afghan American translator, and three members of the U.S. military and severely injured several others was a terrible tragedy, and one that, as you all know, people across this building and across the world who work at the State Department remember every day. The only people responsible for this tragedy were the extremists opposed to the many brave Afghans and Americans who have sacrificed so much to help build a stronger, more stable Afghanistan. And what they were doing that day was participating in an outreach event that was part of a nationwide public diplomacy initiative highlighting cooperation between the United States and Afghans in a number of areas. And that's a program that we've been proud of and was underway for weeks there.

QUESTION: The Pentagon says that the senior military commander – they agree with you that they were in charge, but say that they did call in additional resources. So when you're saying that it's really up to the military to make the call – go or don't go – what you're saying is while the commander was choosing to bring in more resources, he shouldn't have chosen to go ahead with this at all? That's where the fault lies?

MS. PSAKI: Well, again, Margaret, I think where we are – we're not about placing fault here. We're about looking at this, as we have, and determining, with any event that happens around the world, what we should do moving forward. We work closely with the Department of Defense, with military commanders on the ground, whether it's ISAF or otherwise, to make sure we take every step to keep our people safe. That doesn't mean that tragic events don't happen. Afghanistan is a war zone and we, of course, can honor the memory of Anne and the others who died that day by not only learning from it and what we do moving forward, but by continuing to do many of the programs that they were undertaking that day.

QUESTION: Can I ask you, now that the military unit on the ground has finished its review, will the State Department reconsider its initial review? Because per the State Department, the investigation of the incident happened immediately afterwards, before the military unit submitted its review and its account of what they saw happen on the ground. So --

MS. PSAKI: Well, just to be clear, Margaret --

QUESTION: And that's why it didn't go to an ARB.

MS. PSAKI: -- this was an army field after action report that happened on the ground. And typically, what happens with these is that these reports are done by an investigating officer in the field. We understand that under DOD procedures, this field report would be transmitted through the military chain-of-command to be ratified and modified and further distributed. I'm not aware of that happening at this point. No State Department officials, civilian personnel were interviewed for the military report. We have done – the Department as well, through Embassy Kabul – has done our own review to determine what occurred and whether security procedures required adjustment. That review is classified. But there have been multiple investigations in this case, and we undertook our own review here.

QUESTION: But given that the Army's review now is done and that they have pointed to fault in this building --

MS. PSAKI: Well, to be clear, again, this is important --

QUESTION: -- is it worth reconsidering?

MS. PSAKI: This is important because this is – again, this was a report done by an Army unit, an Army unit field report. It has to work its way through the chain of command. I'm not aware of that happening yet. I would, of course, point to the Department of Defense, and they can all take a look at that when that happens. But we've done our own review.

QUESTION: Yeah. They've said they're not probing it further at this point, at the Pentagon level because (inaudible) --

MS. PSAKI: Well, but there's still a process that it goes through regardless.

QUESTION: And – but at this point, is it fair to say the State Department is not moving ahead since, in Afghanistan and Iraq, they are exempted from going to the ARB level of investigation? And there was a decision not to go to that level because they didn't have --

MS. PSAKI: Well, but we did our own review regardless --

QUESTION: -- when they had the meeting, they decided not to there --

MS. PSAKI: Regardless of that, we did our own review. Yes, Afghanistan is a war zone, so it falls under different requirements, but we still did our own review regardless of that.

QUESTION: But at this point, it is a closed matter? Is that correct?

MS. PSAKI: It's never a closed matter in the sense that you're still remembering the memory of the people who lost their lives.

QUESTION: Of course.

MS. PSAKI: And you're still learning from the experience, and I mentioned a checklist we've put in place. And we'll continue to evaluate on that basis. But again, our efforts now are focused on continuing to coordinate with the military at the operational and tactical level in these situations, and if for some reason the military unit is unable to meet the provisions of our checklist, our personnel will not participate. So you do take what you've learned, you adapt it moving forward, and you do everything you can to honor the memory of the lives that have been lost.

April 22, 2014

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

QUESTION: On Afghanistan, has U.S. assessment changed after the Afghan – successful Afghanistan elections the number of troops U.S. would have after 2014?

MS. PSAKI: Well, for decisions on troop numbers, I would certainly refer you to the White House, given that's a decision the President would make. That said, until we have concluded a bilateral security agreement, we would not expect to announce any potential troop numbers. As you know, should we have a BSA and a willing and committed partner in the Afghan Government, a limited post-2014 mission focused on training, advising, and assisting Afghan forces and going after the remnants of core al-Qaida is something certainly we still support. We think it's in our interest, it's in the interest of the Afghan people, and we will continue to encourage that.

QUESTION: Yeah. After the first round of elections, you were very highly appreciative of the role that Afghan national security forces played in the largely peaceful elections there. Has that changed your assessment about the number of troops that U.S. could have in Afghanistan after 2014?

MS. PSAKI: I'm not going to --

QUESTION: Would this have any implications on the decision?

MS. PSAKI: Certainly. I understand your question. I'm not going to get an analysis of the factors impacting troop numbers. Obviously that's a decision the President will make. I'm sure he's considering a range of factors. We remain fully supportive of our partners in the Afghan security forces. We continue to proudly work side by side with many Afghans who continue to work to ensure the stability and prosperity of their fellow citizens. Clearly, there's an ongoing deliberative process that is taking into account a range of factors.

QUESTION: And is there any fresh effort to sign the BSA with President Karzai?

MS. PSAKI: I think we've been pretty clear. We've expressed an openness to having one of the – not one of the, the future president, whenever that process is seen through, sign the BSA. Obviously we have an interest in seeing that happen.

QUESTION: Yes. Afghanistan.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: Yes, please. Do you have any plan or policy to be in touch with Taliban? Or you just concede this is an Afghani process?

MS. PSAKI: Again, I think we've – continue to be supportive of Afghans talking to Afghans. It would be a process they would run. I don't have any updates on that for you today.

April 4, 2014

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

MS. HARF: This weekend, all of us in the State Department family are taking a moment to remember and to mark the one-year anniversary of the attack in Zabul Province in Afghanistan that took the lives of a bright young Foreign Service officer named Anne Smedinghoff, three United States soldiers, an Afghan American translator, and an Afghan doctor. A year later, those injured in that attack continue to heal and our hearts remain with the families of those we lost. As Secretary Kerry himself wrote in a note to all State Department employees shortly after that tragic day – and I'm quoting now – "We never forget and certainly no one anywhere should forget for a minute that the work of our diplomats is hard and hazardous or that as you serve on the frontlines in the world's most dangerous places, you put the interests of our country and those of our allies and partners ahead of your own safety."

That's exactly what Anne was doing. She was 25 years old and had worked on Secretary Kerry's trip to Afghanistan just a few weeks before she was killed. She was a press officer in Kabul where she worked to support the Afghan media as they told the story of their country. Sadly, today we were reminded yet again of how dangerous that work can be. Today, the Associated Press lost one of its own: Anja Niedringhaus, an internationally-acclaimed, Pulitzer Prize-winning German photographer. She was shot in Afghanistan's Khost province. A second Canadian journalist who worked for the AP, Kathy Gannon, was also wounded.

What Anne was in Afghanistan to do was work with the Afghan people. This weekend, millions of them will go to the polls to cast a ballot. The United States has proudly supported this process through the hard work of people just like Anne. And as the Afghans stand up, speak out, and exercise their right to vote, the United States will continue to stand side by side with them. As President Obama said in an address to the nation from Kabul in 2012 – and I'm quoting now – "Here in Afghanistan, Americans answered the call to defend their fellow citizens and uphold human dignity. Today, we recall the fallen and those who suffered wounds, both seen and unseen. But through dark days, we have drawn strength from their example and the ideals that have guided our nation and led the world, a belief that all people are treated equal and deserve the freedom to determine their destiny. That is the light that guides us still."

So this Sunday, even as we mark the tragic events of a year ago, we do so drawing strength from Anne and Anja and all those who have made the ultimate sacrifice, especially the brave men and women of the United States Armed Forces and the Afghan people themselves. And we pledge to continue the work of building a safe, stable, secure, and free Afghanistan.

April 1, 2014

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

QUESTION: -- because there's violence out there. A lot of people who were meant to monitor elections are now leaving the country. Are you concerned that that would undermine the credibility of that vote?

MS. HARF: We're not. And actually, on the question of observers, I do know that some international observer groups have been evaluating their plans, obviously, because of the violence. It's my understanding that a number of the groups still remain on the ground. I don't want to speak for them, so I would check with them, but it is my understanding that, for example, the team from NDI remains in Afghanistan. Other international observer and assessment missions appear to be continuing with their plans. And as I said, I think, yesterday, the IEC expects as many as 300,000 total observers, including domestic and international monitors. I know they have many inside the country as well.

In terms of fraud, I think what I said yesterday, which is always an observer question, was that they are better prepared now than they were in 2009 to detect fraud. They have a much more robust system in place. And we've called on the candidates and all the people in Afghanistan to – who are participating in the process to encourage their supporters to do so within the bounds of the law.

QUESTION: Is the U.S. providing any help as far as security is concerned for the vote?

MS. HARF: Well, what we've said is that security is an Afghan-led process. The Afghan security institutions are collaborating with the Independent Election Commission to evaluate which polling stations can be open, and a large majority of them I think I will be, to ensure security of ballots, sort of, and voters during the entire election process. We obviously play a advisory role here, as we do with Afghan security forces writ large, but they have the lead for this.

QUESTION: Thank you.

MS. HARF: And I would note that we have seen, obviously, a lot of reports of violence, but we've also seen now increasing number of Afghans come out in the press very publicly say this is their chance to determine their future, even in the face of this violence. They believe it's their duty to do so, and so we are hopeful that these elections will go forward and give the Afghan people confidence in whoever they elect to lead them going forward.

QUESTION: Thank you.

March 31, 2014

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

QUESTION: Afghanistan is holding an important election later this week.

MS. HARF: Yes.

QUESTION: And President Karzai is to constitutionally leave the office upon completion of this process. What are your expectations from this – from these developments in view of U.S. and NATO drawdown from the country?

MS. HARF: Well, I think it's significant that on April 5th, millions of Afghans will go to the polls to choose their next president. These are very critical elections and the United States welcomes the democratic process underway in Afghanistan. All you have to do is look at the Afghan press today to see the fact that there are people lined up around the block to register to vote, that despite the violence that the Taliban has been perpetrating in parts of Afghanistan, people want to make their voices heard and they want to be a part of the process. We do believe that a peaceful and timely political transition through elections that are inclusive and broadly acceptable to the Afghan people is critical to Afghanistan's stability and democratic development, as well as to sustaining international support for Afghanistan.

In terms of our long-term presence there, obviously, we said separately that the BSA issue is still there. We are open if someone else who wins during these elections would like to sign it, but we've said that we – every day that goes by that we don't have a signed BSA, it gets harder and harder to envision how we could stay, quite frankly.

QUESTION: Is there still a timeline or a deadline the BSA should be signed for the U.S. --

MS. HARF: Well, we've never had a deadline.

QUESTION: Even after election?

MS. HARF: We've never had a deadline. What we said a while ago – when we first talked about the fact that it became clear that President Karzai was not going to sign the BSA – that we've left open the possibility of concluding a BSA later this year. The longer we go without a BSA, as I said, the more challenging it will be to plan and execute a new mission, and also the more likely it will be that any mission, if we do get one, will be smaller in scale and smaller in ambition. So if we get a willing and committed partner in the Afghan Government out of this election who wants to sign it, we are still open to that discussion.

QUESTION: Could you tell us what kind of support are you giving the election process in Afghanistan?

MS. HARF: What kind of support in what way, Said?

QUESTION: Right. I mean, you have monitors, you have --

MS. HARF: Uh-huh.

QUESTION: -- you're facilitating movement, you're doing all kinds of things.

MS. HARF: Let me see on that.

QUESTION: Security --

QUESTION: Security, so forth.

MS. HARF: Well, security is being led by the Afghans.

QUESTION: Right.

MS. HARF: The Afghan security institutions are collaborating with the Independent Election Commission to ensure the security of polling places, the security of ballots and voters, during the entire election period. In terms of monitors, the United States Government doesn't field observers, but we support the Afghan-owned elections process within the donor community. I believe there are plans for approximately 200 international observers. The IEC expects as many as 300,000 total observers throughout the country. So obviously, we support that work as well, but we won't have any observers of our own.

QUESTION: And are you also working with regional countries like Pakistan to ensure that there is security and stability on the border to facilitate this election?

MS. HARF: Well, in terms of the security inside Afghanistan with elections, we're working with the Afghan security forces. We work with regional partners on cross-border issues all the time, but I don't want to in any way tie that to the elections.

…

MS. HARF: So the fact that we have so many countries around the world that are moving forward with elections that we're working with to try and help them with their democratic processes actually is quite exciting, even when sometimes they're not 100 percent perfect. So thank you for the question, Said.

QUESTION: Does the U.S. have any concerns about the potential for fraud in Saturday's elections?

MS. HARF: Yeah. Let me see, I do have something on that. So we do believe that the Afghan electoral institutions are better prepared to administer elections and detect and prevent fraud today than they were in 2009. So we think that's good progress. Obviously, fraud detection's an important part of what the IEC has been doing. We also do think the candidates themselves have

a responsibility here, a real responsibility to see that these elections go off without fraud. So to encourage their supporters, as excited and enthusiastic as they may be, to refrain from the types of fraud that we saw in 2009, we think, is a responsibility they have.

QUESTION: Is that a hidden message to one of the candidates, Mr. Rassoul?

MS. HARF: It's not a hidden message to anyone, I promise.

Yes, Lucas.

QUESTION: Is the – excuse me, is the State Department supporting a candidate?

MS. HARF: No. We don't support candidates or parties. Up to the people of Afghanistan.

March 28, 2014

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

QUESTION: Thank you. I'd like to start in Kabul, please. There were reports of an attack on a house where Americans lived with the California-based NGO Roots of Peace.

MS. HARF: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: Wondering if you have an update. There were some reports that Americans may have been held hostage.

MS. HARF: Yes. So the reports do continue to come in, but they have indicated that Afghan security forces have neutralized the remaining attackers, obviously played a crucial role in evacuating civilians from the guest house. We condemn this attack on Roots of Peace, the organization you mentioned, an organization that only seeks to help Afghans improve their lives and their livelihoods. Roots of Peace has been a valued partner for Afghanistan with the support of USAID.

All chief of mission personnel are accounted for at this time. We can confirm that there were two U.S. citizens in the guest house, but they are now safe. We also note the Taliban's claim of responsibility. Again, the Taliban's actions demonstrate the growing distance between them and the Afghan people and at a time when Afghans are engaged in an inclusive dialogue about the future of their country in the run-up to the election. The Taliban continue to offer nothing but an agenda of violence and fear like we saw today.

QUESTION: So the two U.S. citizens – were they ever abducted, or were they just kind of trapped inside the house and then they were gotten out safely?

MS. HARF: I think those details are still emerging. Let me see if I can get you some more on that. We do know that they're safe now.

QUESTION: Okay. And the chief of mission personnel were – I wasn't aware that there was any chief of mission personnel involved in --

MS. HARF: They were not.

QUESTION: Okay.

MS. HARF: But it is often a question we get any time there's an attack --

QUESTION: Okay.

MS. HARF: -- or something like this, whether our chief of mission personnel are accounted for, and they are.

QUESTION: Got it.

…

QUESTION: Quick one on Afghanistan. As the election nears, and the violence continuing, including yesterday, and Talibans are really – they are threatening the elections and also officials there, international community is really fearful. So what do you think the future of Afghanistan as far as elections under the fear of Taliban, who are not supporting or going to be part of it?

MS. HARF: Well, what we've said is that the Afghans themselves have made significant progress towards holding their elections next month. Afghan security ministries, in close coordination with the Afghan National Security Council, have continued working with the Independent Elections Commission to prepare security for the elections. We know much more needs to be done, but we have, quite frankly, been impressed by the progress that the IEC and the security organizations have made.

I'd remind you of a few other data points: Voter registration continues. Candidates are finalized. Two key electoral laws have been adopted. Elections commissioners and complaints commissioners have been appointed. In addition, the Afghan security ministries, as I've said, have continued working to prepare for the election.

Also recent polls show that the vast majority of Afghans see elections as compatible with Islam, and 85 percent intend to vote; 77 percent think their votes will make a difference. So I would say that a majority, a large majority, of Afghans reject what the Taliban is trying to sell them, reject this kind of violence and fear and intimidation, and want to go to the polls, and they should be allowed to do so to pick the leaders of their country freely, without intimidation.

QUESTION: They're also saying that without the full cooperation of Pakistan, next-door neighbor, this election or democracy in Afghanistan is not possible. So what role you think U.S. is playing so Pakistan can cooperate or --

MS. HARF: Look, this is a conversation about Afghanistan preparing for its elections, and that's the context we're going to talk about it in.

QUESTION: But as far as violence is concerned, continuously.

MS. HARF: I'm sorry?

QUESTION: Violence is continuously by the Talibans inside of Afghanistan.

MS. HARF: I mean, clearly we know there's a concern with cross-border violence. The Pakistanis know that as well. We've all been working. Pakistan and all of Afghanistan's neighbors have an interest in seeing a stable Afghanistan. So that's what we're working towards right now.

March 25, 2014

Marie Harf, Deputy Spokesperson
Daily Press Briefing, selections on Afghanistan/Russia/Ukraine
Washington, DC

QUESTION: On Afghanistan.

MS. HARF: Uh-huh.

QUESTION: Have you seen President Karzai's statement over the weekend on Crimea supporting Russian position on that? Do you have anything?

MS. HARF: I have seen it.

QUESTION: How do you view it?

MS. HARF: Well, I think we've been very clear about the fact that we believe Russia – we and the rest of the G7 and the international community believes that Russia violated Ukraine's territorial integrity and sovereignty with their incursion into Crimea. So I'm not sure exactly what international legal standards that President Karzai is basing that on, but it's just not based in reality, I would say, is probably my only comment about that.

QUESTION: So have you taken up this issue with him? He's --

MS. HARF: With President Karzai?

QUESTION: Yeah.

MS. HARF: Not to my knowledge. It isn't really – I mean, there's not really a reason we would. We're talking to the G7, to the Ukrainians, to the Russians, to everyone who directly is involved in this situation in Ukraine, and Afghanistan's just not.

QUESTION: And also, the top leadership of Afghan Government is blaming Pakistan's ISI for the attack on the hotel and the several journalists including that of AFP were killed. Do you have any readout on that?

MS. HARF: Of the attack?

QUESTION: Yes.

MS. HARF: Well, I know we've put out statements, obviously, condemning the violence and the attack. I don't have more on responsibility for that. I'm happy to check.

March 21, 2014

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

QUESTION: There was an attack yesterday on a hotel in Kabul in which nine people were killed. Among them was AFP's local correspondent Sardar Ahmad, his wife, and two children. His baby boy is still in the hospital being treated for injuries. I believe there was also possibly an American Bangladeshi who was killed. And I just wanted – this is another in a series of attacks, attacks we've seen in Kabul, and I just wondered if (a) if there was a U.S. reaction, and going forward what kind of hope could you give to these families?

MS. PSAKI: Yeah. Jo, I'm incredibly sorry – and you're going to make me cry. I'm incredibly sorry for – and we're all incredibly sorry, the Secretary is incredibly sorry for the loss that AFP has experienced. And certainly our heart and our condolences go out to the family of that reporter. And obviously, we know reporters go out every day and risk their lives in countries around the world, and it's an incredible service to not only communicating what's happening in a country like Afghanistan, but the fact that they put their lives at risk is certainly commendable.

We did put out a statement from our Embassy strongly condemning the recent senseless attacks of violence against the police station and the Serena Hotel in Kabul. The perpetrators of these attacks have needlessly shed the blood of both Afghans and their international partners at a time when citizens are celebrating Nowruz and preparing to vote in historic elections. The barbaric nature of these events reminds us of the total disregard the insurgents have for human life and their fear of a free vote for the future of Afghanistan.

We offer our deepest condolences, again, to the families of the deceased and wish a speedy recovery to the wounded. We will continue to stand with the Afghan people and the government in pursuit of a stable, prosperous, and democratic Afghanistan, where all life is respected.

In answer to your specific question, one U.S. citizen was killed in the attack. We have no further information that we can provide at this time about that.

March 11, 2014

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

QUESTION: I don't know if you've seen the reports that there was a Swedish-British journalist that was shot dead in Kabul in what seems to be a cold-blooded murder in the middle of the day – Nils Horner. Did you have any reaction to that?

MS. PSAKI: Obviously, we've seen those reports and our heart, of course, goes out to his family and his friends at this difficult time. We don't have any information, of course, on this incident and certainly the Afghans would be the lead on determining the cause.

February 26, 2014

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

QUESTION: Thank you. On Afghanistan, as Secretary and President both have said, the ultimate goal in Afghanistan is to defeat the al-Qaida and the Taliban. Do you think you can achieve that goal with zero-option in Afghanistan?

MS. PSAKI: Well, obviously there's a lot going on right now, which is why you're asking about this. And I know we talked a bit about – yesterday about the President's call with President Karzai, and I won't rehash that for all of you unless you want to discuss it again. But as the possibility of a full withdrawal has grown in the sense that we have begun the planning process for it, we have been undertaking a methodical review of any U.S. capabilities that may be affected and developing strategies to mitigate impacts on the issue you just mentioned.

So regardless of the outcome of the BSA, we and our partners have a strong shared interest, of course, in suppressing the terrorist groups that seek to undermine our security as well as – in the region as well as worldwide. And we will take the steps necessary to combat terrorism and protect our interests. So that is a conversation that's ongoing, while still, our hope remains that the BSA is signed, and we have that ongoing partnership.

QUESTION: But why do you plan for an option which you think is – will put U.S. and your allies at risk, the security of those people in the countries at risk? Why do you plan for even that option?

MS. PSAKI: Well, it's – we have a responsibility to contingency plan for all options. And this wasn't our preferred approach, as you know. Our preferred option would've been for President Karzai to sign the BSA last year. He didn't do that; he's not indicated a plan to do that. So we're – we've taken steps to plan for a variety of options.

QUESTION: But why don't you consider the SOFA option? SOFA has an unlimited – there's no timeline on that, your presence in the – Afghanistan.

MS. PSAKI: Well, we've been pretty clear that without a BSA, we can't have an ongoing presence. So that hasn't changed. That remains the case. But we will look to what will happen over the next couple of months.

QUESTION: Thank you.

February 25, 2014

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

QUESTION: So I read with great interest the White House readout of the President's phone call with President Karzai, and I'm having a hard time understanding if anything is different today post-call than it was yesterday.

MS. PSAKI: Well, Matt, I think in the readout – which many of you may have seen that the White House put out, but let me just reiterate what was in there – in addition to talking about the upcoming campaign season and affirming the support of the United States for fair, credible, and an Afghan-led process, the President also told President Karzai that because he's demonstrated that it is unlikely that he will sign the BSA, the United States is moving forward with additional contingency planning. That's not something that we have talked about before, not something that had been indicated to President Karzai before. And President Obama has also – as has been announced and was in the readout as well – has asked the Pentagon to ensure that it has adequate plans in place to accomplish an orderly withdrawal. You may have also seen the statement that Secretary Hagel put out.

So this is an indication that we are taking President Karzai at his word that he has no plans, he has not indicated he's going to sign the BSA. We need to do our own planning, and that includes contingency planning for a range of options. The later it goes the harder it is, as you know, because we've talked about it often. But this is a candid assessment, to your point, of where things stand --

QUESTION: Okay.

MS. PSAKI: -- and an indication to people of what our planning entails.

QUESTION: I'm – so I'm confused, though, because I thought this contingency planning had been going on for months.

MS. PSAKI: Well, we always have contingency planning, but we haven't talked about --

QUESTION: Right. I mean, it would be irresponsible not to have been --

MS. PSAKI: -- planning for – of course.

QUESTION: -- planning for it.

MS. PSAKI: But we have not talked about till now planning for the – a zero option, which again, is not our preference. But that is something we're talking about now, and we've indicated to President Karzai, which is an appropriate place for that conversation to take place first.

QUESTION: So the difference is that the President has told President Karzai that it's directly what you and every other spokesperson around this town and officials on background have been saying for months? I'm – I just – I'm not – the contingency planning that was going on prior to today included a zero-option possibility, didn't it?

MS. PSAKI: Well, we had – we've always said that we've been doing contingency planning.

QUESTION: Right.

MS. PSAKI: But planning, which I'm not going to outline all the details of what that means --

QUESTION: I'm not asking for the details.

MS. PSAKI: -- but specifics and for options that include a range of numbers and include zero troops is something that obviously is picking up.

QUESTION: Okay. But did the President tell – or has the Administration set a deadline for Karzai and/or his successor to sign a BSA? Because the statement makes it clear that a BSA – the U.S. is open to a BSA being signed later in the year, although it would have consequences --

MS. PSAKI: Certainly. Right.

QUESTION: -- on the planning.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: But you haven't told him sign by X date or we're going to the zero option. And you haven't said to any of his successors or potential successors that I'm aware of – or at least it wasn't included in the call – whether they've been told, like, on day one, if you don't sign this we're going to go ahead with – I guess I'm just having a hard time figuring out if there was any policy decision here, because it just seems like the White House has kind of kicked this down the – kicked the can down the road again without making any decision.

MS. PSAKI: Well, I think we've decided that we're not going to leave this in the hands of President Karzai to sign, and that there is the option of having a successor sign. So that is certainly a new piece of information that we have not indicated in the past.

QUESTION: Okay. So --

MS. PSAKI: In addition, in terms of consequences, what we have indicated is that the later it goes, the harder it is, but also the – to plan, and also the smaller it will be. And that certainly is a consequence.

QUESTION: Right.

MS. PSAKI: But in terms of a deadline or a date, that's not something I'm going to get into.

QUESTION: Okay. So in fact – then I'll stop after this.

MS. PSAKI: Okay.

QUESTION: In fact, what the main point of this is is that you no longer insist that Karzai has to sign this thing and that you've given the Afghans another several months or an undefined period of more time to sign the BSA without having any definite consequences, because you're just leaving the options open, right?

MS. PSAKI: Well --

QUESTION: So they got – now have more time rather than less time to make up their mind.

MS. PSAKI: No, I would refute that, Matt. Look, for the – for our long-term strategic interests, it is in our interest, it is in the interest of the Afghan people to have a signed BSA. Karzai has not indicated – I don't think you would disagree with me on this point –

QUESTION: No.

MS. PSAKI: -- that he is planning to sign the BSA. So this is a candid assessment of where we are and planning for other options to get a BSA signed. And if we have a partner who's the next elected leader of Afghanistan who will sign the BSA, then we will – we are happy to move forward with that. In terms of consequences, as I mentioned, the longer it goes, the harder it is to plan, and the greater impact it will be on the size.

QUESTION: So would you say, Jen, that the zero option today is more likely than it was yesterday?

MS. PSAKI: I wouldn't say that, because there's still the possibility that – we've always said it was an option – there still is the possibility that one of Karzai – Karzai's successor, whomever that may be, could sign the BSA. And we're still happy to work with whomever that may be to move forward.

QUESTION: But in this statement that was put out from Secretary Hagel, there was a mention of the upcoming NATO Ministerial in Brussels.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: What is the – are you making a recommendation to your NATO allies about how they should be planning this going forward?

MS. PSAKI: Well, we are working closely with them and, of course, advising them on what steps we are taking to plan for a range of contingencies, including the possibility of a full withdrawal. They're, of course, going to make their own decisions, and we leave that to them, but we have laid out for them the fact that that is a planning process that's underway.

QUESTION: But you're not saying to them: Our preferable option at the moment is a zero-troop option and you should plan for that.

MS. PSAKI: Well, it doesn't – it's not our – a preferable option. Because if there's a BSA signed, that lays the groundwork for a troop presence in Afghanistan. If there's no BSA, we can't have a presence there. We are saying today that we are open to one of Karzai's successor – or Karzai's successor signing the BSA. But that doesn't indicate a preference. Obviously, the President hasn't made a decision about troop numbers at this point.

QUESTION: But realistically, how late can you go? Because the election's in April. Given the fact that it's extremely unlikely that the – it'll be an uncontested election that could go to a second round, you could be looking at much later into the year, beyond spring and into summer, before you have a decision on who the successor is.

MS. PSAKI: Well, we're evaluating this, of course, week by week, just like we would about any policy process. This is where we are at this point. Obviously, the elections are scheduled for April. We'll see where we are at that point.

QUESTION: But, I mean, to get all these troops out is a huge logistical operation.

MS. PSAKI: You're right. That's why it makes it harder to plan. Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: The longer you leave it on the table though this possibility of some rather than zero, the harder you're going to make it for yourselves towards the back end of the year, if you don't have a successor until, say, I don't know when, nobody knows when.

MS. PSAKI: Well, but I don't want to predict that at this point. Obviously, we'll continue to evaluate as events on the ground continue in Afghanistan.

QUESTION: Can we --

MS. PSAKI: Afghanistan?

QUESTION: On Afghanistan?

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: As far as this contingency planning, how much of it extends to this building? Because so many people know the security situation being what it is there, Foreign Service officers, the Embassy presence is very, very dependent on the security provided by the military. So what kind of planning is happening here for diplomats?

MS. PSAKI: Well, certainly we're a part of the interagency – an important part, I will say – of the interagency planning process. And the Secretary and Ambassador Dobbins and other senior officials have been a part of all of these discussions about the path forward. I don't have anything specific to outline for you, beyond to say that we have strategic interests in maintaining our relationship through a BSA with Afghanistan, national security interests, interests in continuing a lot of the progress that's been made over the last ten years, whether that's on education issues or women's issues.

These are many things, as you know, that the State Department and diplomats around the world have made great investments in. So certainly, we believe, and it's in our interest as well, for a BSA to get signed so that we can continue that relationship.

QUESTION: So it would be safe, then, to assume that the size of the U.S. diplomatic presence will be impacted by this security agreement itself?

MS. PSAKI: I don't have anything to outline for you on that today. Obviously, there's a range of discussions that happen regarding everything from troops to what it will mean for where we have diplomatic presence in Afghanistan, just like any country. So I don't have anything to tell you on that today.

QUESTION: Jen, because – but on that, though, I mean, so much of what people on the ground tell you in Afghanistan is it's not just the number of soldiers. It's the number of dollars, it's the number of aid support mechanisms coming in there.

MS. PSAKI: Sure.

QUESTION: So was that part of the discussion between the President – the two presidents today? I mean, how much of the diplomatic presence and aid was part of it?

MS. PSAKI: I don't have any more to outline for you beyond what the White House put out. And I would certainly point you to them, and I'm certain your colleagues are asking them. As you may have seen in the readout, they also talked about the upcoming campaign season, they talked about the importance of continue – of Afghanistan continuing on the path to a strong, stable, unified, and democratic country in the future.

Of course, the President is deeply committed to a range of these programs that we've invested in over the last ten years. And that's why we've long said that zero option is not a preferred option. We understand and recognize the strategic relationship and the strategic consequences of not having a presence in Afghanistan.

QUESTION: Doesn't the continuation of some of your foreign assistance programs depend on somebody signing the BSA, as laid out in the budget that went forward?

MS. PSAKI: Yep, it does. Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: I mean, if there's no BSA signed, some of this foreign assistance will not be approved by Congress according to what they laid out --

MS. PSAKI: According to what Congress has --

QUESTION: -- according to what Congress laid out.

MS. PSAKI: -- what Congress has laid out.

QUESTION: Yes. I mean, does that not concern this Department, that some of those programs that you were talking about are either going to have to be halted or going to fall into some kind of limbo because there won't be any way of funding them?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I think it's really important to remember here that if we take a step back, when we started negotiating the BSA in November of 2012, what we set out was a goal – and we agreed with Afghanistan – of signing – concluding the agreement and signing it within a year because of all the reasons I outlined about our strategic interests and the progress that's been made on important issues like education, like promoting women; as well as counterterrorism and other issues that are of great value to the United States.

So certainly, our preferred option is not to not have a BSA signed. We want to have a BSA signed. And today, what we're conveying is that we have left open the door for Karzai's successor to sign it, which should give you more of an indication of how important it is for us to get this signed and move forward with our relationship.

QUESTION: So correct me if I'm wrong then that the upshot of this deal is that you – that the President has basically removed all the pressure or all of the – removed – I'll use pressure for lack of a better word – has removed all the pressure from Karzai to sign this by saying that a successor could sign it and it might not result in a zero option.

MS. PSAKI: Well, if there's no BSA there won't be a troop presence.

QUESTION: No, I understand that.

MS. PSAKI: So --

QUESTION: But you basically just told Karzai, "You're off the hook. You don't have to sign this anymore --

MS. PSAKI: Well, I don't --

QUESTION: -- because your successor can sign it and we still might not go to zero."

MS. PSAKI: Well, Matt --

QUESTION: Right?

MS. PSAKI: -- if there's no – no.

QUESTION: No, okay.

MS. PSAKI: If there's no BSA signed --

QUESTION: I understand.

MS. PSAKI: -- we're not going to have a presence in Afghanistan.

QUESTION: I know.

MS. PSAKI: The longer this goes the less of a presence – the greater a factor it will be in our planning, and it will have an impact on the size, certainly. So those are all consequences.

QUESTION: Right.

MS. PSAKI: Karzai is going to be in office for another --

QUESTION: Two or three months?

MS. PSAKI: Correct. And so what we've acknowledged here is that he has not indicated that he's going to sign it. So let's look ahead to future options for how we can come to an agreement on the BSA.

QUESTION: Right. But the future option no longer rests with him. You've taken all of the leverage that you had with Karzai in saying, "Look, if you don't sign this thing, we're going to leave." That's all gone now.

MS. PSAKI: It's not gone, but this has never been about --

QUESTION: It is gone.

MS. PSAKI: This has never been about President Karzai. This has been about the United States relationship with Afghanistan and our long-term presence in Afghanistan. So it's not about President Karzai; it's about that. And we're trying to take steps to figure out how we can --

QUESTION: Right, but when this --

MS. PSAKI: -- be in the most productive place moving forward.

QUESTION: But when we were in Kabul and the Secretary and President Karzai negotiated this thing, and for the previous nine months to a year --

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: -- it had all been with this goal of having it done within a year, and then that slipped, obviously. And you said you still want it sooner rather than later --

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: -- which is presumably what you still want. But now you have accepted the fact that Karzai is not going to sign it or says that he has no – given no signal that he will sign it, and said, "Okay, it doesn't matter anymore because your successor can sign it."

MS. PSAKI: Well, his actions and his recent rhetoric have frankly concerned us. And so again, this is not about President Karzai. And that's a point, obviously, we're making with this announcement today. This is about our long-term relationship with Afghanistan.

QUESTION: But up until today, it was on President Karzai to sign this thing.

MS. PSAKI: Well, as the president of the country, certainly.

QUESTION: Right. And now it's not. So this is why I don't understand. It seems to me that you – that the White House has basically just left – just extended the deadline if there are – the target for anyone to sign the BS for basically until November, it could be.

MS. PSAKI: That is not what I'm indicating.

QUESTION: Well, that's what --

MS. PSAKI: Again, what I've said a couple times is that the longer it goes the more of an impact it will have on what kind of a presence we could even have.

February 24, 2014

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

QUESTION: I'm wondering if you have any update for starters on BSA negotiations?

MS. PSAKI: I do not. (Laughter.)

QUESTION: Okay. I'm sure you saw it reported today that one of the options DOD is looking at would involve about 3,500 residual troops remaining in Afghanistan. I understand that's a Pentagon issue and you don't want to speak to that; but if that were to be the number, that would have a massive impact on State operations in Kabul and around the country as well, and I'm just wondering if you can comment on that.

MS. PSAKI: What I will say is that the President has a range of options. He has long had a range of options. Obviously, he hasn't made a decision about what options he will go with or what option he will go with. But beyond that, any reports out there are speculation about what he's considering and what he may lean towards. So I don't want to speak to what the internal deliberations are about.

QUESTION: Could you put brackets on that range of options?

MS. PSAKI: I would prefer not to. You've long heard us say that, obviously, it's in everyone's interests – the interest of the Afghan people, the national security of the United States – to see a BSA signed, because otherwise we will need to initiate planning for a zero option. But clearly, that is not the preference, and that's why we continue to press on that front. But in terms of troop numbers, I will leave that to my friends over in the White House.

QUESTION: Do you think that the longer the negotiations are dragged out that the closer – not just the zero option yet, but is there a proportionate agreement between lower numbers being considered the longer the negotiations or the discussions are dragged out?

MS. PSAKI: I wouldn't look at it that way. I think, obviously, the longer it goes, the more – not just the United States but our NATO allies – as you know, there's a meeting going on, I believe this week, a NATO meeting going on this week – makes it more and more challenging for all of us. But beyond that, there are discussions at the most senior levels about this nearly every week. But I don't have any prediction of what it will mean at this point.

QUESTION: Thank you.

February 4, 2014

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

QUESTION: Jen, I was wondering, there's a meeting between the President and Defense leadership, the U.S., on Afghanistan today.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: Is the Secretary going to be part of that?

MS. PSAKI: So as you mentioned, this is a meeting that is focused on the leadership of the Defense Department. As you probably know, General Dunford is in town, so that is obviously an opportunity for the President to hear directly from him. And I'm certain that my colleagues at the White House will speak more directly to this, but it's with DOD leadership. The Secretary is at the White House nearly every day and he sees the President every week, so certainly they discuss this issue when they have the opportunity.

QUESTION: And you saw reports today that Karzai's in talk with the Taliban. You have any comments on it?

MS. PSAKI: Sure. Well I'd, naturally, refer all of you to the Government of Afghanistan regarding any contacts they may have had. I know they've spoken to it in the story and since then. But it's important to note here that we've long supported – you've heard me say this, you've heard my predecessor say this – long strongly supported an Afghan-led reconciliation, which would, of course, be Afghans talking to Afghans. So the notion that we wouldn't support that dialogue is inaccurate. And as you all know, back a year ago in – well, a little over a year ago, last January, President Obama and President Karzai reaffirmed that Afghan-led peace and reconciliation as the surest way to end violence and ensure the lasting stability of Afghanistan and the region. And our objective continues to be, and our focus continues to be, promoting and supporting an inclusive, Afghan-led process. So we support --

QUESTION: Is there any discussions between the U.S. and – any update on the U.S. and Taliban talks?

MS. PSAKI: No, we're not – there hasn't been any change to that. We're not engaged in discussions with the Taliban.

QUESTION: Then with this meeting today on Afghanistan, clearly to update himself, but we've also – James Dobbins, the special envoy, has gone off to NATO meetings.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: There's obviously some movement here to try to have a decision made quickly. Is there any kind of feeling that you've got to make a decision or that a decision on this needs to be made within a certain time?

MS. PSAKI: I --

QUESTION: It's just – or is it just a lot of circumstance – a lot of events going on at the same time and it's not – and it doesn't mean anything?

MS. PSAKI: Well, that is true. There are a lot of events going on at the same time. Certainly, this is an important issue and a priority for the United States. It remains the case that Afghan – that it is in the interest of the Afghan people and the interest of the Afghan Government and U.S. national security interest for a BSA to be signed. So we continue to press for that, support that, and obviously we're working closely with our allies, which is the role that Ambassador Dobbins is certainly playing.

I would never venture to predict when any decision would be made. That would be made by the President, whether that's troop numbers or whatever it may be. But obviously we continue to press for this decision to be made as quickly as possible – not the decision, I'm sorry, for the BSA to be signed as quickly as possible.

QUESTION: Has the Karzai government kept you in the loop on talks with the Taliban? Have they been – informed you?

MS. PSAKI: I'm not going to speak to our diplomatic engagement or discussions with the Afghan Government. I just simply want it to be clear that Afghan-led talks, Afghans talking to Afghans, is something we've long supported.

QUESTION: But was the U.S. Government aware of these talks before this *New York Times* article came out?

MS. PSAKI: I'm not going to detail what discussions we may or may not have had on this specific piece.

QUESTION: In the region.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: I'm sure you've seen today the talks about the Pakistani talks and the Pakistani Taliban as well, which were due to open today but the government negotiators didn't turn up for the meeting. And I wondered if you had any thoughts about those talks.

MS. PSAKI: Well, we of course are closely following the recent developments and reports. The issue of whether to negotiate with TTP is an internal matter for Pakistan, and we refer you, of course, to the Government of Pakistan for further details or information. More broadly, the United States and Pakistan continue to have a vital, shared strategic interest in ending extremist violence so as to build a more prosperous, stable, and peaceful region, but we'd point you to them for any details of what's happening.

QUESTION: But just like you support Afghanistan-led talks with the Taliban, do you support these Pakistan-Taliban talks?

MS. PSAKI: It is. The issue of whether to negotiate is a decision that the Government of Pakistan needs to make.

QUESTION: Do you think this will bring in peace in that part – tribal regions of Pakistan?

MS. PSAKI: I don't want to make a prediction of an outcome. I would point you to them on the status.

QUESTION: Do you draw a distinction between the two?

QUESTION: Yeah. Well, Jen, the problem is, is that you – the question is not asking about the details of the talks, it's asking whether you would encourage them in the same way. If you're taking a position that it is a good thing for Afghans to talk to Afghans, is it not also a good thing for Pakistanis to talk to Pakistanis?

MS. PSAKI: Well, every circumstance is different. I'm not piling every country and every circumstance into one, so I think I gave you an answer on our position.

QUESTION: Right, right. But just as is it is up for the Afghans to decide whether – who they want to talk to, is it not also up to the Pakistanis to decide?

MS. PSAKI: Certainly. That's why I said it's up to the Government of Pakistan to determine.

QUESTION: Okay. So why you – so why would you come out and support one but not the other?

MS. PSAKI: Every circumstance is different, Matt. So --

QUESTION: So this – so should we infer that you do not think it's a good idea --

MS. PSAKI: I think --

QUESTION: -- for the Pakistanis to talk to the Taliban there?

MS. PSAKI: -- we'll let them make their own evaluation.

January 29, 2014

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

QUESTION: I wondered what your comment was on the reports in *The Washington Post* yesterday citing Afghan officials in which they say that President Karzai believes the United States may have backed some of the attacks against the – some of these insurgent attacks to undermine his government.

MS. PSAKI: Well, I think in that same story, Ambassador Cunningham and General Dunford were both quoted. So – and they were very clear. So I would echo what they said, which is that we have spent 12 years trying to bring peace and stability to Afghanistan in the face of threats from terrorist and insurgent networks. To suggest otherwise does a grave disservice to those who have sacrificed for the people of Afghanistan. Further, it flies in the face of logic and morality to think that we would aid the enemy that we're trying to defeat, and we are trying to get a BSA signed to continue to defeat. So --

QUESTION: But what does this say generally about relations between the United States and Karzai in particular, actually?

MS. PSAKI: I think – look, the United States and President Karzai both have a similar goal, which is to achieve a stable, sovereign, unified Afghanistan responsible for its own security and able to ensure that it can never again be a safe haven for terrorists. It's not about trust. It's not about other issues than the fact that moving forward on a BSA, moving forward on getting that signed is in the best interests of the Afghan people and the government, of the United States, of our NATO allies. That's why we're focused on it.

QUESTION: It's not about trust? What do you mean by it's not about trust?

MS. PSAKI: Well, what I mean is I think you're asking me about comments and what that says and what it means. And I think I would just reiterate the fact that it doesn't change our commitment and desire to get the BSA signed.

QUESTION: But if you have an interlocutor who's saying things like this, which you say do a grave disservice to the troops that you've had out in Afghanistan for the last 12 years, how can you have confidence that he will negotiate with you a BSA agreement – or even, when it's negotiated – to sign it with you, which will then guarantee the safety of your forces going forward?

MS. PSAKI: Well, President Karzai is the elected leader of Afghanistan. It still remains up to him to sign the BSA. That hasn't changed. We've talked about the reasons why we think that is

important and the reasons why it's in the interests of the Afghan people and the United States. So what I mean is that's what our focus is on, not what comments mean or what they – what we should take from them.

QUESTION: Well, can I just say – I mean, are you convinced or do you know, has President Karzai made these allegations to U.S. officials that you're aware of?

MS. PSAKI: We've seen, obviously, the public comments. I don't have anything on --

QUESTION: The public --

MS. PSAKI: -- private comments.

QUESTION: So as far as you know, you can't confirm – you don't know firsthand that what the *Post* says that Karzai told other people is correct; is that right?

MS. PSAKI: I think that's a fair point. Obviously, there are comments that have been made in the past that you could categorize in the same category, but --

QUESTION: Right, but I mean, in terms of this specific story, the question is: How – what does this say about the state of relations between the U.S. and Afghanistan or the U.S. and Karzai? And I'm trying to figure out what you understand "this" to mean – the story in the *Post*, or the comments that you may or may not know are accurate that Karzai has made?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I was asked about the reported comments. As I understood Jo's question, it was more about a larger pattern, so that's how I was answering it.

QUESTION: Okay. So you, then, would agree that there is a large – that whether or not these latest comment – reported comments from Karzai are actually correct, whether he said them or not, there is an existing history of comments in a similar vein that disturb you and that would – that lead you to repeat the – Ambassador Cunningham and the General's response?

MS. PSAKI: Well, the comments that Ambassador Cunningham and General Dunford made that I was reiterating were related to this specific set of comments that were reported in the *Post*.

QUESTION: I understand, but do they or do you have any reason to believe that the reported comments in the story – that they were actually made? Or are you saying you don't know, but that he has said things like this in the past, and so you have no reason to doubt the report?

MS. PSAKI: I was --

QUESTION: I'm just trying to figure out what it is that --

MS. PSAKI: I was – I'm not trying to overcomplicate this. All I was conveying was the reported comments in the story, that those raised concerns. Those concerns have been expressed from our end by Ambassador Cunningham and General Dunford. I don't – I'm not trying to make a larger point here other than to respond to those specific comments.

QUESTION: Okay. The point is, is that oftentimes, when you are asked about reported comments, you'll say – or whoever is standing at the podium – for years, it's been the case that, "Well, I haven't seen those comments, so I don't know how to address them." The fact that you're willing to stand up there and repeat what Cunningham and the General said suggests that you have reason to believe that what – that Karzai's allegations – that he in fact made them.

MS. PSAKI: I wasn't – I don't have any further information than what was provided in the story, Matt.

QUESTION: Has the Afghan Government, in – whether it's Karzai himself or one of his aides, communicated to the U.S. Government that this is how they see the situation, that the U.S. has been --

MS. PSAKI: I think I just answered that question, that I don't have any information --

QUESTION: But not – but respectfully --

MS. PSAKI: Let me finish.

QUESTION: -- it's just very --

MS. PSAKI: I don't have any information on an independent, private conversation. What I was speaking to was reported comments.

QUESTION: Let me ask you --

QUESTION: Jen, is President Karzai still a partner for the U.S.?

MS. PSAKI: He remains the president of Afghanistan, he remains the partner that needs to sign the BSA, and we share, as I mentioned, some goals about moving forward towards a stable, sovereign Afghanistan.

QUESTION: Let me ask you a rudimentary question on the agreement. Last night, the President --

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm, the BSA agreement?

QUESTION: The – yeah, on the – yeah. Last night, the President said "If Afghanistan signs," if. Is it really that iffy? Is it really – is there such a great doubt cast on the possibility that they may or may not sign that agreement?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I think you would know if they had signed it or if they had indicated a timeline of when they would sign it. It remains true that the delay in signing, as we've said many times, negatively affects confidence in the region as well as our and our allies' ability to plan a potential follow-on mission.

As we've said many times, this means that we would have to at some point begin the process of planning for a zero option. So that hasn't changed. I think what the President was stating in his speech last night is the reality which is that it hasn't been signed yet.

QUESTION: So you are really neutral on signing or not signing? I mean, they could sign it or leave it, right?

MS. PSAKI: No, I think I've been absolutely clear that we're not neutral, that we'd like to have it signed.

QUESTION: What – it fails to --

MS. PSAKI: Do we have any more on Afghanistan?

QUESTION: -- contextualize the kind of enthusiasm they're pushing for or something that comes with "If you don't sign, we will do this" kind of a thing. It was absent. Is that the feeling?

MS. PSAKI: I think that we've been very clear that if they don't sign the BSA, we'll have to initiate planning for a zero option.

QUESTION: Well, can I – do you have any discussions within NATO about we realize that the end of 2014 is coming --

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: -- but we have this issue with the BSA and we're up against the clock, and I don't really know how NATO – how the kind of documents work or treaties work or whatever, but in the UN Security Council, if you need a couple more months to kind of – you know what I mean – push this along, you can just extend it for a couple months while troop levels are worked out or anything like that. And I'm wondering, are there any discussions within NATO to say listen, we know – we have this kind of time crunch right here; can we extend two, three months to give us all the time that we need?

MS. PSAKI: I'm obviously not going to speak on behalf of NATO. I think NATO has spoken publicly themselves about the need to get this done as quickly as possible because they need a

BSA signed in order to move forward with the SOFA. In terms of what their planning would require or what space they have, I don't have any particular intel on that piece.

QUESTION: But, I mean, are you willing to consider, as a NATO member state who has discussions with other NATO member states, an extension of the mission for just a couple of months to see if the new government – you know what I mean – so that this way you don't have this time crunch between planning for withdrawal --

MS. PSAKI: An extension in what capacity? Sorry, I'm just not sure (inaudible).

QUESTION: Like, okay, we said we're going to all withdraw at the end of 2014. Can we say we're all going to keep it to, like, March of 2015 so that we know whether we have these couple months to play with?

MS. PSAKI: I'm not aware of that as being an option under consideration.

January 27, 2014

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

QUESTION: I wanted to ask you first about the situation in Afghanistan where 37 prisoners have been released. I understand the Defense Department is also working on this, but I wanted to ask you, from a policy standpoint and – first off on a short-term basis, does this mean that the U.S. no longer has any ability to delay the release of some of these prisoners that it's so concerned about? And on a longer term – more broad term – what will this mean for the BSA negotiations, and would the BSA that the United States would like to have, would it bar the release of more of these prisoners?

MS. PSAKI: Well, a couple of things. One, I'm sure you've seen the ISAF statement that they've put out. I would point you to some strong language that was included in that statement, including the line in there that this is a major step backward in further developing the rule of law in Afghanistan. We have expressed our concerns from the State Department, of course, over the possible release of these detainees without their cases being referring to the Afghan criminal justice system. The 37 detainees are dangerous criminals against whom there is strong evidence linking them to terror-related crimes, including the use of improvised explosive devices, the largest killer of Afghan civilians.

These insurgents who pose threat to the safety and the security of the Afghan people and the state are being released without an investigation and without the use of the criminal justice system in accordance with Afghan law. As you mentioned, obviously, ISAF and DOD are largely running point on this. Broadly speaking in terms of the BSA, we've expressed our concerns as a government writ large about the importance of rule of law and the importance of abiding by – in accordance with the law. So that has been a consistent message that we have conveyed to the Afghan Government.

Our view on the BSA continues to be that it is in the interest of the Afghan people, in the interest of the government, in the interest of the United States, our NATO allies, to move forward with signing of a BSA. You are all familiar with the language that is included in a BSA. I'm not predicting nor do we anticipate a change in any of the language, but that doesn't change our concerns that we've expressed in this case about the importance of abiding by rule of law.

QUESTION: I guess I haven't seen the entire language of the BSA and short of asking you to recite it chapter and verse, would what is being discussed right now include continued detention authorities for the – by the U.S. Government?

MS. PSAKI: I'd have to check on those specifics. Honestly, I haven't talked about all the lines in it in quite a while.

QUESTION: Okay.

MS. PSAKI: I was just conveying that there wasn't planned change in what the language is that exists.

QUESTION: Okay. I guess it could go either way if it's – a development like this makes the United States more or less eager to have a BSA with Afghanistan or certainly with the Karzai government.

MS. PSAKI: I have not – and I'm happy to go back and talk with our team again, but no view has been conveyed to me that our view has changed about the need to move forward with a BSA. As you know, there are a number of reasons why, including the fact that it's in the best interest of the Afghan people, but also because of our own interest on the ground.

And as we've said, a potential U.S. military presence after 2014 would focus on two basic missions, which is training the remnants of al-Qaida – targeting, sorry, the remnants of al-Qaida. That's an important note in the transcript – targeting the remnants of al-Qaida and its affiliates, and training and equipping Afghan forces. Obviously, there are interests there that we have for our own safety and security, but as we've said many times, it's also in the interests of the Afghan people. So that hasn't changed.

QUESTION: Do you have any reaction to the comments over the weekend from President Karzai basically sort of suggesting that the Afghan people would not be strong-armed into signing the BSA?

MS. PSAKI: Well, we're not --

QUESTION: I'm paraphrasing there. It wasn't exactly what he said.

MS. PSAKI: Sure.

QUESTION: But that was the gist of it.

MS. PSAKI: Sure. No, I've seen the comments. I think – I don't have any specific – we don't have any specific U.S. Government reaction, as we wouldn't to every single comment that's made, but I would refute the notion of the point, which is that this has been a negotiation that has occurred over the course of more than a year now. There have been – when the Secretary was there just a few months ago, they agreed on the basic tenets and the language that would be included in the BSA, agreed that it would go to the Loya Jirga to hear from the Afghan people. And it did just that. So this is – there's no question that signing the BSA, moving forward on the

BSA, is in the interests of the Afghan people. They deserve the security of knowing what their future is, and – just as the United States and our NATO allies deserve the certainty of knowing how to plan. So I would just refute the notion of the claim.

QUESTION: Are you – would you agree that you're in a standoff now with the Afghan Government? I mean, when was the last time that the Secretary actually spoke to President Karzai?

MS. PSAKI: Well, it's been awhile. However, this is being discussed, and as is appropriate, on the ground, with our officials on the ground who work this issue every single day. So it's – it shouldn't be taken – the last time the Secretary spoke with President Karzai shouldn't be taken as an evaluation of how closely we're working this. I can assure you that people on the ground are in touch on probably a daily basis on these issues and how to move forward.

QUESTION: But it hasn't moved since December. I mean, if Karzai's comments over the weekend suggest that if anything he's more deeply entrenched his position, that you're going to have to wait until his successor is chosen on April the 5th. So we're now almost in February, so February, March. So you've got two – nine weeks before an election, which he says is when he believes Afghanistan should sign the BSA.

MS. PSAKI: Well, our – look, our position hasn't changed in terms of why we think this is necessary, as I just outlined. Our position also hasn't changed that --

QUESTION: But can you wait 'til – I mean, can you wait 'til April the 5th?

MS. PSAKI: Well, the further this slips into 2014, which we're obviously almost a month into, the more likely that we will have to begin planning for a zero option. I don't think that – as we've stated many times. I'm not going to give you a date or a day on when that would need to take place, but that certainly is a real option out there, and why we continue to press the government to move forward.

QUESTION: I just wanted to ask you if whether you agree that the language of President Karzai is becoming more and more belligerent toward the U.S.

MS. PSAKI: I'm not going to do an evaluation of that. I don't think it would be particularly productive. Our focus here, Said, is of course continuing to make the case, both publicly and privately, on why signing a BSA is in the interests of the Afghan people and the interests of all parties involved. So I'm not going to do an analysis of what is --

QUESTION: Is he unnecessarily straining the U.S.-Afghani relations, you think?

MS. PSAKI: I'm not going to give an evaluation of that either. Obviously, while we never saw the end of last year as a hard deadline, it was certainly our preference to complete the agreement

by the end of last year. We remain focused on our goal on – of attempting to move forward so that we can plan, so that our NATO allies can plan. And many of them have spoken out publicly on this front and the need to move forward as well.

QUESTION: Do you think that President Karzai is probably looking after his own survival and longevity post the elections?

MS. PSAKI: I would point you to him and Afghan political analysts on that particular question.

QUESTION: You talked a moment ago about the need for the Afghan people to have some certainty about their future as a reason for having --

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: -- the BSA. Is it also accurate to suggest, as was in today's New York Times, that the U.S. intelligence community is looking for some sort of certainty? Because without a BSA, it would find it very difficult to operate its UAV program and would have to relocate it to perhaps less advantageous places in the region.

MS. PSAKI: Well, I'm certainly not going to outline or entertain any questions about any intel planning. And of course we've seen the story. There are a range of reasons, many of which I've already outlined, as to why it's important to move forward with the signing of the BSA. So we'll leave it at that.

QUESTION: When you talk, though, about the U.S.'s security interests in Central and Southwestern Asia, does that – doesn't having a BSA mean that the U.S. is better able to keep tabs or to provide support to its non-military operations in those countries?

MS. PSAKI: I'm just not going to outline more specifics or comment any further on the story today. We all saw the story. I just don't have any more commentary for you on it.

QUESTION: Are you able to say whether or not this whole question of the pending BSA has come up in the Secretary's meetings with his Pakistani counterpart today?

MS. PSAKI: It's a good question. Obviously, Afghanistan and the future of Afghanistan is a priority for the United States, and certainly Pakistan as well. Because they're ongoing, I don't have any readout for you at this point. We'll put something out after they conclude later this afternoon.

QUESTION: Could I ask you a follow-up question?

MS. PSAKI: Sure.

QUESTION: I just – it's been said from this podium that the decision on whether or not the United States will continue pressing for a BSA will happen before the Afghan elections, before April 5th. And I just wanted to make sure that was still the case and nothing had changed.

MS. PSAKI: I don't know if it's been stated that – in that specific language, as much as we've long wanted it to have been done by the end of December, and now we were continuing to press for it be completed. So obviously, sooner rather than later, weeks not months, is – continues to be our preference here. But we take this day by day and week by week and determine what planning we need to do in accordance with what happens on the ground.

QUESTION: Okay. So there's no hard-and-fast? It could be a decision made after Karzai's successor comes in or – but it's obviously the preference for it to be done while Karzai – before Karzai leaves office, correct?

MS. PSAKI: Well, the preference was related in large part to the need for the United States to plan, for our NATO allies to plan. Obviously, having this done by last year, or long before the elections, so that the Afghan people have certainty going into the Afghan elections and this doesn't get entangled with Afghan politics was certainly a priority. But I don't have anything to announce for you in terms of the exact date at which we'll have to start planning.

QUESTION: So can you wait, though? You said it was a preference, so can you wait until April the 5th now? Are you coming – is the Administration coming around to that idea that they will wait now until April the 5th?

MS. PSAKI: I wasn't predicting that. It's an evaluation we're making day by day, week by week. I don't have anything to announce for you today on what it means or when the date will be when we'll have to start that planning or when things will change. Obviously, discussions are ongoing on the – in the – within the Administration on that particular question.

QUESTION: Is that a decision you're going to take with your NATO allies? Did you see the comments today from the NATO Secretary General Rasmussen?

MS. PSAKI: I didn't see them, but what --

QUESTION: He was basically saying that you can't wait any longer. I mean, is there some pressure now coming from NATO as well to finally just go ahead with your own planning and forget about what the Afghans do?

MS. PSAKI: Well, NATO has been very clear that they can't move forward with a SOFA – I don't know if this is what he stated as well – until there's a BSA signed, right? So there's a domino effect here in place. They have a number of countries and a large number of resources that they would need to incorporate for planning. I think we've been pretty clear on the need to move forward as quickly as possible, but – and of course we're in touch with our allies about it.

In terms of what the determining factors will be, that's a discussion that will go on and continues to go on internally in the government, but I don't have anything to announce for all of you today.

January 23, 2014

Marie Harf, Spokesperson
Daily Press Briefing, selections on Afghanistan
Washington, DC

QUESTION: The NATO chiefs, when they met and they talked about the agreement – BSA – and they said that they will be not reaching an – they are waiting till sometime in late spring or early summer, they said.

MS. HARF: Yeah.

QUESTION: So what is the – so – and that means that kind of a deadline they are putting.

MS. HARF: Well --

QUESTION: And where is the State Department on that?

MS. HARF: Well, the NATO secretary general has explicitly stated that NATO will not conclude or sign its SOFA with Afghanistan until there's a completed U.S.-Afghanistan BSA. So when I stand up here and say not signing our BSA, it has huge ripple effects of impacts, including planning with our partners. That's exactly what I'm talking about. So obviously, there's no hard deadline, but it needs to be signed as soon as possible, and our position continues to be that if we cannot conclude a BSA promptly, we will initiate planning for a post-2014 future in which there would be no U.S. and no NATO troops presence in Afghanistan.

That's obviously not our preferred position. That's not a future that we're seeking. But every day that goes by without a BSA, that becomes more of a likelihood, not less.

QUESTION: No, but the other journalists who are attending there, they're saying that there are other nations who are quite – they are expecting a kind of deadline from the U.S. that – do it by this – like, you had given a December --

MS. HARF: I just said there's no deadline, and December 31st wasn't a hard deadline either.

QUESTION: So – okay.

MS. HARF: So there's really no hard deadline, but again, every day that goes longer without a BSA, it impacts our planning, it impacts NATO planning, it impacts the Afghan people's planning for what their country will look like post-2014, and that's why we believe it's in the best interest of the Afghan people for President Karzai to sign this as soon as possible.

QUESTION: Even the cuts in the U.S. aid to Afghanistan, which is by half by the Congress is --

MS. HARF: Not all – I don't think it's to all U.S. aid. I think it was specific to some kinds of aid. In the draft budget?

QUESTION: Yeah.

MS. HARF: Yeah.

QUESTION: So is it part of that non-signing of BSA? Is it linked to it?

MS. HARF: I can check. I'm not exactly sure. Let me check on that. I'm not sure.

QUESTION: To clarify on Afghanistan --

MS. HARF: Uh-huh.

QUESTION: -- some people have said that this decision – that Karzai needs to make this decision within weeks, not months, i.e. --

MS. HARF: Yeah.

QUESTION: -- there may be no – it'll happen on this day/deadline --

MS. HARF: Yeah.

QUESTION: -- but it needs to happen soon. Now, Karzai election – or the election to replace Karzai --

MS. HARF: In April.

QUESTION: -- will be in months, not weeks. So does this indicate that Karzai needs to make this decision, that the U.S. cannot wait until after his successor comes in?

MS. HARF: We have – we have said weeks, not months. I would reiterate that here. And we have also said we do not want to wait until after the election, that President Karzai should sign it --

QUESTION: Okay.

MS. HARF: -- or make a decision on what he's going to do.

QUESTION: Okay.

MS. HARF: Yes.

QUESTION: And this is the second week of that weeks, and if you wait for another two month – two weeks, it'll be months. We'll be entering months.

MS. HARF: We are saying weeks, not months. And again, we have to take steps and plan for what we think is the most likely outcome and what it will look like after 2014. And by him continuing to not sign it, the likelihood becomes more likely, I guess, or higher that we won't have any troops there. And again, we encourage him to sign it as soon as possible.

QUESTION: No, but a ISAF official on background told a journalist there that – and there will be some additional – some troops in – around in July through September, but by October, most of those will be gone. So on that statement – so we have a kind of – a time span to work on it.

MS. HARF: Well, when we – when the United States has decisions about troop presence and numbers and drawdown, we'll be making those announcements. We don't have anything to announce on that point. The President is still making decisions about drawdown and what it will look like after 2014.

January 16, 2014

Jen Psaki, **Spokesperson**
Daily Press Briefing, selections on Afghanistan
Washington, DC

QUESTION: Okay. On the spending bill, do you have any numbers or any more information on the Afghan section?

MS. PSAKI: Sure. Let me see what I have here. Let's see. I don't have any specific numbers because while overall levels for the major civilian assistance accounts have been reduced, the bill itself does not include any specific cap for Afghanistan, and using – over the next few months, the Department will finalize bilateral assistance totals for the fiscal year. So there isn't a specific number that we're going to get into, but there's no cap either.

QUESTION: Okay. I'll get back with you on that.

MS. PSAKI: Okay.

QUESTION: And – but also, part of that is about – that some of it's tied to the Government of Afghanistan signing the BSA. Does that concern you? Because obviously, if there's a drawdown of troops, then there's going to be a need presumably for a corresponding amount of foreign assistance to go into the country. If you've got – if they haven't signed the BSA, then under this bill, if it stays as it is, you won't be able to provide them with that assistance.

MS. PSAKI: I'm not sure and I'd have to double-check if something is actually specifically tied to that particular piece. I mean, obviously, we recognize that civilian needs in Afghanistan will not end with the end of the combat mission this year, and we continue to believe that sustained and significant support for Afghanistan's government and its people are critical to maintaining the gains of the past decade. Obviously, there are a range of different processes that are happening at one time, and as I mentioned, we'll finalize the bilateral assistance totals as the fiscal year proceeds.

QUESTION: If, as you said, that the civil needs will – the civilians' needs will be looked at, and is there anything in the making to get a kind of a proxy presence, like a UN force or any other countries if the U.S. has to leave, because – if there's no agreement signature going on?

MS. PSAKI: Well, obviously, our focus remains on pressing the government to sign the BSA. That's something not just the United States, but our NATO allies are pressing on. Obviously, there are always contingency plans, but I'm not going to get into those. And we remain focused on encouraging them to sign the BSA.

QUESTION: Is there any deadline near your – because the NATO people are meeting in Brussels – and is there any deadline you have put to that BSA if it is not signed? Because we cannot go on indefinitely.

MS. PSAKI: Well, it was certainly our preference to complete the agreement in 2013, as we expressed, consistent with the goals set out at the beginning of the process. Our position continues to be that if we cannot conclude a BSA promptly, we will initiate planning for a post-2014 future. As I mentioned and you referenced, it's not just about the United States. It's also about our NATO allies. And NATO, like the United States, is working with the Afghan Government to fulfill the commitment made at the 2012 Chicago NATO summit.

It's important to note that this includes 37 – in addition to the United States, 37 other NATO allies and partners who have pledged their participation in a post-2014 support mission. This will be – which will also be impacted if the signing of the BSA continues to slip. So like the United States, these other nations each have timelines to meet with regard to their political, military, and budget planning process, and that's why not just the United States, but many of our NATO allies are pressing for this to be concluded.

January 10, 2014

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

QUESTION: Afghanistan. The announcement by the Afghans that they are going to release a large majority --

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: -- of the detainees. I'm just wondering if you have any reaction to that, if you're in discussions about possible – if they are going to do it, about possible monitoring measures of these individuals to make sure they don't --

MS. PSAKI: Well, as would come as no surprise, I expect a statement will be coming out from DOD, but let me just reiterate some of the – some of our views from here. We have expressed our concerns over the possible release of these detainees without their cases being referred to the Afghan criminal justice system. We've seen reports, as you noted, that President Karzai has approved the release of 72 of the 80 detainees under review.

As you may also know, these 72 detainees are dangerous criminals against whom there is strong evidence linking them to terror-related crimes, including the use of improvised explosive devices, the largest killer of Afghan civilians. These insurgents who pose threats to the safety and security of the Afghan people and the state are being released without an investigation and without the use of criminal justice system in accordance with Afghan law. Among – their release also undermines Afghanistan's court system and rule of law, because the Afghan people do not get their day in court.

In terms of any other pieces in terms of how it would be dealt with, I would refer you to DOD.

QUESTION: Well, but I mean you've – the State Department has in large part been dealing with the Afghan Government –

MS. PSAKI: Sure.

QUESTION: -- on the larger issues --

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: -- about some stuff. I mean, what about any type of monitoring measures of these individuals when they – I mean that's something that this Department was involved in, for instance, when you sent Guantanamo detainees back (inaudible).

MS. PSAKI: I don't have any update on that. My understanding is that would probably fall under the purview of DOD, but I can check and see if there's anything we have or any involvement from here in that piece.

QUESTION: How do you view this decision? Do you view this decision – is it impacting the relationship or negotiations on the BSA?

MS. PSAKI: Well, on the BSA, as you know, our view continues to be, despite these reports, that it's not only desired by the United States for the Afghans to sign the BSA, but it's in the interests of the Afghan people. And it's in the interests of the Afghan Government to sign the BSA. So time will tell whether there is an impact, but obviously, this is a report that we have concerns about. At the same time, we continue to work toward and make our case for why it's important to sign the BSA as quickly as possible.

QUESTION: (Inaudible.)

MS. PSAKI: Afghanistan? Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: Yes, please. In general, usually it's in the military side we are – you are, like, putting on the table the option – zero option.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: And is there an equivalent to it in the nation-building option?

MS. PSAKI: I'm not sure I understand your question.

QUESTION: I mean, I'm trying to say if, like – if you don't come to an agreement regarding the military --

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: -- or security arrangements --

MS. PSAKI: Sure.

QUESTION: -- how it's going to affect the other project that over those years that are most in 10 – more than 10 years now all this nation building project, and I assume there is a diplomatic and economic relation.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: Are these things are going to be affected or not?

MS. PSAKI: Well, as you know, if we can't conclude a BSA promptly, we will initiate planning for a post-2014 future in which there's no U.S. or NATO troop presence in Afghanistan. Obviously, those troops would not be playing a role, a combat role. They'd be playing a train, advise, and assist role. There are a range of programs, to your point, that would be part of that, certainly. I don't have an outline or detail of that, as in we're not in that stage at this point. But it would be challenging. And this is an important point we perhaps haven't made enough, which is that it's not just about the United States and NATO planning, it's also about Congress planning and even asked for funding or assistance for a variety of programs. It makes it more challenging for Congress to plan when there isn't certainty about what the future will be either.

So the answer is we don't know yet. But obviously there are a range of interests we have in Afghanistan. I don't have any predictions for you on what the impact would be because we're not at that point yet.

QUESTION: Speaking of the Hill, there was quite a lot of chatter up there this morning, and I think right now going on Senators McCain and Graham and also Speaker Boehner are talking about Iraq and the need for the Administration to get more engaged. Is there any – is there anything new on that support for the Maliki government in its fight that you can offer us today?

MS. PSAKI: Sure. Well, one, let me just refute some of that criticism, or all of that criticism I suspect, which is that the United States, the State Department, the White House, the Administration writ large has been very deeply and closely engaged in Iraq consistently. We've talked a bit in here about Deputy Assistant Secretary Brett McGurk's work to push for unity in the region, our efforts to work with – in recent days, I should say, to work with the Iraqi Government to develop strategies, our efforts to accelerate assistance. But this has been consistent, and it would be inaccurate to assume that this is just a recent effort on behalf of the United States. Obviously, we're talking about it in the news these days.

I can – did you have any specific pieces --

QUESTION: Well, I mean, Chairman Menendez has been talking about how he's willing to allow certain – the provision of certain things that were blocked before to go through now. There were, I believe, helicopters --

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: -- there were fighter jets – planes that were stopped. Does the Administration see any way of getting that stuff to the Iraqis?

MS. PSAKI: Well, as you know, and we've talked a bit in here about accelerating assistance, and as part of our FMS program, we would certainly support – the Administration would certainly support providing Apaches, especially given the situation on the ground. Obviously,

that's something that we are working with Congress on, we're in close contact with Congress on, and we'll continue that – those consultations. But we would support that.

QUESTION: Just to put a finer point on it --

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: -- you said you would support it. But are you lobbying Congress to get them to approve it?

MS. PSAKI: We wouldn't call it lobbying. We support it --

QUESTION: Maybe not lobbying – not – I know you support the idea --

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: -- but do you want to provide them and are you trying to get Congress to say yes?

MS. PSAKI: We are working with Congress on that exactly.

QUESTION: Yes. I'll take that as a "yes."

January 9, 2014

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

QUESTION: Afghanistan. The announcement by the Afghans that they are going to release a large majority --

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: -- of the detainees. I'm just wondering if you have any reaction to that, if you're in discussions about possible – if they are going to do it, about possible monitoring measures of these individuals to make sure they don't --

MS. PSAKI: Well, as would come as no surprise, I expect a statement will be coming out from DOD, but let me just reiterate some of the – some of our views from here. We have expressed our concerns over the possible release of these detainees without their cases being referred to the Afghan criminal justice system. We've seen reports, as you noted, that President Karzai has approved the release of 72 of the 80 detainees under review.

As you may also know, these 72 detainees are dangerous criminals against whom there is strong evidence linking them to terror-related crimes, including the use of improvised explosive devices, the largest killer of Afghan civilians. These insurgents who pose threats to the safety and security of the Afghan people and the state are being released without an investigation and without the use of criminal justice system in accordance with Afghan law. Among – their release also undermines Afghanistan's court system and rule of law, because the Afghan people do not get their day in court.

In terms of any other pieces in terms of how it would be dealt with, I would refer you to DOD.

QUESTION: Well, but I mean you've – the State Department has in large part been dealing with the Afghan Government –

MS. PSAKI: Sure.

QUESTION: -- on the larger issues --

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: -- about some stuff. I mean, what about any type of monitoring measures of these individuals when they – I mean that's something that this Department was involved in, for instance, when you sent Guantanamo detainees back (inaudible).

MS. PSAKI: I don't have any update on that. My understanding is that would probably fall under the purview of DOD, but I can check and see if there's anything we have or any involvement from here in that piece.

QUESTION: How do you view this decision? Do you view this decision – is it impacting the relationship or negotiations on the BSA?

MS. PSAKI: Well, on the BSA, as you know, our view continues to be, despite these reports, that it's not only desired by the United States for the Afghans to sign the BSA, but it's in the interests of the Afghan people. And it's in the interests of the Afghan Government to sign the BSA. So time will tell whether there is an impact, but obviously, this is a report that we have concerns about. At the same time, we continue to work toward and make our case for why it's important to sign the BSA as quickly as possible.

QUESTION: (Inaudible.)

MS. PSAKI: Afghanistan? Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: Yes, please. In general, usually it's in the military side we are – you are, like, putting on the table the option – zero option.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: And is there an equivalent to it in the nation-building option?

MS. PSAKI: I'm not sure I understand your question.

QUESTION: I mean, I'm trying to say if, like – if you don't come to an agreement regarding the military --

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: -- or security arrangements --

MS. PSAKI: Sure.

QUESTION: -- how it's going to affect the other project that over those years that are most in 10 – more than 10 years now all this nation building project, and I assume there is a diplomatic and economic relation.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: Are these things are going to be affected or not?

MS. PSAKI: Well, as you know, if we can't conclude a BSA promptly, we will initiate planning for a post-2014 future in which there's no U.S. or NATO troop presence in Afghanistan. Obviously, those troops would not be playing a role, a combat role. They'd be playing a train, advise, and assist role. There are a range of programs, to your point, that would be part of that, certainly. I don't have an outline or detail of that, as in we're not in that stage at this point. But it would be challenging. And this is an important point we perhaps haven't made enough, which is that it's not just about the United States and NATO planning, it's also about Congress planning and even asked for funding or assistance for a variety of programs. It makes it more challenging for Congress to plan when there isn't certainty about what the future will be either.

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