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**Press Briefing by Press Secretary Jay Carney, 5/17/2011**

**James S. Brady Press Briefing Room**

1:22 P.M. EDT

MR. CARNEY: All right. Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. I don't have any announcements, so we'll go straight to questions.

Jim.

Q Thank you, Jay. As the President prepares for this speech on the Middle East this week, the region is in upheaval, they have stalled Israeli-Palestinian talks, bin Laden is dead. How does the President link all those things together? And what is he attempting to accomplish with this speech and with all the activity that's taking place this week on the news?

MR. CARNEY: Jim, you make a great point that we have seen just a remarkable amount of activity of change in these six months. We have -- or five months. More in five months than we've seen in 50 years, in many ways, in the region, in the Middle East and North Africa.

And the President looks forward to giving this speech and sees it as an opportunity to sort of step back and assess what we've all witnessed, the historic change we've seen, and to talk about how he views it, the change we've seen, as a moment of opportunity and an opportunity for us to explain to the world what our values are and the values and the principles that we bring to the region as we decide what policies this administration and this country should pursue to support that change, to support the democratic aspirations of the people in the region. He'll talk specifically about ways that we can best support that positive change, while focusing on our core principles: nonviolence, support for human rights, and support for political and economic reform.

Q Does he -- does the President agree with King Abdullah who was quoted saying yesterday that, "injustice, the stalemate in the Middle East process, and loss of hope are major factors behind continued tensions and violence in the region"? Particularly at issue is the unsettled peace talks. Are those an element?

MR. CARNEY: Well, he will certainly -- the President will certainly discuss the Middle East peace process in the speech. It is an element, obviously, of the speech as well as the discussions about what's happening in the region.

I think that the fact that there needs to be progress in those peace talks is something the President very much agrees with. I think that, as we've said -- most recently I said yesterday in responding to a question about activities by the Syrian government -- that conflict is often used by other regimes in the region, by other governments in the region to distract from the problems in their own countries. And we also think that there's a history of that, and that what we have been seeing in many cases in these past five months is demonstrations by people of these countries, protests against their governments and demands for more political participation, for greater individual freedoms, greater economic prosperity, that is really the source of future instability in the region. And while we obviously believe that there needs to be progress in the Middle East peace process, there are many other important problems to address in the region to -- for the governments in the region to answer the legitimate grievances of the people that they represent.

Q If I could ask on another point, the President today once again didn't take questions from the White House press corps when he met King Abdullah. We haven't had an opportunity to ask the President anything since I believe the near-government shutdown. And I was wondering why is that? Why -- he's in the middle of -- he's taken up a lot of issues, from immigration to debt relief to the Middle East. Why --

MR. CARNEY: Well, I'm sure, Jim, you'll have opportunities -- for those of you who are traveling, he will be taking questions on our upcoming foreign trip. And as you know, he has given some interviews in that time to journalists who have asked some questions about all of the pressing issues of the day. And he'll continue to do that. I think his track record of taking questions and giving interviews is very strong and will continue to be strong going forward.

Yes.

Q Jay, a couple of things. Can I start with the IMF? Is the administration concerned of the ongoing uncertainty about the future of Dominique Strauss-Kahn damaging the IMF in any way or its ability to function?

MR. CARNEY: No. We retain full confidence in the IMF and its continued capacity to fulfill its obligations, to fill its role -- rather fulfill its role in the global economy during this difficult period. And as I said yesterday, that remains our position today.

Q Okay. Notwithstanding that, at some point the job of managing director of the IMF will be open, at some point in the future. The President in the past has said that he'd like to see an enhanced role for emerging economies in the International Monetary Fund. Would he support the longstanding tradition of the IMF managing director's position being held by a European changing and going in the next term to someone from the emerging world?

MR. CARNEY: I'm not going to talk about the process for selecting potentially a future head of the IMF from here. I don't really have any comment on it. I think the important point is that we believe that the IMF can and will continue to function and fulfill its role in the global economy.

Q Changing track to the debt and budget discussions, Newt Gingrich over the weekend called Representative Ryan's Medicare plan "radical." Does the administration think that popular opinion about the Medicare plan from the Republicans strengthens the position of Democrats in the debt and budget discussions?

MR. CARNEY: Well, that's a complicated question that involves a lot of moving pieces. I would note that, without wading into a dispute between Republicans, I would note that the former Speaker of the House once said that he hoped to see Medicare wither on the vine, and yet his position now is seen as too far to the left by some people in his party. I think what we believe is that -- as the President has stated very clearly -- is that Medicare needs to be there for seniors. The commitment, the guarantee that it provides, needs to be retained and that our approach is to find the savings that we can within the program, as we have demonstrated in the past and going forward as we deal with long-term deficits and debt reduction, while maintaining that guarantee.

And we obviously disagree with some -- the approach that House Republicans have taken in their proposal which would essentially eliminate Medicare as we know it and turn it into a semi-privatized voucher system, which we do not support.

Yes, Jake.

Q Jay, on the Mideast peace process, how can Israel be expected to make peace with the Palestinians given the reconciliation between Fatah and Hamas, and Hamas in its charter has called for the destruction of Israel? How can there be any way forward there? What is the President suggesting to King Abdullah? What will he suggest to Bibi on Friday?

MR. CARNEY: Well, Jake, as we've said, we're watching developments in the Palestinian Territories, and we're watching them very closely. And we've made it clear that Hamas must stop its outrageous use of terrorism and recognize Israel's right to exist. That remains our position. It has not changed. And obviously any participation in a Palestinian government would require that it abides by those standards, in our view. And that's why we're continuing to monitor the developments and reports about the reconciliation and where it's headed.

Q But is there anything possible -- the President said that now more than ever it's vital to have the parties return to the table -- is anything even possible, given this reconciliation with Hamas?

MR. CARNEY: Well, again, you're sort of looking into the future in terms of what the Palestinian government might look like. In terms of the reconciliation, we've made it clear that our principles have not changed; that Hamas must stop its use of terrorism and must recognize Israeli's right to exist. And those are core principles that we stand by.

Q Switching to a domestic issue, the White House and the Department of Health and Human Services has granted more than 1,300 waivers for businesses, unions, corporations for the health care law. Can you explain why so many waivers have been granted?

MR. CARNEY: Well, first of all, that's not that many, if you consider the number of businesses that we're talking about here. The waiver is not a waiver of the law. It is a provision of the law, and it is specifically designed to ensure that those individuals in some places of employment who have mini-med plans, these very limited coverage plans, retain the coverage that they have while the transition and the implementation of the health care law takes place.

By 2014 -- beginning in 2014 when annual limits are completely banned, all Americans will have affordable coverage options, and these waivers will no longer be necessary and will no longer exist. It's basically a bridging mechanism to get -- to ensure that those folks who have these mini-med plans, who have this minimal leverage of coverage, are able to retain it during this period of transition.

Q And how was the decision made? Has anybody been denied one of these waivers?

MR. CARNEY: There have been 1,372 waivers granted and fewer than 100 waiver applications have been denied.

Q And why were they denied?

MR. CARNEY: You'd have to ask HHS.

Q Okay, thank you.

MR. CARNEY: Yes, Dan.

Q Thank you, Jay. When can we expect the administration to announce new sanctions on Syria? And will those sanctions be focused directly at President Assad?

MR. CARNEY: I believe you probably heard the Secretary of State mention that we are looking at additional measures that we might take, and that is obviously the case. And I don't have timing for you, but we are continuing --

Q Will they be focused on President Assad?

MR. CARNEY: I don't want to get ahead of myself here, but we are looking at ways to continue to put pressure on the Syrian government, the Syrian regime to pressure it so that it ceases the violence against its own people and that it engages its people in peaceful dialogue and begins to respond to the legitimate grievances that the Syrian people have.

We will be looking at taking additional measures to do that.

Q On the Mideast peace process, you said how the President sees this as a moment of opportunity. How big is this window of opportunity? And in light of what we've seen spread across the region, is this now or never?

MR. CARNEY: It depends on what you're referring to. My answer is no, it's not now or never. But we are in a historic moment with regards to what's been referred to as the Arab Spring. I don't think anybody in this room has seen anything like it in their adult lifetimes, and it presents a unique opportunity for the United States and our allies to embrace and support the kind of change that will improve the lives of the people of that region, and improve the security of the United States of America.

That is an opportunity not to be missed, in the President's view. And while change can be unsettling, it can even be scary because we don't always know where it's headed. It is something in this case to be embraced because the opportunity is there to help shape a better future for the region and for the world.

Q But in terms of the opportunity to jumpstart the peace process, which has been stalled, how big is that window?

MR. CARNEY: Well, if you're asking specifically about the peace process, I think that I'll let the President address that in his speech in terms of specifics and how he wants to discuss that. I think the President has been very clear, as has the Secretary of State and as have others, that we need to move forward with that process, that the circumstances are difficult, and they are not likely to magically resolve themselves. So the parties need to sit down and negotiate and move forward on a peace process that reaches a resolution, a two-state solution that we obviously support strongly.

Yes.

Q Jay, I just want to be clear, but in the speech on Thursday will the President be essentially setting forth a new policy on the Middle East peace process?

MR. CARNEY: Again, I think there's a focus on the Middle East peace process here that I want to clarify, which is the speech is not about the Middle East peace process. It will include a discussion of the conflict between the Israelis the Palestinians and the peace process, but it is a much broader speech than that, that looks at developments in the entire region -- the historic developments that we've seen in these past five months since -- or six months since that street vendor in Tunisia took that dramatic action that he took.

So, again, I want to make clear that he's using this opportunity to step back and talk about what we've seen, what's transpired, the approach that he's taken in applying the core principles that he holds to the whole region and to the unrest that we've seen in the whole region, but then obviously looking at U.S. policy and applying those principles in a country -- on a country-by-country basis because, as we've said, obviously each country is different.

Q But will it be the old policy, or will there be elements of a new policy?

MR. CARNEY: With regards to --

Q The Middle East.

MR. CARNEY: The peace process. Again, I don't want to get into specifics about --

Q I'm sorry -- the peace process.

MR. CARNEY: Yes, because the President will be -- will have some specific ideas about how the United States can support the positive change in the Middle East and North Africa, the broader region. On the specific Israeli-

can support the positive change in the Middle East and North Africa, the broader region. On the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict, he will address this. I don't want to raise the curtain beyond that on the specifics of that element of the speech.

Q How about on the broader -- the kind of thing Dan was talking about, sanctions, things of that nature? Will the President make news? Will there be -- (laughter) --

MR. CARNEY: The President --

Q Not on that -- on any issue, will he be making news?

MR. CARNEY: I can say safely the President will make news on Thursday when he gives this speech. And I mean that in the language that we understand, that, yes, he will have some specific new ideas about U.S. policy towards the region.

Q Okay, one other issue is that in his speech -- in one of his fundraiser speeches last night, he said, "We're just a quarter of the way through." And Hillary Clinton today is quoted as saying that -- quoting a discussion she had with the President recently in which they were talking about leaders around the world who were in power for 10 or 20 years and how terrible that would be, and she quoted the President as saying, "I'm going to get reelected and that's it." Sounds like he's taking reelection for granted.

MR. CARNEY: Oh, I can assure you he is not at all and he's focused very much on the job he has to do as President. The enormous array of challenges that this country faces right now occupy almost all of his time and -- but when it comes to the coming election, he's taking absolutely nothing for granted and he understands very well that we live in a very competitive political environment, which is why he will when the time comes make a case for reelection.

Yes.

Q Jay, you've spoken out several times about Syria. We heard the Secretary of State speak out about Syria this morning. Should we expect a message from the President in the speech directly to Assad or Syria?

MR. CARNEY: I don't want to get any more specific than I have about the elements of the speech. I want to make sure you tune in or show up and cover and write about the speech. So I'll leave that alone except to say that -- to echo what the Secretary of State said, which we are looking at taking additional measures to add to the pressure we're trying to put on the Syrian government to cease the violence against its own people.

Q One quick one on a domestic issue. Ed Lazear from the previous administration wrote an opinion piece in the Wall Street Journal, talking about the jobs market, and said the reason why it doesn't feel so good right now is because we're not necessarily adding more jobs; we're just not having as many layoffs. Do you guys agree with that assessment?

MR. CARNEY: Well, I'll say two things about this. Since Mr. Lazear was in the White House, obviously -- well, two things. One, when we came into power, there were -- when the President took office, already lost 4 million jobs. And within a number of months after that, another 4 million had been lost in the recession. That's quite a big hole to dig the country out of.

We measure the jobs situation based on the data that everyone sees and receives, which has shown us that we've had now 14 months of net job creation, private sector job creation, and three straight months of rather strong net private sector job creation, three-quarters of a million jobs in three months. So I think that's very solid news.

Would we argue that we're there, that there isn't more to be done? Absolutely not. That's why the President wakes up every morning thinking about what ways -- what can we do to further our economic growth, to continue the positive growth that we've had, to continue the job creation that we've been experiencing, especially the strong job creation lately.

But we're still -- we still have a ways to go. There's no question. And there are people who wake up every morning and worry about their job security and worry about whether or not they're going to be able to find a job. And we understand that, and that's the focus of all of the President's economic policies.

Yes.

Q Back to the Palestinian-Israeli issue, you said that the United States has core values when it comes to looking at this situation -- human rights, nonviolence, support for economic and political reforms. On the issue of nonviolence, how does the President view the nonviolent protests the Palestinians staged over the weekend? I know you've singled out the situation of Syria where there was clearly some incitement to do this by the Syrian government. But there's now talk of more protests, nonviolent protests, as perhaps a next way of trying to exert pressure on the Israelis. What is the President's view of that tactic, nonviolent protests and the Palestinians?

MR. CARNEY: Well, a couple of points I would make. One is that -- I think I made this point yesterday -- is that obviously Israel has the right to protect its own borders, and that's an important point. The other point obviously is that we would urge, obviously, restraint on all sides. And we want -- progress in peaceful negotiations is obviously

that we would like, obviously, remain an obstacle. But the main progress in peacemaking is obviously the goal that we seek.

But I think it's important to note that Israel, like all countries, has the right to protect its borders.

Q It's been asked other ways, but I guess I'm not clear on how the President now plans to move things forward in a way that's different than things have been in the past. Given the new reality -- what seems to be a new reality of this unity government that the Palestinians have formed, given that reality, what do you do? How do you -- besides demanding that Hamas renounce -- accept the state of Israel and renounce violence, can you deal with any aspect of that government?

MR. CARNEY: Well, we obviously deal with the existing government, the Prime Minister and the President, and we encourage both sides to move forward in the peace process, as we make clear our position on the things Hamas needs to do, in our view.

The broader -- stepping back, this is a moment of opportunity, and not just for other countries in the region but for Israel and the Palestinians as well. There is historic change taking place in the region and proof that there are universal aspirations -- a desire for greater freedom, greater political freedom and economic prosperity that crosses borders, crosses ethnicities, crosses nationalities.

And it's incumbent upon the political leaders of the whole region to try to take steps that encourage that positive change and to do it -- because that is really the future for their countries and for their peoples. And as we've said about other countries, the efforts to use -- to resist the positive change will not lead to greater stability. So we think it's very important that everybody in the region look at this moment as an opportunity for -- to move forward on behalf of the region, on behalf of the peoples of the region, on behalf of the world.

Q In Pakistan, there was the arrest of an al Qaeda operative, a guy named Muhammad Ali Qasim. The Pakistanis describe him as a major figure. Some in the U.S. are not describing him in that way. What is your sense of how significant this is and is it something that has happened as a result of the bin Laden episode or pressure on the Pakistani government to cooperate, be more aggressive? Or how should we see this?

MR. CARNEY: I have to confess I don't have anything for you on that except to say that, as we've been saying for the last couple weeks, that the relationship that the United States has with Pakistan is very important, it's complex and it's sometimes complicated. But it is vital to our national security interests, and maintaining that cooperative relationship is a high priority precisely because it is in the interests of the United States of America and the American people that we do maintain that relationship. And it has led to some very important achievements in the war against al Qaeda and the war against terrorism in general. And we look forward to continuing that cooperation with the Pakistani people and Pakistani government.

Q Just one last one, on Syria. There are now reports of mass graves near the town of Daraa and other places in the country. The death toll is approaching a thousand, depending upon -- some human rights groups are saying that. As the President looks at this situation and compare it to Libya and other situations, what is the -- how much longer can this go in that direction before there's a need for some more aggressive response? Not necessarily militarily, but some kind of response. I know there's no tripwire, no line in the sand, to use an overused cliché, but how do you -- how does the administration see recent developments, which seem to be going in wrong direction?

MR. CARNEY: Well, we strongly condemn the unacceptable behavior. And we've made it clear that the recent events in Syria we believe prove that the country cannot go back to the status quo ante; that Syria's future will only be secured by a government that reflects the popular will of its people.

The window is narrowing for the Syrian government to shift focus away from repressing its people and towards meeting the legitimate aspirations of its people. And as I said, we are looking at additional measures that we can take, and we continue to enforce the measures already taken, the longstanding sanctions against Syria and the specific targeted sanctions that we announced recently. But we remain very concerned about this, and could not be less clear -- I mean, could not be more clear, rather, about our insistence that the Syrian government needs to cease the violence, because the window is narrowing for its opportunity to embrace the demands of its people and work with the Syrian people in peaceful dialogue to respond to their aspirations.

Yes, Laura.

Q Two questions. First, you spoke a moment ago about the moment of opportunity in the Arab world, the historic change taking place across the region. Does that sense of a moment of opportunity also apply to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict? Did you mean that to encompass that, that they also have a moment of opportunity?

MR. CARNEY: Well, I would just say that broadly speaking, that changes in the region present an opportunity for positive progress. And I will leave specifics about that conflict to the President's speech, but -- except to say that, yes, broadly speaking --

Q There's a connection.

MR. CARNEY: Well, I don't want to draw it in too firmly, because obviously each -- just as each country in the region is different, this conflict is distinct. But it is an opportunity.

Q There's something special about what's happening now that does present a perfect opportunity --

MR. CARNEY: I think -- you're talking about developments in a region that are unprecedented in a half century. And that has, I think, repercussions and hopefully positive repercussions throughout the region.

Q Separately, European leaders are calling on Strauss-Kahn to resign for the good of the institution. Does the U.S. feel the same way? Should he resign from the IMF?

MR. CARNEY: I don't have anything more on the IMF than what I've said.

Q So there's no position on whether he should keep his -- he should stay in that position right now?

MR. CARNEY: Again, first of all, this involves a legal issue taking place in the United States and I -- beyond the IMF, I don't have any more comment.

Q In terms of not so much whether he should be forced to resign, but whether it would be wise for him to resign.

MR. CARNEY: Again, no more -- I don't have anything else on that.

Yes, sir.

Q Today Queen Elizabeth is making a historic visit to Ireland as a symbolic gesture, putting old grievances aside between the Republic of Ireland and Great Britain. Since the President seems to be focusing on similar dramatic changes in the Middle East this week, does the Queen's visit give him much hope that those resolutions may exist in those regions? Does he take much hope from that? And will the President be asking Her Majesty for some advice?

MR. CARNEY: It's entirely possible. I have not had that discussion with the President about what conversations he may anticipate having with the Queen. He's very much looking forward to the visit. He also is visiting Ireland, very excited about that, in addition to the United Kingdom. And the progress made in that conflict is an important precedent for the capacity for parties that had been in conflict for a long time to reach peaceful reconciliation. And so in that sense I think the answer is yes.

Q Thanks.

MR. CARNEY: Yes.

Q On the Middle East, is a September deadline still possible? I mean, is it a realistic deadline now?

MR. CARNEY: Again, I don't want to get into any more specifics about it. The President is going to give a big speech about the Middle East region, so -- and on the peace process itself, I'll leave it to him.

Q What would need to happen for talks to be revived, though? I mean what would be the way forward, like --

MR. CARNEY: Yes, there are obviously a number of people involved directly in the negotiations who could answer that question more concretely. But obviously a certain amount of will and a desire to sit down and move forward with the peace process -- I mean, that's the basic requirement.

Q And on the budget talks, when is the Vice President's next budget meeting? Has a date been picked for that yet?

MR. CARNEY: I don't believe we have a date, but we expect after both houses of Congress are back in town.

Q What kind of talks are going on now? Who is the Vice President talking to as the House is in recess?

MR. CARNEY: There are staff-level conversations continuing on a regular basis. We remain optimistic about the progress that those talks have made so far, and we look forward to greater progress being made when they resume. But staff-level conversations are taking place this week while the House is in recess.

Q So the Vice President isn't -- is he --

MR. CARNEY: I know he's deeply engaged in this process. I just haven't checked in with him or his office to see if he's had any specific conversations in the last 48 hours, but it's entirely possible.

Yes.

Q Jay, could you talk -- not about the content of the speech but sort of the process over the last few months as events have unfolded, how the staff decided that a bigger narrative was needed here?

MR. CARNEY: Well, I think there have been discussions for a number of months now about finding the right opportunity and the right time for the President to step back and give a speech about -- that takes into account these sweeping changes, these historic changes in the region. And from there, it's just been a matter of finding the venue and the date and the appropriate moment to do it. And we settled on this Thursday.

Q Did bin Laden's death play into the timing?

MR. CARNEY: As I think unfortunately has been reported for quite a long time, the discussions about having a speech like this -- having the President give a speech like this well predate the death of Osama bin Laden.

Q Why the State Department as opposed to here or somewhere else?

MR. CARNEY: You know, I think obviously when the -- the decision that we would do it in Washington, and I think the State Department is an excellent venue because it speaks to where our efforts in the region will emanate principally, which is that they will be diplomatic efforts. They will be -- even as we maintain our fierce fight against al Qaeda and terrorism in general, and even as we continue to work in Afghanistan to make progress there and break the momentum of the Taliban and make the kind of progress that will allow us to achieve that transition to an Afghan lead -- and those are principally military efforts, military and intelligence efforts -- the longer future in the Middle East we believe will have a huge diplomatic component to it. And the State Department is an appropriate place to give a speech like this because of the role that agency will play in achieving the kind of goals the President will talk about on Thursday.

Yes.

Q Jay, last December when Secretary Clinton laid out the way the U.S. was going to move forward with the Middle East in the wake of the direct negotiations between Abbas and Netanyahu falling through, she said the U.S. would revert to proximity talks, indirect negotiations. Yet between last December and now, there didn't seem to be any high-level U.S. engagement in trying to make that happen. Senator Mitchell made no trips to the region at all during this intervening period.

So my question is, why wasn't there high-level envoys -- Senator Mitchell or others -- that were trying to make these indirect talks actually, you know, begin to unfold? I mean, was there a judgment made that because there was so much going elsewhere in the region that it didn't make sense, or maybe some other reason that explains it?

MR. CARNEY: Well, the specifics I'll leave to others to discuss, and perhaps in reference to the State Department's prominent role in these kinds of things you might get more specifics from the State Department. I would simply say that whatever the means by which you pursue this effort, the pursuit has been consistent and intense, and it is very much a priority of the President to continue to push for progress in the Middle East peace process. I think you'll hear that again from him on Thursday.

Yes.

Q Jay, can you speak to this report that the President -- there's a draft of the speech floating around that says the President will urge Israel to withdraw to the pre-1967 borders --

MR. CARNEY: Yes, I can. That report is completely false. We have not shared a draft of the speech with anyone outside of the administration.

Q Will he talk about, for example, the 1967 borders?

MR. CARNEY: I don't want to get into the specifics of his discussion at all. But I can tell you that no one outside of this administration has been shown a draft of the speech.

Q So that report is inaccurate in that it says that there's a draft copy of the speech.

MR. CARNEY: Well, a report that says that it has specifics about a speech based on a draft that doesn't exist -- I don't have any comment on the content of a draft that doesn't exist, because no draft has been shared with anyone outside of the administration.

Q But there are drafts, correct? They are still working on -- how many --

MR. CARNEY: He's not going to wing it. (Laughter.)

Q No, but seriously, there are drafts when the -- a speech is never done until completed -- until the President delivers it. But in the meantime there are drafts, correct?

MR. CARNEY: Sure. There is a process by which a speech is written, the President reviews it, makes edits, the speech is rewritten, adjusted according to what he wants, and that normal process is being followed. But this is a fairly tightly held process in a relatively small circle.

Yes.

Q Will he make any commitments to visit Israel?

MR. CARNEY: I don't want to, again, get into any specifics about the President's speech beyond what I've said.

Q And can you just describe any of the talks he's had with Middle East leaders about -- ahead of the speech? Any consultations with leaders --

MR. CARNEY: Well, as you know, King Abdullah was here. And he has had consultations and conversations with a number of leaders in the region in general over these past five months because of the remarkable events there, and recently in anticipation of giving a speech, but also because of the successful mission against Osama bin Laden.

So those conversations have contained discussions about his views of the historic change in the region and his vision for how the United States can best support positive change in the region, both with leaders from the region and with leaders from elsewhere among the nations of the world.

Yes, April.

Q Jay, going back to the speech, is the President going to announce anything new on Thursday night when it comes to Osama bin Laden? Information that --

MR. CARNEY: I don't anticipate that. I think the speech is much more forward-looking about the change in the region and how to take actions that support positive change in the region.

Q Okay, well, since he's not -- since you just said you don't expect that --

MR. CARNEY: You tricked me into giving a specific. (Laughter.)

Q I didn't trick you. I just asked a question. You chose to answer it the way you did. So anyway --

MR. CARNEY: Well. (Laughter.)

Q Anyway, going back to bin Laden, since the raid and death of bin Laden, in that raid information was obtained and intelligence officials are going through that information. What new can you give us an update on some of that information? Also, early on after 9/11, there was talk about him and his health issues. What do you know specifically that's pinpoint on about his health issues? Because we were told that he had kidney dialysis -- he was on dialysis. And other people were saying that they didn't find those kinds of machines or anything of that nature in the raid. Could you talk to us about what is spot on now from that information that you've gained?

MR. CARNEY: April, that's actually a very interesting question. I don't have any more detailed information for you on that. Our personnel are obviously reviewing the considerable amount of information that was gathered initially for any evidence of imminent threats, which is why in the immediate aftermath of the raid there was the alert about the consideration that had taken place -- going after American railway system, that it was an old consideration but felt it was important to get that out.

And then obviously for -- just a variety of information that would be reviewed that would help in our fight against al Qaeda and terrorist networks. So beyond that I don't have any details.

Q Jay, the President had quite a bit of fun with Donald Trump at the Correspondents Dinner. Did he have any reaction to Trump's announcement yesterday that he's not running? Oh, go for it. (Laughter.)

Q And he's not tricking you.

MR. CARNEY: I'm trying to remember from yesterday. Nothing -- surprisingly subdued reaction, I would say.

Q Is there a certificate proving that he -- (laughter) --

MR. CARNEY: That's a good one. I wish I'd thought of that. But, no, he did not have a particularly notable reaction.

Q Were there fist pounds around the White House?

MR. CARNEY: I'm not even going to go there. (Laughter.)

Stephen.

Q On this issue of it being a moment of opportunity, don't the events so far of the Arab Spring suggest the opposite, that it'll be even more difficult to forge peace given the fact that the new Egyptian government facilitated a

opposite, that it will be even more difficult to forge peace given the fact that the new Egyptian government facilitated a tie-up between Hamas and Fatah, and that the Israelis, being more concerned about their borders and their security, seem even less inclined to make compromises than they would have before?

MR. CARNEY: I think it's important to note that, again, the moment -- there's a lot of focus here on the Middle East peace process, which is an element, obviously, of the region and an element of the speech the President will give on Thursday. And that obviously has always been a complicated, difficult issue -- resolution of which has eluded a number of leaders in the region and a number of administrations. We continue to pursue that aggressively.

The fact that the change that we've seen in the region is -- has created some unpredictability is without question. And it has certainly been said by students of the region that one of the prices of the search for or the demand for stability has been the kind of repression that we've seen, and obviously that the unrest that we've seen in the region has created a certain amount of tumult and we have to assess the developments as they come.

Overall, the President believes very strongly that this is positive; that the opportunity for positive change here is substantial. And, again, reminding you of the core principles that he holds when he looks at the developments in the region, he thinks that the possibility for democratic reform, for governments that are representative of their people, that answer the legitimate grievances of the people, that provide them greater economic opportunity and political participation -- that opportunity is real and the potential for positive change is great -- positive not just for the peoples of the region but for the United States and its allies.

Q So that being said, will he stick to his position that it's also important for the United States not to be seen as an actor in any of these uprisings?

MR. CARNEY: The President has made clear, and others including myself have made clear, that we cannot dictate outcomes -- nor should we -- in the case -- if we could, nor should we, because one of the reasons -- for example, if you look at the developments in Egypt, it's very important to deprive those who would repress their populations of the straw man accusation that the expression -- legitimate expression of a desire for change by people in these regions is somehow being forced upon or inspired by the United States, because these are legitimate demonstrations of popular will. And it's important that that's made clear.

Yes.

Q Jay, I don't know if you've seen President Abbas's op-ed piece today in The New York Times, but it was explaining why the Palestinians has to go to the U.N. to get recognition. What do you honestly hope that will happen between now and September to avert this decision? And I have another question.

MR. CARNEY: Well, again, we believe very strongly that progress towards a two-state solution needs to come in a negotiating process and not through symbolic acts. And we encourage the sides to move forward with the peace process and the negotiations.

What's your follow-up?

Q There's criticism in the region that this administration is big on speeches and very short on following up, especially when it comes to the peace process. Is this a fair criticism?

MR. CARNEY: I don't think so. (Laughter.) I think that this administration has been assiduous in its pursuit of peace in the region and trying to help move the process forward, and continues to do that.

And in terms of the broader region, again, I think the suggestion that we have not taken significant actions that have been helpful towards a process of positive change in the region I think would be mistaken.

Yes.

Q Thank you, Jay. How does this speech compare to the Cairo speech, and what did the President -- what has he learned during this period since the Cairo speech besides what happened in the Arab streets?

MR. CARNEY: Well, that's a big exception that you've carved out there. I think that one of the things that's I think important to remember and remarkable to me when I look back at the Cairo speech is how in many ways -- not that anybody could have predicted or certainly the President suggest that he predicted the timing of this development, but it recognized the importance -- the President understood the importance of the changes that were beginning to show themselves in the region.

And when you have such a young population and a population in all the -- in so many countries that is frustrated by a lack of economic opportunity, frustrated by a lack of an ability to participate politically, that there was a coming movement for change, and that that had to be recognized and engaged by the governments in the region or else -- in the sense that if you're looking for the future stability of your country you need to engage your people, you need to harness that change, you need to do it in a peaceful manner and move forward in a positive direction, because as we -- as I was just saying about Syria, there is no going back. You can't put the genie back in the bottle. And I think that's -- there are echoes of that in the President's speech in Cairo, and I think he'll discuss that on Thursday.

Q How does he explain keeping some alliances like... he has received three leaders that would belong... a lot

Q How does he explain keeping some alliances like -- he has received three leaders that would belong -- a lot of people in the region would call them part of that tradeoff between stability and reform and democracy. How does he explain welcoming those leaders here at the White House at the same time when there is a fluid situation in the Middle East?

MR. CARNEY: Well, I think the principles that he has stated apply in the way we look at every country. We've called on and complimented those leaders who have engaged in political dialogue, who have moved towards political reform, because we think that is the way to go, in response to the legitimate aspirations of the people in their specific countries and in the region.

Let me take one more. Yes, sir. Yes.

Q Thank you. I wanted to follow up on the Ireland question and the possible lessons. Here everybody is focusing what the U.S. can do. Will the President also talk about the limitations as long as the leaders of the conflict parties are not willing to move in their positions, than even the (inaudible)?

MR. CARNEY: Well, I don't know that he'll speak to that specifically, but it is a truth that in all conflicts like this, it is up to -- it is incumbent upon the leaders of the conflicting parties, the parties in conflict, the leaders of the nations, to desire progress and desire peace. And that is a baseline starting point, there's no question.

What the United States can do is help facilitate that, as it has tried to do in the Middle East peace process through a number of administrations, and also make decisions as it has in some of the cases with unrest in the region to either quietly advise and assist or make clear that we're not inserting ourselves into a process, because it is a process that's unfolding organically from the street, if you will. So there are things we can do either actively or passively that can help encourage the process forward.

Thank you all very much.