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The White House

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

March 15, 2011

Press Briefing by Press Secretary Jay Carney, 3/15/2011

2:18 P.M. EDT

MR. CARNEY: Good afternoon. I apologize for the fact that we're running a little late here today. Before I get started, I'd just like to give you a short update on the response to the situation in Japan.

The United States is continuing to do everything in its power to help Japan and American citizens who were there at the time of these tragic events. USAID is coordinating the overall U.S. government efforts in support of the Japanese government's response, and we are currently directing individuals to www.usaid.gov for information about response donations.

The President is being kept up to date and is constantly being briefed by his national security staff. The national security staff in the White House is also coordinating a large interagency response with experts meeting around the clock to monitor the latest information coming out of Japan.

We have offered our Japanese friends disaster response experts, search and rescue teams, technical advisors with nuclear expertise, and logistical support from the United States military. Secretary Chu announced earlier today that the Department of Energy has offered and Japan has accepted an aerial measuring system capability, including detectors and analytical equipment used to provide assessments of contamination on the ground. In total, the DOE team includes 34 people.

To support our citizens in Japan, the embassy is working around the clock. We have our consular services available 24 hours a day to determine the whereabouts and well-being of all U.S. citizens in Japan. A short while ago the Nuclear Regulatory Commission and the State Department each issued an update on the ongoing situation at the nuclear plant in question in Japan. The guidance, once again, was that after careful analysis of data, radiation levels and damage assessments to all units at the plant, our independent experts at the NRC are in agreement with the response and measures taken by Japanese technicians, including their recommended 20-kilometer radius for evacuation and additional shelter-in-place recommendations out to 30 kilometers.

Both the NRC and the State Department are continuing to ask American citizens in Japan to listen to the local Japanese officials for the very latest information regarding the situation there.

With that, I will take your questions. Julie.

Q I know you just said that you're urging Americans in Japan to listen to the local officials there. We are starting to see, though, some other governments -- China, France, Austria -- taking steps to either urge their citizens or recommend their citizens leave Tokyo. Does the U.S. feel like its citizens in Tokyo are safe at this point?

MR. CARNEY: The assessment that I just mentioned made by the NRC is that the actions and recommendations taken by the Japanese government are the same that we would take in the situation and therefore they support and are recommending to American citizens that they listen to and follow the instructions of the Japanese government or local Japanese officials.

Q So taking into account all of the possible options that could happen at this point, there's no recommendation that U.S. citizens leave Tokyo at this point?

MR. CARNEY: There is not that I'm aware of. I refer you -- obviously the State Department issues those kinds of advisories, but again, I would refer you to what the NRC has just put out.

Q Given that the situation at this plant took a turn for the worse overnight, do your comments from yesterday that there is no threat to Hawaii or the West Coast of the U.S. -- do those comments still stand?

MR. CARNEY: Well, as you know, those comments were not mine, because I'm not the expert, but the chairman of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, which is an independent agency charged specifically with safety regarding our nuclear industry. And he -- Chairman Jaczko made clear that he believes based on his analysis and the NRC's analysis that there is no threat posed by --

Q Actually he said "highly unlikely." He didn't say no. They later sent out --

MR. CARNEY: Let me actually -- I have language precisely what he said. "You aren't going to have any radiological material that, by the time it traveled those large distances, could present any risk to the American public." That's a quote from yesterday.

So I will defer to him as he is the expert on this.

Q But as far as you know, that comment stands, even given the developments overnight?

MR. CARNEY: Again, I think the NRC has put out additional information today, but on that issue, yes.

Tricia.

Q On Bahrain, yesterday you said the Saudi troops are not an invasion. But does the U.S. welcome them there and do you think it will help stabilize the kingdom? And are you worried that it could inflame tensions and have an effect on oil prices?

MR. CARNEY: Tricia, we -- first of all, the GCC troops were obviously invited by the Bahraini government. However, we have made clear that we believe that there is no military solution to the unrest in Bahrain or in other countries in the region. And we urge the parties involved here and the governments involved to engage in the political dialogue that is necessary to respond to the grievances and the desires of the people of Bahrain.

And that's a call that we make to other governments in the region as well. We have maintained that position consistently as we have seen unrest affect different countries throughout the region.

Q And on Libya, given that the rebels seem to be finished or coming near being finished, does the U.S. have any regrets about not doing more sooner?

MR. CARNEY: Well, Tricia, I would say first of all that Secretary Clinton, as you know, met with the Libyan opposition in Paris, as well as our European and Arab partners, to discuss the best way to continue to raise pressure on the Qaddafi regime and ways of supporting the Libyan opposition. I can tell you that today, later this afternoon, the President will be meeting with his national security team to discuss the situation in Libya, and that we continue to be focused on ways to increase the pressure on Qaddafi, increasing our support for the Libyan people and working with the international community to stop the violence there.

And in terms of the speed of our response, I would simply say that it is -- we have acted with the utmost urgency. We have taken dramatic action, together with our international partners, to put pressure on Muammar Qaddafi and his regime. And obviously, as you know, the President has called on him to give up power.

We continue to review a variety of options that can be taken, that might be taken, together with our international partners, and we'll continue to do that. But it, again, has been four weeks, if that, since this began, and the actions that the United States and the international -- its international partners have taken have been quite swift and unprecedented, in many ways, in terms of the nature and range of the actions. And again, we continue to look at other options.

Jill.

Q Jay, following up on exactly that question, though, there is the feeling that the tide may have turned, that the opposition is now fleeing, they are under attack, and that they can't pull it together. There are others who are saying it's too late for a no-fly zone. Does the administration share that view? I mean, is it over for the opposition?

MR. CARNEY: I don't have a military assessment to make for you. I would say, again, that the Secretary of State met with the Libyan opposition yesterday. They discussed forms of assistance, including humanitarian assistance. She also has mentioned, I believe, and has said this, that we are exploring authorities to free up some of the seized regime assets, the 32 plus billion dollars that have been seized, to provide financial support to the opposition.

So this is another indication of the constant exploration of different options that we have to increase the pressure on the Qaddafi regime as we go forward.

Q Okay. And just one on Bahrain. Is there any indication that the U.S. has -- that Iran now actively is participating or just simply exploiting this situation undergoing -- underway in Bahrain?

MR. CARNEY: Jill, what I would say is that we believe that the situation in Bahrain needs to be resolved by the Bahraini people and the Bahraini government. We continue to urge all sides to refrain from violence and the use of force in any way; to respect the universal rights of the people in that country -- the right to free speech, the right to freedom of assembly, access to information; and to address the grievance that they have, their demands for greater participation.

And it is the broader point that we feel that the President has made since his speech in Cairo in 2009 that it is precisely to prevent ongoing unrest in the region -- or it will be one of the positive effects of having a dialogue, broadening your political participation of the people in these countries, addressing the grievances, responding in a non-violent way.

One of the effects of taking that approach will be to reduce the amount of unrest in the future, because there is no -- suppression is not an answer in the long run to the problems in the region that have led to the unrest that has affected so many countries so far.

Q Right, but the question was about Iran trying to exploit this situation.

MR. CARNEY: Well, we obviously believe that this has to be dealt with by the Bahrainis in Bahrain. And I don't have anything for you on Iran, but we believe that it is -- it began with protests by the Bahrainis, and we have encouraged the Bahrain government to engage in a dialogue -- we have encouraged actually both sides to engage in a dialogue, moderates on both sides who want to pursue that. And we continue to do so.

Yes, Jake.

Q How satisfied is President Obama with the information coming from Japanese authorities? Does the U.S. government, does the White House feel that you are

getting all the information when it -- as soon as the Japanese officials know it? I say this because on Friday President Obama, when I asked him about the nuclear threat in Japan, offered reassuring words, I could say, as conveyed from the Prime Minister. Obviously, the situation seems a little more dire today.

MR. CARNEY: What I can point you to, Jake, is the statement that the NRC has put out. And it's -- you have to remember that the NRC has its own independent experts on the ground there making assessments about the situation in Japan, determinations about advice that American citizens in Japan should follow. And we have an overall team, the number of which I gave you, on the ground there that is making its own assessments and working very closely with Japanese officials to make those assessments.

Q But that -- I appreciate the fact that we have our own independent experts there, but that wasn't the question. The question is how comfortable is the President with -- that the information the Japanese are giving to the U.S. from Prime Minister Kan to him and below is accurate and not just best-case scenarios and hopes and wishes?

MR. CARNEY: Again, Jake, I would point you to the fact that we have a certain amount of expertise in this area. We have people on the ground there. We are working with Japanese officials who are providing us information, and we are making our independent assessments with our own experts, as well as consulting with the Japanese.

And I just want to point to you right now, our focus is on helping the Japanese, helping our good friends and allies deal with this terrible tragedy that they've encountered -- the combination of an earthquake, a tsunami, and now the nuclear reactor problem that they have.

So we are obviously, in the ways that I mentioned at the top, coordinating very closely with the Japanese and offering assistance that's being accepted; our expertise that they can tap when they need it; and giving advice when it's solicited. So there's a great deal of coordination, and right now our focus obviously is on American citizens in the country, and those assessments are being made, and then also focus very closely on what we can do to help Japan deal with this series of really tragic events.

Q Are our independent experts there at least in part because we don't trust the assessments being made by the Japanese?

MR. CARNEY: No, Jake, they're there because we are a close ally and friend to Japan, and we are coordinating with the Japanese to assist them in any way that we can and in any way that they request in dealing with this terrible tragedy and historic tragedy. We are obviously, because we have expertise in this area, making independent assessments, and using them to evaluate decisions we make about advising American citizens in Japan and obviously about advising Americans on American soil about any impact they may face because of this, which is what Chairman Jaczko was talking about yesterday.

Q So just to button it -- the President is satisfied with the information he's been getting from the Japanese government? Yes?

MR. CARNEY: I have no reason to say that he's not, Jake. The coordination is deep in many ways. I would refer you for details on how that works and who's talking to whom to the NRC, the Department of Energy, the State Department, and the Embassy in Tokyo.

Q Okay, one other thing. The six youth groups who are part of the Egyptian revolution snubbed Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, who wanted to meet with them, who invited them to meet with her. They said that they would not meet with her based on her negative position from the beginning of the revolution in Egypt and the position of the U.S. administration. Did they misunderstand our position?

MR. CARNEY: Jake, I'll refer you to the State Department on that specifically. I believe --

Q They have no comment.

MR. CARNEY: Well, I would just say that we have said from the beginning of the situation in Egypt and the beginning even prior to that of the unrest in the region that this is not and should not be about the United States of America. We have operated under the principles that the President laid out in his speech in Cairo, and we believe that sticking to those principles was an important thing to do during the course of those historic days earlier this year during the events in Egypt. And we are working closely with our allies in Egypt and offering assistance where we can and advice where we

can as they go through this transitional process that is really remarkable, given where they were just a few months ago.

As for the specific comments that those groups made, I don't have -- I do not have a response.

Chip.

Q Jay, could you clarify -- Secretary Chu -- and I'm not asking you to be a brilliant scientist here -- but he said two things that seemed a bit in contradiction. First of all, he said that the reactors in the U.S. are designed above what would be required to withstand a worst-case earthquake scenario. But he also said that the United States can learn from this to strengthen and -- strengthen the safety at its 104 reactors. So why do you need to strengthen the safety of the reactors if they're all designed above a worst-case scenario?

MR. CARNEY: I think as Chairman Jaczko made clear from this podium yesterday, that independent agency exists in order to ensure that the highest safety standards are met by the nuclear reactors that are part of the energy industry in this country. And it is -- part of their procedure is to constantly review information and data that comes in, to review incidents that happen around the world. I believe Chairman Jaczko even mentioned that they'd performed a review of safety measures in the wake of the tsunami in Indonesia and made evaluations based on that in terms of the safety and security of our facilities here in the United States.

So it simply stands to reason that you make models for various scenarios and every time there is new information that comes in from an actual event you take that data and you analyze it and you examine whether or not it affects the models you have for safety and security of your facilities.

To suggest that everything is static forever obviously would be wrong, because there obviously -- there's new information to be gleaned from incidents. And I'm sure that's what Secretary Chu, a far wiser man than I, was talking about.

Q On no-fly zone, what exactly is the U.S. -- the administration's position before the Security Council?

MR. CARNEY: Our position, Chip, remains that we are evaluating a number of

options, military options, including --

Q But a decision has to be made now.

MR. CARNEY: -- including a no-fly zone. We feel that it is important that any action like that that might be taken should be done in concert with our international partners. Through the United Nations would be our preferable vehicle for that, and therefore we would look to the U.N. as a forum for evaluating that option. I think I mentioned yesterday that today is the deadline for the no-fly zone option to -- preparations or plans to be submitted in Brussels at NATO. And I believe the NAC will review those tomorrow. So this process is moving forward.

But our position is that action like that should be considered and taken if decided upon in coordination with our international partners, because it's very important in the way that we respond to a situation like we see in Libya, that it be international and not unilateral; that it include the support and participation, for example, of the Arab League and other organizations and countries in the region.

And that is our sort of focus as we proceed with these conversations.

Q Is the President satisfied to follow, not lead, on deciding whether to do it?

MR. CARNEY: I take issue with the characterization. We think it is precisely because the President believes that the best outcome in a situation like we see in Libya, as we have seen in different forms in other countries in the region, that the best outcome will come when the action taken by countries -- third-party countries outside of the country where the unrest is happening -- be done in consensus with international partners, precisely so that it is not viewed by those who oppose positive democratic reform as the dictate of the West or the United States.

Q But wouldn't it be fair to say -- accurate to say the United States is still sitting on the fence on this? Isn't it time to make a decision, yes or no?

MR. CARNEY: Well, Chip, you tell me if as an American citizen would you want your President not to consider all the implications and ramifications of taking military action.

Q Doesn't there come a point to make a -- where you have to make a decision?

MR. CARNEY: And I would go back to what I said to Jill, that we have acted with great haste, and we have coordinated international -- led and coordinated an international response, the likes of which the world has never seen in such a short period of time. And we have -- we continue to consult with our international partners. We meet -- we have met with, as the Secretary of State did, with the Libyan opposition discussing new ways we can put pressure on Qaddafi.

And when it comes to considering military options, this President will always be mindful of what the mission, should it be engaged, what it entails, the risks that it poses to our men and women in uniform, and its likelihood of having the kind of impact that we set out for it to have. And that is his responsibility as Commander-in-Chief.

And I would suggest to you that that is what leadership is all about.

Yes, Mike.

Q Is he worried about, though, the bureaucracy of making this decision with our allies, that by the time a decision is made the conflict may be over? I mean, the rebels may have gone home.

MR. CARNEY: We are obviously aware of the situation in Libya and the events and the fighting that's happening there. Again, I do not believe that the American people would want the U.S. President to act unilaterally in a way to engage militarily without taking careful consideration of what the consequences of that would be; what the goals of the action would be; and being, as we have said from the beginning, very mindful of the fact that the desired result here will be best achieved if we act in concert with our international partners. And that is the position he's taken, and it's the position he takes today.

Q On nuclear energy in this country, Congressman Markey is calling for a moratorium on new reactors that could be built in seismically sensitive areas. Does the President believe that's an overreaction?

MR. CARNEY: I think, Mike, as you know, we have a program, a loan-guarantee program at the Department of Energy. I believe that's what some of the calls for a moratorium would address because those are -- that is the program through which potentially new reactors are being assisted through a loan-guarantee program that is conditional.

And right now we have one conditional loan commitment to one nuclear project, and there are several others that are under consideration. It's a conditional loan agreement precisely because there are conditions attached, and one of those conditions is that any license would have to be granted by, of course, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, the independent agency that ensures the safety and security of our nuclear reactors. And they would not issue that license if they felt that a proposed plant were not safe and secure to operate in the United States.

So that is the process we follow. The agency in question here, the NRC, as Chairman Jaczko said yesterday, focuses day to day, including prior to the events in Japan -- for days, weeks, months and years -- day to day on the safety and security of the nuclear facilities in the United States. And that would certainly apply going forward.

Q Is the President worried about an overreaction here in Washington as you view the events in Japan when it comes to nuclear energy and how it may affect U.S. energy policy?

MR. CARNEY: The President sees what's happening in Japan and feels, as most Americans do, a great -- he is -- I believe I heard him use the phrase today -- heartbroken by what he sees unfolding in Japan and the effect on the Japanese people. He is, every day, concerned about the safety and security of the American people.

He believes that our energy future will be best served by the approach that he's taking, which is to take an all-of-the-above approach in terms of our goals to reaching a clean energy standard, and that includes wind, solar, biofuels. It includes responsible drilling in the deepwater areas that, even in the wake of the deep -- of the Gulf spill -- I think as I mentioned the other day, we have issued our first permit several weeks ago since the Gulf spill for deepwater drilling, then just several days ago issued the second permit.

And we were able to do that because we're committed to responsible drilling because we need it for our energy demands, but we insist, in the wake of that spill, which demonstrated a weakness in our system and the dangers associated with that, with a terrible spill, that any industry that get a permit demonstrate that it can contain the kind of spill that we saw in the Gulf. And those permits are now being issued to

those industries that demonstrate that capacity.

So, more broadly, I would just say that he is committed to a multidimensional or multisource approach to our energy needs in the future. Nuclear is one of those sources. And he believes that we need to proceed responsibly with the safety and security of the American people in mind, and if we do that, that nuclear can continue to be an element in our energy arsenal.

Q Does the President believe implementing a no-fly zone is an act of war?

MR. CARNEY: Chuck, I don't know about the terminology here, but he does believe it would be, in any situation, a serious action. It is a military action. And his concern -- again, I will go back to what I said -- is as he evaluates that option, which he has very clearly insisted be on the table for consideration and has driven the process to make sure that that option is evaluated and reviewed at NATO and now of course at the United Nations -- his preoccupation is, is this an option that can be effective? Is it the right option? What are the costs associated with it? What are the risks associated with it? And will it -- when I say the right option -- will it -- what confidence do we have that it will achieve the goals that we set if we were to implement it, because it is not a minor undertaking.

Q Well, I asked does he believe -- does the administration believe they need congressional approval?

MR. CARNEY: The issue here, I believe, is about deciding what is the best option to take in concert with our international partners.

Q And you do not believe you need --

MR. CARNEY: I have not heard any suggestion that there would be a --

Q There's no suggestion that you need a congressional resolution --

MR. CARNEY: Not that I have heard.

Q -- any sort of -- on that? On Japan, there is a pharmaceutical -- this run on potassium iodide that's taking place. One of the pharmaceutical companies here in the United States that makes it, the oral solution, says that the national stockpile of this

actually begins expiring in April of 2011. Has there been any decision by the administration to look into that and make sure all of that is up to date, order more of it, if necessary, especially now that suddenly there's obviously a worldwide run on this right now?

MR. CARNEY: Well, let me refer to HHS for specifics about the program and the stockpiling of that. I would take this opportunity to remind you and the American people that this is an accident and a situation that's happening in Japan and not in the United States, and the chairman of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission made clear yesterday his belief, based on the NRC's analysis, that there are no harmful effects that can come from any radiation spillage -- that's probably not the word -- but radiation emissions that might come from the reactors that had been damaged in Japan; any harm that could come to Americans on American soil, because of the great distances involved here.

Q To follow up on Jake's question, every single independent nuclear expert that we've talked to seems to think that this is at such a catastrophic level that the Japanese -- they don't have the capacity anymore to handle this on their own, that there needs to be a ton of international support.

Has the NRS -- has the NRC come to that same conclusion, that this is now beyond the scope of what the Japanese government can handle?

MR. CARNEY: Well, let me refer you to the NRC for questions to the NRC. But I would say that the NRC's role is tailored to its expertise. The Department of Energy, as I mentioned, is very engaged in this and has experts also on the ground, and we are participating in international assistance to the Japanese to help them deal with this tragedy, both the --

Q But dealing with the nuclear reactor itself, that this is -- they don't have the capacity anymore --

MR. CARNEY: Well, I don't know about the assessments of Japanese capacity except, of course, they do have a certain amount of expertise and -- a large amount of expertise. Again, I'm telling you what I know based on talking to those experts including the one who heads the NRC.

However, this is a huge event, and it requires the kind of concerted international

response that we're seeing and which we are participating in a robust way. Because Japan is a close friend and ally, and we will do everything we can to help them in this situation.

Q Very quickly to follow up on Chip's question which is this -- safety at our own nuclear plants. Does the President not need to order a review of safety plans because they're constantly going on? Is that what you're trying to imply here?

MR. CARNEY: He doesn't have to order a review because they're constantly going on. He has, however -- I spoke with him about this within the last couple of hours -- asked, requested the NRC to evaluate the situation, the lessons learned from Japan as that information comes available and to incorporate it in its overall reviews of the safety and security of the reactors here in the United States.

Now, as we learned from Chairman Jaczko yesterday, that is what they do in any case. The President has added his voice, which is a singular and substantial voice, to the call for the need to do that today.

Yes, Jonathan.

Q Follow-up on Chuck's point. When the BP -- when Deepwater Horizon, when the President ordered a moratorium on new permitting while he did a review on response on that, in that case, there exactly was a planned incident response to a deepwater disaster. In the case of nuclear meltdowns, there is no such thing. There are seven different agencies, no clear lines of command.

MR. CARNEY: I disagree with that, Jonathan. I think that obviously there are a variety of incidents that could happen with a nuclear facility, including, as I believe Chairman Jaczko discussed, maybe Secretary Poneman discussed yesterday, the reviews that were done in the wake of 9/11 in terms of the security of our nuclear facilities and other potentially vulnerable facilities to terrorist attack.

That is one incident and would require a response by -- with a different lead, perhaps -- a different agency in response. There could be the kind of meltdown, I guess, like occurred -- partial meltdown that occurred at Three Mile Island, and that would -- another agency might have the lead -- because they would have the expertise, so they would have the lead in responding to that. And then you have the natural disaster possibility that we've seen in Japan.

We have very specific and detailed plans in how response would be coordinated and which agencies would take the lead. Depending on what kind of incident we're discussing here, you would not -- there is not a one-size-fits-all response, we believe, and that's why we take the approach we take.

Q And in 2002, in the wake of 9/11, there was an amendment passed by Congress that ordered the distribution of potassium iodide to a 20-mile radius around all nuclear plants. The Bush administration ignored it and Markey sent a letter to President Obama. It's been ignored by the Obama administration as well. Is there any effort to follow the law and begin distributing potassium iodide on a 20-mile radius?

MR. CARNEY: Jonathan, I don't have any information on that law or how the previous administration or this one has handled it. I would just say that, again, this incident happened in Japan, not in the United States. It is not in a place in the world where it could have harmful effects -- according to the independent NRC -- it could harmful effects on Americans, on American soil.

And we -- the NRC has as its mission to constantly review the safety and security of the facilities we have here in the United States.

Julianna.

Q When you were speaking with the President earlier, was there any specific mention of reviewing older nuclear facilities, and that those should be an area that you might want to inspect in the wake of what we're seeing in the aftermath?

MR. CARNEY: Not in any conversation I had with him. But I would just refer you to the NRC and the Department of Energy for this. And again, the NRC is responsible for all the facilities and for the licensing and permitting the evaluations of their safety standards and the upgrade of their safety procedures if they so deem it necessary. And again, it would be -- if the NRC decided that a facility was no longer safe, either because of something that had happened in that facility or because of new information, it has the authority to take the steps necessary to suspend activity at that facility or to shut it down.

So these procedures -- this agency is in place precisely for this reason, and the procedures are in place so that they can be followed if that contingency occurred.

Q Is there any response to what we saw in Germany earlier today where Chancellor Merkel has ordered the -- I think it was all pre-1980s plants to be shut down -- I think it was seven nuclear plants to be shut down, pending a review of their safety, until June? Does the administration have any response to that, or did the President talk about that at all?

MR. CARNEY: Well, I don't have a response to actions taken by other countries. What we know and what we're responsible for is the safety and security of those facilities in the United States. And that responsibility lies with the Nuclear Regulatory Commission. They have made the judgment that our facilities are safe and secure. They are constantly, as Chairman Jaczko said, evaluating their standards, their procedures, taking in new information, and making adjustments accordingly. And that would apply to old reactors as well as newer ones.

MR. CARNEY: Ann. Ann, yes.

Q Yes, thank you. On no-fly, a clarification. How does it work tomorrow when the North Atlantic Council considers this? Has the United States already decided how it feels, or does your representative have to call back to Washington and say, here are the options? And will any action by the -- or anything adopted by the NAC also require a green light from the Security Council?

MR. CARNEY: What I can tell you, as I mentioned, the President is having a meeting on Libya today in the White House with his national security team. In terms of how the process of communicating what happens in Brussels takes place, I'm not sure. This is not a, as far as I understand it, a decision moment where here's the option, sir, take it. I think it's -- they evaluate what's presented before them and then have discussions, and we move forward accordingly.

So I don't have a timeframe on when a decision will be made.

Q And real quick. Could it be a smaller no-fly zone? Does the President feel that he could do something other than cover the entire country?

MR. CARNEY: I don't -- I would just refer you on sort of the logistical aspects of it to NATO.

Q And who would pay for it?

MR. CARNEY: Again, I haven't seen an option that would spell that out. And it depends obviously --

Q You were asked in the non-broadcast briefing this morning about what might keep the President home from his foreign trip this weekend? Are there elements either in Japan or Libya that might --

MR. CARNEY: Ann, I'm not going to speculate on what could happen in the world we live in tomorrow or next week. The fact is the President is taking this trip because he is committed to growing the economy, to rebalancing our national security posture to take into account the world as it has changed. And he believes our relationships with Latin America are very important. So he will continue with the trip.

And as you know -- you've covered the White House for a long time -- our communications are very sophisticated. He will travel with a great deal of staff. I daresay they're a lot more sophisticated than they were back when you and I started covering this place. So he remains confident that he can fully execute his job while on the road.

Abby.

Q I wanted to go back to the question of the Libyan no-fly zone and the role of Congress. Senator Lugar yesterday suggested that not just that there must be a war declaration but that, as a courtesy, given the U.S. blood and treasure that might be at risk if a no-fly zone were implemented, that the President bring that decision to Congress so that they can have a chance to debate it and consult about it. To what extent is that something that is a part of the discussion of a no-fly zone? And does the President believe that Congress should have an opportunity to have that debate about whether we put soldiers and U.S. money on the line?

MR. CARNEY: I don't have a response, Abby, specifically to the role of Congress in this instance. I think that we're getting ahead of ourselves -- you're asking what role would Congress have should the President decide that this option is one that the United States should pursue. So why don't we wait and see as those steps are taken and that decision is made.

And I remind you that this is not the only option that is on the table. We're

reviewing options constantly, including the one that I mentioned the Secretary of State brought up yesterday with a Libyan opposition leader, which is how to -- exploring ways to take those seized assets or a portion of them to aid the opposition in Libya.

April.

Q Jay, thanks. What safety nets is the White House considering when it comes to trade for American companies who gain items from Japan like electronics, cars, et cetera? What is the White House doing to the possible pinch for these American companies when it comes to trade with Japan?

MR. CARNEY: April, that's a good question. I don't know. Obviously this incident happened four days ago; I don't know that any procedures are in place. I think that kind of question might be best addressed to the USTR. But we can look into that for you if you want to check back.

Margaret.

Q Thanks. After the Libya briefing the President is getting today, are we going to get any kind of a substantive readout, do you expect, on --

MR. CARNEY: I think I'll just put a mic in the room, and then you guys can --
(laughter) --

Q Should we wait for anything, or not really?

MR. CARNEY: I don't have anything for you. We obviously from here announced that the meeting is taking place, so we might have something to say about it. But I wouldn't anticipate a substantial announcement out of it. If we -- if there is something to say then we'll put out a statement.

Q Okay, and I had a last question --

Q Wild card.

Q Not really --

MR. CARNEY: Wild card for -- (laughter) --

Q So, on education, should we read anything into the fact that every education visit the President has made in the last week or so has been to a swing state, and the three interviews he's doing today are in swing states? Or is that a total coincidence and is there some other reason to explain --

MR. CARNEY: I think the interviews he gave today to regional television had to do with -- at least something to do with the fact that there are things happening in those states regarding education reform. And, look, we make decisions for a variety of reason about where he should visit and where he should -- to whom he should give interviews, so I wouldn't read too much into that.

Q Education follow-up, Jay?

MR. CARNEY: Let me go to Stephen.

Q What does it say about the state of U.S.-Saudi relations that they would stage this intervention in Bahrain without telling the U.S., given the fact that Secretary Gates was there, I guess, Friday, and you've been very engaged in this whole issue about what Bahrain should do to reform and stop the violence?

MR. CARNEY: Stephen, I would just say that we were aware of obviously the invitation by the Bahrain government for assistance from GCC countries. And I would simply say that Saudi Arabia is an important partner of ours, as are other countries in the region. Our position, however, remains that it is -- military response is not a solution to the problems Bahrain or other countries in the region; that the countries in the region have -- are experiencing the unrest that they are experiencing precisely because their populations are -- crave more participation in the political process. They want more freedom, they want more economic possibilities, and they want to be heard.

And we support that. We support the peaceful demonstrations in which the peoples of the region voice those demands, and we call on the governments in the region to respond to those demonstrations to meet peace with peace and then to begin a dialogue that will produce the kind of changes that in the long run will ensure that the countries in the region have brighter futures, that the people in the region have brighter futures, and that the likelihood of further unrest is diminished because the people are feeling that their government is listening to them and responding.

Q So the experts in town that say that there's some tension between the U.S. and the Saudis over events in the Middle East, Bahrain -- are they incorrect? Is that interpretation wrong?

MR. CARNEY: Stephen, I would just say that the message the President has delivered is not a message tailored for a specific country. We understand that each country is different. The circumstances are different. The states of development can be different. The government arrangements can be different. But the sort of principles that he laid out pertain throughout the region. And obviously we maintain close partnerships with some governments in the region, and it's precisely out of friendship that we are encouraging governments in the region who are our partners to pursue political dialogue and to respond to the legitimate aspirations and grievances of their people, because we believe therein lies the future, the positive future for countries in the region.

Q Thanks, Jay.

MR. CARNEY: Thank you all very much.

END 3:04 P.M. EDT

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