

Press Briefing by Press Secretary Jay Carney

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James S. Brady Press Briefing Room

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MR. CARNEY: Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. Thank you for being here. I'm not gone yet, Wendell. Before I take your questions, let me note that just two weeks ago, the President led a weeklong effort to highlight this administration's focus on attracting job-creating investment to America. At a time when our businesses have created 9.2 million new jobs in just over four years and more companies are considering bringing jobs here, it has been a top priority for this administration to do all we can to help businesses invest in the U.S. and to support good jobs for American workers. In doing so, we can create more jobs and faster economic growth as more companies from around the world are choosing to bring job-creating investment to the U.S.

And today, we have even more reason to keep our foot on the accelerator when it comes to attracting investment — a new study shows that we are leading the world. For the second year in a row, an A.T. Kearney survey of 300 global executives found that the U.S. was ranked the top destination in the world for foreign direct investment. Last year, the U.S. surged past Brazil, China and India to retake the top spot for the first time since 2001. This year, the U.S. extended its lead, scoring one of the highest confidence scores on record for any country in the survey's history and ranked first by respondents from every geography and in every industry.

Not only did the U.S. extend its lead, but the improvements over the past two years have been profound. And the U.S. continues to show greater positive momentum than any other country. And that's why, as the President departs for Europe, tomorrow, members of his team will be hosting a business roundtable with companies in Warsaw that have recently announced their own investments in the United States or are gearing up for future business here. I expect we'll have more details for you on this roundtable soon. Taken together, U.S. and foreign companies are investing billions of dollars that strengthen our economy, directly support thousands of high-quality jobs for millions of U.S. workers. And today's survey shows, once again, that the rest of the world

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overwhelmingly wants to make it in America.

Jim Kuhnhenh.

Q: Thank you, Jay. I wanted to ask you about Bowe Bergdahl. What made the administration's determination that it was these particular five detainees in Guantanamo that should be released in exchange for Sergeant Bergdahl's release? Just earlier today, Chief of Staff Denis McDonough said that members of Congress, or the required members of Congress, have been notified over I believe he said — for years about this effort and that it included the potential transfer of five Gitmo detainees. I'm also curious what the reaction was from those members of Congress when they were presented with that possibility.

MR. CARNEY: The point that the Chief of Staff was making is that we have been engaged in an effort for years, as we should have been, to recover Sergeant Bergdahl, a prisoner of war in Afghanistan. And as part of those efforts, there have been ongoing discussions about how to bring that about. And that included conversations with members of Congress about at least the possibility of transferring these five detainees as part of getting Sergeant Bergdahl back to the United States and back with his family.

As we've been saying since we successfully recovered Sergeant Bergdahl this weekend, this was the right thing to do, because we in the United States do not leave our men and women in uniform behind during an armed conflict. And five years is a very long time to be a prisoner. We are enormously gratified that Bowe Bergdahl is now safely in U.S. hands and is getting the health care that he needs, and has begun the process of reintegrating that will take some time no doubt, given the duration of his captivity. But it is a welcome development to be sure when our single prisoner in the Afghanistan conflict has been successfully recovered.

Q: But what was the — was there any pushback? Was there acknowledgement on the part of these members of Congress when you guys mentioned these particular five detainees? Did members of Congress agree with this kind of swap? Did they say, no, bad idea? Can you tell me anything of what that kind of discussion was about?

MR. CARNEY: I don't have a readout of conversations that date back some time. I think what it reflects, however, is that this should not have come as a surprise to members of Congress that this was possible, because we had been working to secure Sergeant Bergdahl's release for a long time. And prisoner exchanges in armed conflicts are hardly a new development, including in our history in the United States. Whether it's the Japanese or the North Koreans or others, we have engaged in prisoner exchanges in the past. We don't — the United States does not — leave our men and women in uniform behind.

The Chairmen of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Martin Dempsey, said in a statement, "It is our ethos that we never leave a fallen comrade. Today, we have back in our ranks the only remaining

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captured soldier from our conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. Welcome home, Sergeant Bowe Bergdahl.” And that’s the senior most member of our military speaking.

Q: As you know, there have been detainees who have returned to the battlefield. What are the guarantees, other than just a one-year ban on travel on these five detainees that they won’t go back and target U.S. interests, U.S. personnel, U.S. military?

MR. CARNEY: Again, I’ll re-stipulate that prisoner exchanges are not uncommon in armed conflicts. Secondly, I’ll say that without getting into specific assurances, I can tell you that they included a travel ban and information-sharing on the detainees between our governments, between the United States and Qatar. I can also tell you that the assurances were sufficient to allow the Secretary of Defense, Chuck Hagel, in coordination with the national security team, to determine that the threat posed by the detainees to the United States would be sufficiently mitigated and that the transfer was in the U.S. national security interest.

So this was done after the appropriate consideration and analysis, and it was the judgment of the Secretary of Defense in coordination with the entire national security team that there was sufficient mitigation in place and assurances in place to allow the exchange.

Q: One quick question on the carbon rule today. As proposed by the EPA, it gives states up until 2017 or 2018 to enact some of these rules. Any concern here at the White House that that places actual implementation beyond this administration and in the hands of a subsequent president who could not be friendly to this particular issue?

MR. CARNEY: We are focused on doing what we can to ensure that we significantly reduce carbon pollution, because of the negative effect that it has on the health of our children and the health of our environment. This is the right thing to do. And I know you’ve heard from the EPA Administrator and will hear from the President in a conference call he’s doing later today, and heard from him over the weekend in his weekly address on this issue.

We have faith that as the years progress, it will become more and more a consensus view in the United States — even here in Washington — that we have to take action to ensure that we protect ourselves here in the United States against the most serious consequences of climate change and global warming. And one of the steps that we need to take and we can take is to reduce our own carbon emissions in order to help tackle that effort, which has to ultimately be an international effort.

We’ve made significant progress through the actions the President has led on, including the car rule that dramatically increases fuel efficiency standards and will itself reduce significantly carbon emissions here in the United States, will save Americans around the country significantly over the long term, in terms of the cost of filling the tank, and this proposed rule will when implemented save Americans on their electricity bill and significantly reduce the amount of carbon emissions into our

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air; and therefore — and by doing that rather reduce the number of cases of asthma and other negative health impacts that carbon pollution causes.

Q: Jay.

MR. CARNEY: Steve Holland.

Q: Why didn't you give the Congress the 30-days' notice on Sergeant Bergdhal?

MR. CARNEY: As I think you heard the National Security Advisor say over the weekend, it was the judgment of the team and the President that there was enough urgency here to ensure that Sergeant Bergdhal was safely recovered that a 30-day window of hoping that that opportunity remained open was not an option. And ultimately as Commander-in-Chief, the President had the responsibility to take the action he did to ensure that, as Chairman Dempsey said, our only remaining prisoner of the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan was safely recovered.

Q: And what was the urgency that you mentioned specifically?

MR. CARNEY: Well, going back to the questions I answered from Jim, this has been an effort that has taken years to bring about, recovering Sergeant Bergdhal. And there are no guarantees in situations like this, just as there were not in the past when it seemed possible we might recover him but did not — that something like this would remain an open possibility if we waited any longer. And so when the opportunity presented itself, and we could successfully recover him, we acted quickly to do so.

The moment he was in U.S. custody, the notifications of members of Congress began. But in his circumstance as Commander-in-Chief, the President felt it was absolutely the right thing to do to ensure that Sergeant Bergdhal was in U.S. custody.

Q: And has it been determined yet whether he was a deserter?

MR. CARNEY: The first and foremost thing that we have to recognize here is that Sergeant Bergdhal was in captivity for five years, held against his will. And it was absolutely the right thing to do, consistent with our tradition in the United States to secure his return.

The Defense Department will — obviously has been and will continue to be the lead in terms of evaluating all of the circumstances surrounding his initial detention and his captivity, and that process continues obviously directly with Sergeant Bergdhal now that he is in U.S. care.

But I would point you again to what Chairman Dempsey said, and what Secretary of Defense Hagel said, and what so many others have said about the ethos that we here in the United States abide by when it comes to men and women who are taken prisoner during armed conflicts, and the

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history of this government taking actions to secure the return of our POWs is very full.

Let me move around a little bit. Cheryl.

Q: Thanks. Does the White House think that the emission cuts announced today are enough to prompt China to sign onto a binding global climate deal?

MR. CARNEY: The proposed rule announced today demonstrates U.S. leadership in this important area. I wouldn't predict what specific actions other countries may take, but it stands to reason that leadership by the United States, a demonstration of a seriousness of purpose here, will have at least potentially positive effects on other nations as collectively we address a global challenge.

The fact is that as the President and others have said so often, this creates opportunities to further invest in renewables and other areas that will enhance our energy independence and create thousands of jobs here in the United States, and we ought to aggressively pursue that in the future as we have in the past.

So I think that the opportunity here for the U.S. to lead to pull carbon pollutants out of our atmosphere so that — and our air so that our children are healthier in the future, and to enhance our energy independence moving forward is the right thing to do.

Yes, sir.

Q: Jay, a couple more things about Sergeant Bergdhal, was there a sense here in the administration that if the Congress was notified beforehand, members of Congress might put up roadblocks and make it more difficult to release or get the release of Sergeant Bergdhal?

MR. CARNEY: I think the issue was simply that there was a near-term opportunity to recover Sergeant Bergdhal and save his life, and so we moved as quickly as possible to do that. The administration determined that given the unique and exigent

circumstances, such a transfer should go forward notwithstanding the notice requirement of the NDAA, because of the circumstances, because of — as we've discussed — the state of his health, the fact that he had been held for five years in captivity, the fact that there were no guarantees that the window would remain open, the window of opportunity to recover him. It was the right thing to do to move quickly and take that opportunity.

Q: There have been obviously a lot of questions about the legality of this. Point blank, does the President feel as though on this issue and this kind of issue he is above the law?

MR. CARNEY: Absolutely not. To be clear, the 30-day notice requirement has appeared in NDAA bills and in other legislation in this and prior years. And we have repeatedly noted concerns with

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this requirement. In signing statements, he has — he, the President — consistently made clear that the executive branch must have the flexibility to act swiftly in conducting negotiations with foreign countries regarding the circumstances of detainee transfers if necessary. And that was certainly the case here.

Q: On the issue of those signing statements, the President said, when he was first running for President, that he thought restraint needed to be used with signing statements. Is this an example of presidential restraint?

MR. CARNEY: I appreciate the way you phrased that question, because it's often misreported that he somehow took a position against all signing statements, which was never the case, as a senator and candidate. He made clear that there were times when it would be appropriate, but that the authority to issue signing statements should not be overused or abused, and that a President should exercise restraint.

And I think if you look at his record in office — now five and a half years in office — you'll see that restraint demonstrated. But there will be and have been circumstances when signing statements are necessary, because of the President's view and the executive branch's view of the constitutional issues involved in a particular legislation. And with regard to this specific situation, within the NDAA bill, that was already addressed within a signing statement.

Q: And last question — has the President put a price on the heads of other Americans, because of the way this deal went down?

MR. CARNEY: I think this goes back to the general proposition that has been true throughout our history as a nation that we, the United States, always seek the return of our prisoners in an armed conflict. And there is a long history of prisoner exchanges in previous armed conflicts, and this action that was taken to recover Sergeant Bergdahl is entirely consistent with this past practice. Sergeant Bergdahl was a prisoner in an armed conflict. And we did the right thing by after five years of captivity, securing his release and recovery and return to the United States.

The fact of the matter is, as I noted before, if you look through our history, there are ample precedents to this kind of decision, because as Chairman Dempsey has said, and others have said, we don't leave our men and women behind, and we don't qualify a decision about leaving them behind or not leaving them behind based on who is holding him.

Alexis.

Q: Jay, how does the President view his role or his leverage to get released aid workers or American journalists, as a follow up to the last question, as distinct from the options open to him or the compulsion he feels to free military, U.S. military?

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MR. CARNEY: Well, I think that's a good question. And I think that it is absolutely the case that this administration, not unlike previous administrations, engages aggressively in an effort to recover Americans who are being held against their will in other circumstances, and that includes Americans being held in Iran or in Cuba or elsewhere. I think it's important to note that as we find relief in Sergeant Bowe's recovery, our thoughts and prayers are with those other Americans whose release we continue to pursue, and with their friends and family.

When it comes to a member of the military who is being held as a prisoner during an armed conflict, there is quite a bit of precedent for the action that we took and the bottom line that we, the United States — and the United States military — does not walk away and leave behind members who are held prisoner during an armed conflict.

Q: Just to follow up on the last question too, just does the President share the concern that has been voiced by some members of families of existing prisoners that their lives may be in enhanced jeopardy because of this?

MR. CARNEY: I think it's fair to say that Americans in that conflict and elsewhere have put themselves in harm's way on behalf of us and everyone in the United States for quite a long time. And I don't think that the decision to seek in complete consistency with our history the release of a POW alters that equation at all any more than it did when we engaged in exchanges with the North Koreans or with the Japanese or others in previous conflicts in our history.

Jim.

Q: Since it appears at least that the Sergeant walked away from the base without his weapon and was not involved in actual combat at the time, did the National Security Advisor misspeak when she said that he served with honor and distinction? And if she did not misspeak, how did he serve with honor and distinction?

MR. CARNEY: Again, you're citing a circumstance with a lot of ifs attached to it. I would refer you to the Defense Department in terms of its assessment and review of the circumstances under which Sergeant Bergdahl was initially detained. And I would point you to what the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs said about his successful recovery, and its consistency with an ethos that has long been held here in the United States and by our military.

Q: My question is not about whether or not there should have been a deal to release him. My question is about the words used to describe his service. He was promoted during his captivity, and Susan Rice said he served with honor and distinction. Is that true?

MR. CARNEY: I would certainly refer you to the Defense Department. You noted his promotion. And I think since this goes to questions about his initial detention, the Defense Department is the body that has been reviewing that and will continue to review it not that Sergeant Bergdahl has

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been recovered. The fact of the matter is he was held captive by an enemy force in an armed conflict with the United States and our allies for five years, and consistent with centuries of past practice, we sought to recover him and successfully recovered him.

Q: On the other subject of the EPA, as someone sitting at home, there's a lot of debate today about whether or not how much is this going to cost me. What is true? Regardless of the benefit to society and the benefit to our environment, how much is this going to cost me in my home electric bill?

MR. CARNEY: Well, I would point you to economic analysis that shows that these standards will actually shrink electricity bills roughly 8 percent by increasing energy efficiency and reducing demand in the electricity system.

Look, throughout our history, Jim, when America has taken steps to cut pollution and protect public health, opponents of those steps have made dire predictions about destroying jobs and harming the economy, and throughout our history they've been wrong. When we passed the Clean Air Act to combat smog, they said new pollution standards would decimate the auto industry. Not true. In 1990, when we took steps to stop acid rain, they claimed the lights would go out and businesses around the country would suffer. But the facts tell a different story. The EPA has been protecting air quality in the United States for more than 40 years, and in that time we've cut pollution by 70 percent and the economy has tripled in size.

What that demonstrates is that we can in a smart way take steps to reduce the amount of pollution in our air, so that our children are healthier, and do it in a way that allows our economy to not only to continue to grow, but to grow more effectively and efficiently. And in the case of the kinds of developments that will be a partial result of this proposed rule, we'll see an increase in investments in areas of renewables and the like that will create cutting-edge jobs of the future here in the United States. And we've seen that already as we've made significant increases in renewable energy production here in the United States in the past several years, and we expect to see that in the future.

Major.

Q: Did the President and his team believe that Bowe Bergdahl might have been killed by his captors, and that was the exigent circumstance you referred to?

MR. CARNEY: Any time you have a prisoner held against his will for as long as he was, he is by definition at risk. It is also the case that his health —

Q: I mean acute and immediate risk.

MR. CARNEY: It is also the case that his health was a concern and justifiably so. I can't get into all

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the information that we had available to us, but I think you've seen reports now out of Germany that he's getting health care for conditions that require hospitalization, and that was a concern. And the package of concerns, including the opportunity to recover him after five years, and given the past history, the understanding that that opportunity may not present itself indefinitely, the fact that his health was deteriorating, the fact that the circumstances of his captivity were by definition threatening, it was the right thing to do to take action to secure his release.

Q: Do you disagree with the characterization of the five released detainees as among the hardest of the hard and possibly responsible for the deaths of thousands of people?

MR. CARNEY: Well, I would simply say that we have a long history in this country, and our allies do as well, of exchanging prisoners in an armed conflict, especially when that armed conflict is coming to an end. As you know, because the President announced it recently, we are bringing our combat mission in Afghanistan to an end. We have also put forward a plan whereby we would sustain a significantly reduced military presence in Afghanistan after the end of the combat mission to continue to train Afghan forces and maintain a counterterrorism posture there as we wind down to zero in several years.

Q: Did that make this call easier? And was it nevertheless still a difficult call to release these five?

MR. CARNEY: I'm not going to get into all the specifics, except to say that when it comes to the five individuals that you are referencing, as the Chief of Staff noted earlier, this has been — these five have been identified as potential transferees as part of this release of Sergeant Bergdahl for some time. And it was the assessment of the Secretary of Defense, in consultation with the full national security team, that there were sufficient mitigation steps taken by Qatar and assurances received by the United States that these detainees do not pose a threat to U.S. national security, and that it was therefore, in our interest to take action to recover Sergeant Bergdahl.

Q: To what degree were those assurances solidified when the President talked to the Amir Wednesday at West Point?

MR. CARNEY: Well, the President has had a couple of conversations — I think more specifically, a phone call — to the Amir, and he did have a meeting at West Point. But this was a process, again, that had been ongoing for a long time.

Q: So nothing was solidified there that wasn't already understood?

MR. CARNEY: I don't want to get into too many details about presidential conversations, but this process was fairly completed by then.

Q: One last question — the International Red Cross has expressed some surprise that it was not in any way, shape or form brought into seeing the transferees before they were moved out of Gitmo,

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which is something that has been happening with their participation and awareness of before.

Can you explain why that decision was made?

MR. CARNEY: I'd have to refer you to the Defense Department. I'm not sure about all the questions about that. I can simply point you to the general approach we took here, which was to make sure that we were able to recover Sergeant Bergdhal. Once he was safely in U.S. custody, we began notifications to Congress, and the process began to transfer the five detainees.

Q: Jay.

MR. CARNEY: Kristen.

Q: Jay, thanks. I want to follow up on a question about Susan Rice's comments about Sergeant Bergdhal serving with honor and distinction. You referred the question to the Defense Department, but she's a White House official. So can you say why he —

MR. CARNEY: No, I referred the question about — the circumstances surrounding his initial detention by the Taliban —

Q: Well, would you say that he served with honor and distinction?

MR. CARNEY: Again, this goes to — I would echo what Chairman Dempsey said, I would echo what National Security Advisor Rice said, I would note what the Department of Defense has done with regard to Sergeant Bergdhal. And I would note that the issue of all of the information surrounding his initial captivity or detention by the Taliban is something that the Defense Department is reviewing.

But I think that it is absolutely a fact that a member of the U.S. military, a uniformed member of the U.S. military was held captive by an enemy force in an armed conflict. And in keeping with a long history in our country, backed by an ethos that says we don't leave our men and women in uniform behind, we were able to successfully secure his release.

Q: Understood. But does the President stand by Susan Rice's comments that he served with honor and distinction?

MR. CARNEY: The President stands by actions that he took as Commander-in-Chief to secure the release of the only member of the U.S. military held as a POW from either the Iraq or Afghanistan wars. It was absolutely the right thing to do.

Q: So you're not going to weigh in on that quote?

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MR. CARNEY: I think I've said three times now that we all stand by what the Defense Department has said, what Chairman Dempsey said, and what all the members of the national security team have said.

Q: I want to go back to the assurances that you got from the Qatari government. It's my understanding that those assurances last for a year. So what happens after that year, Jay? What do you say to the American people, what's protecting national security interests beyond that year?

MR. CARNEY: What I can tell you is that — without getting into too many specifics about the mitigation that comes with this transfer that there is a travel ban that is associated with it. There is monitoring that is associated with it, and that altogether the Secretary of Defense and the national security team concluded that there was enough and sufficient mitigation of the threat that this was the right thing to do; that the threat was not — that it did not — that the transfer of these detainees did not pose a significant threat to the United States.

Q: There's enough mitigation for how long though?

MR. CARNEY: Enough mitigation. I don't have the details of the circumstances of how the Qataris will follow the detainees and monitor the detainees and all the aspects obviously of the interaction that we have with the Qataris around this matter. But it is the determination of the Secretary of Defense and the national security team that that threat is mitigated.

Q: Can you say yes or no, does it extend beyond that —

MR. CARNEY: Again, I just don't have more details to provide to you.

Q: Okay, and I just have one on the EPA. The EPA said the regulation that they announced today would create jobs. Can you characterize how many jobs specifically will be created? What types of jobs? Do you have a benchmark that you're looking at?

MR. CARNEY: It's our view that this proposed rule when implemented over time would create tens of thousands of jobs. The opportunities for job creation are apparent certainly in areas of renewable energy. We've seen that already in solar energy, wind energy, biofuels. And that growth has occurred already in the past several years. The growth in renewables has — and renewable production has contributed to the reductions we've already seen in carbon emissions. We've also seen a significant expansion of — and consistent with the President's all-of-the-above approach to energy production that we've seen a significant expansion in our natural gas production here in the United States.

And as you know, natural gas burns twice as cleanly as, for example, coal and other fossil fuels.

Q: And what do you say to your opponents who say ultimately it's going to cost jobs in the gas and

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coal industry?

MR. CARNEY: Look, I think that it's worth noting — and I don't know if I have anybody from the National Journal here. But I'm going to quote the National Journal, which reported last year: "In fact, coal mining jobs in Appalachia fared far worse under the Reagan, Clinton and George H.W. Bush administrations than they have under President Obama."

And we have taken steps to approach our energy needs and our energy security in an all-of-the-above fashion. And that includes increasing domestic production across the board. It includes aggressively investing in renewable energy. It includes taking advantage of our natural gas deposits in a way that enhances U.S. national security and energy independence. And we're going to continue that approach.

And again, I would point you to all the history in this country of actions taken by administrations of both parties to improve the quality of our air and the quality of our water. And every time such actions have been taken, industry has said that doom is upon us, and jobs will be eliminated, and the economy will crater. And when these kinds of actions are done wisely, consistent with the science, the opposite has been true.

Q: Jay.

MR. CARNEY: Wendell.

Q: A couple subjects. Was the White House aware when it invited Sergeant Bergdhal's parents here Friday of his father's apparent Twitter communication with a man described as the spokesman for the Taliban, a commitment to free all the prisoners in Guantanamo, for example?

MR. CARNEY: I don't know the answer to that. The fact is they are the parents of Sergeant Bergdhal. Their son was held in captivity for five years, and it was absolutely the right thing to do for the Commander-in-Chief, for this administration to take action to secure his release — the last prisoner of war from the Iraq and Afghanistan wars.

Q: I'm not asking about that. I'm asking about the decision to invite them here. A lot of people feel that some of the communication he had with this guy was improper.

MR. CARNEY: Well, I don't know about those communications or what a lot of people feel. The President believes we ought to close Gitmo, so do senior national security — senior members of the national security team of President George W. Bush, including President George W. Bush. We believe we ought to close Guantanamo Bay because the costs are excessive, the harm to our national security is real, and we continue to take steps —

Q: — the commitment was to free the inmates of Gitmo.

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MR. CARNEY: Well, that's not our position, Wendell. But you can — whether or not that's — whoever holds that position, it doesn't pertain to this issue. The fact is Sergeant Bergdhal was held captive by an enemy force in an armed conflict with the United States and consistent with past practice in this country. In an ethos adhered to by our military, we brought him home — or we're bringing him home.

Q: Different subject. On the VA, Secretary Shinseki is out. What's the next step? Is this up to Sloan Gibson? Is the President awaiting more reports? Has he, for example, gotten the report from Rob Nabors? What's the next step now in fixing the problem Veterans Administration?

MR. CARNEY: Well, when it comes to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, it is a top priority to find a successor, and I can't predict an exact timeline right now, but we're going to look diligently for a new VA Secretary. And we hope to confirm that successor and fill that post as soon as possible.

The fact is, and we discussed this last week, Sloan Gibson as the acting Secretary has significant background to take on this effort and to fill an important role as we search for a new Secretary. And we look forward to that.

When it comes to the reviews that are underway, they continue — both Rob Nabors' view, and the one initiative by Secretary Shinseki, for which the initial report was provided to the President last week. And of course, there is an independent inspector general investigation that's ongoing.

Q: Does Sloan Gibson start the process? Or do we wait till you get a Secretary confirmed to look big-picture at how you're going to fix this problem?

MR. CARNEY: Oh, the process began prior to Secretary Shinseki offering his resignation. He himself took steps aimed at accountability, ones that became apparent how systemic the problem was regarding falsified reports on wait times, or misrepresentation of wait times. And Rob Nabors began a broader review of VA operations and VHA operations that is ongoing, and he will have a full report this month for the President and the leadership at VA.

Q: Jay?

MR. CARNEY: Mara.

Q: I have a question about this conference call that the President is doing in five minutes.

MR. CARNEY: Of course, I know you don't want to miss, so give me a shout when it's time.

Q: I think they moved it up to 1:50 p.m. actually.

Q: Right.

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Q: But in any event, why is he choosing the Lung Association in order to kind of talk — put this in the context of a health issue, as opposed to an environmental issue? Is it because he thinks more people would understand it that way? I'm just curious why he's chosen that approach.

MR. CARNEY: Well, because it's both, Mara. And he's talked about and will continue to talk about the broader issues of the challenge posed by climate change and global warming. But when it comes to carbon emissions, which are not regulated, they do direct harm to our public health. And you can see the instances of asthma and the huge increase that we've seen in this country when it comes to asthma attacks especially among children, we've taken steps to cut emissions of lead and mercury and arsenic. And this is consistent with those efforts and consistent with the public health objectives of those efforts. So that's what the President will be highlighting today in his conference call.

Q: Is he worried at all about the adverse effect politically to Democrats who are running in coal states in November?

MR. CARNEY: The President thinks this is the right thing to do. And it is consistent with actions that have been taken to reduce pollution caused by lead or mercury, caused by arsenic. And the positive health effects are clear — I think that is independently established — and the long-term benefits, when it comes to reduced electricity bills and increased job creation are clear. So this is, again, in the President's view the right thing to do. And he's confident that there will be significant benefits to our health, public health, and to our economy as the years pass.

Mark. And then, Connie.

Q: Jay, is there a policy that bars the U.S. negotiating with terrorist groups?

MR. CARNEY: Mark, on the issue of negotiating with terrorists, I would point you that we are in an armed conflict with the Taliban in Afghanistan. We don't get to choose our enemies when we go to war. The Taliban held Sergeant Bergdahl and we successfully recovered him, consistent with past practice and consistent with an ethos that says, we, the United States of America, the U.S. military, do not leave our men and women in uniform behind when they're held captive. And it was consistent with that principle that we have pursued for years Sergeant Bergdahl's recovery.

Q: Does the U.S. still regard the Taliban as a terrorist group?

MR. CARNEY: We regard the Taliban as an enemy combatant in a conflict that has been going on — in which the United States has been involved — for more than a decade. And in this case, although as you know, we dealt with the Qataris in order to secure his release, it was absolutely the right thing to do, because he was a uniformed member of the U.S. military who was in captivity as a prisoner, not as a hostage. And so, we sought his recovery and succeeded in recovering him.

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Q: So the negotiation to obtain Sergeant Bergdahl's release is not a breach of that policy of not negotiating with terrorists?

MR. CARNEY: It is absolutely consistent with decades — and I venture, centuries, because we've had more than two now in the United States — of past practice when it comes to prisoners of war and exchanges of prisoners. I think if people want me to end in time for this conference call, just shout.

Connie, do you have one?

Q: Would you consider becoming ambassador to Russia?

MR. CARNEY: I was asked this, Connie. And nobody is offering that job, and I'm not headed to Russia.

Q: Jay, you've given us very little detail about this deal. Can you at least assure the American people that the Taliban that are going back, going over to Qatar, will not be involved in Taliban activities two or three years from now, that they'll not be right back doing what they had done previously?

MR. CARNEY: What I can tell you, Keith, is what I've said already, is that the Secretary of Defense in consultation, in coordination with the full national security team made the conclusion that the mitigation efforts were sufficient when it came to our — the assurances we received from the Qataris and the communications we've had with them that these five detainees do not and will not pose a significant threat to the United States. And it was in the national security interests of the United States to secure Sergeant Bergdahl's release.

Q: I heard that. But you can't say that they'll be back with the Taliban in a couple of years? You can't say that that won't happen?

MR. CARNEY: No, I don't predict the future, Keith. And you probably do on your website.

Q: Well, that's a pretty important —

MR. CARNEY: What I can tell you is consistent with past practice. We have received assurances, and are confident that there is sufficient mitigation.

Q: One more quick one — you're sort of setting this up as kind of a routine — or maybe not routine, but within the tradition of prisoner of war exchanges. The people that you're exchanging are alleged mass murderers and abettors of terrorism, proven abettors of terrorism against the United States. Can you describe a previous time when people of that caliber have been exchanged for a prisoner during a time of war?

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MR. CARNEY: I can tell you is that there have been prisoner exchanges in our past. There have been prisoner exchanges consistent with this action by our allies and by the United States in conflicts where there was a great deal of loss of life on both sides.

Q: Have we sent alleged mass murderers of civilians back, Shiite civilians, back in exchange for a soldier?

MR. CARNEY: Keith, all I can tell you is Sergeant Bergdahl is an American member of the military who was held captive by our enemies for five years, and it is absolutely the right thing to do consistent with U.S. history, consistent with an ethos that was identified by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff that we secure his release in the way that we did. And it was the right thing to do. Thank you all very much.

END 1:51 P.M. EDT