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TRANSCRIPT:

1:55 p.m. EDT

MR. TONER: Good afternoon, everyone. I'm sorry to be a little bit late, apologize.

Just very quickly at the top, I do want to call attention to the fact that today is a day when we honor all of your profession, chosen profession, the profession of journalism. Obviously, it's World Press Freedom Day. And as the President said last week, in the last months, we've seen ample reminders of the important work that all of you do. We've seen journalists threatened, arrested, beaten, attacked, in some cases even killed simply for doing their best to bring us the story, to give people a voice, and to hold leaders accountable. And the United States is proud to host this year's World Press Freedom Day events and honor the contribution that journalists make to advancing universal human rights.

We'd also again like to – we would also, again, like to congratulate the UNESCO Guillermo Cano prizewinner, Ahmad Zeidabadi, who unfortunately cannot join

us today because he remains in prison in Iran. Nonetheless, he continues to demonstrate his courage. I understand he's written a statement that he'll – that will be read by UNESCO Director-General Bokova at today's prize ceremony, which commences at 3:30 p.m. at the National Press Club.

With that, I will take over – take your questions.

QUESTION: Can you give us some information about Ambassador Grossman's meeting – meetings in Islamabad today, describe their flavor, context of what he's there talking about?

MR. TONER: Well, you're right. He's been there, I believe, since yesterday. He, of course, today participated in the trilateral meeting that took place in Islamabad that was hosted by Foreign Secretary Bashir, and they discussed, among other things, Afghan-led reconciliation and greater trade and economic integration into South Asia. He also met, I believe yesterday as well as today, with President Zardari, with Prime Minister Gillani, as well as General Kayani and General Pasha.

And in these meetings, they discussed the importance of continued cooperation and the fight against violent extremism and the need for the United States to continue working in partnership with the Government of Pakistan and people of Pakistan to build a better, stable, more prosperous Pakistan.

QUESTION: Can you be a little bit more specific about that?

MR. TONER: Well, I mean, he talked – sure.

QUESTION: Not the Afghan integration and the enhanced trade, which I'm sure we're all thrilled about, but what he talked about with Zardari, Gillani, and the military people.

MR. TONER: Well, I don't want to get into the details of their private discussions. He did talk a little bit today, he did give a statement after the trilateral meeting in which he talked about the fact that all three countries – that they did talk about the action that resulted in the death of Usama bin Ladin, and that all three countries that were represented there – Pakistan, the U.S., and Afghanistan – viewed it as a shared achievement.

QUESTION: On the meetings – again, not the trilateral meetings.

MR. TONER: Sure.

QUESTION: On the meetings, the individual meetings that he had with Zardari, Gillani, and the military guys, those were all separate or were they all together?

MR. TONER: I believe they were all separate.

QUESTION: Okay. And did he express any concern or relay concerns to these Pakistani officials that if this Administration is not yet ready to – I think it is ready, it has – but in particular, people in Congress, concerns that have been expressed about the fact that bin Ladin was found, where he was found?

MR. TONER: Well, again, I think it's important to put his trip and his meetings in the context that these were – obviously predated Sunday night's action and --

QUESTION: Well, Mark --

MR. TONER: Yeah. Go ahead.

QUESTION: I'm well aware of that.

MR. TONER: Yeah, no --

QUESTION: That's not the question I'm asking.

MR. TONER: Right. But this was a scheduled visit.

QUESTION: Yeah, I'm not --

MR. TONER: And the thrust of his visit, basically, was to follow up on the diplomacy side of the Secretary's Asia Society speech a couple months ago.

QUESTION: Yes, but these preplanned visits don't happen in a vacuum, Mark.

MR. TONER: I understand that.

QUESTION: So --

MR. TONER: Obviously, the context of this visit was --

QUESTION: Exactly. So --

MR. TONER: -- pretty unique.

QUESTION: -- did he relay any concerns from the Administration or from the Hill?

MR. TONER: Again, I don't want to get into the substance of his conversations. I would say that it was a topic of discussion.

QUESTION: What was?

MR. TONER: That – the action against Usama bin Ladin that resulted in his death was discussed, and also, what was important and also stressed by the Secretary yesterday multiple times was that we continue to want to work on counterterrorism with Pakistan going forward. It's important.

QUESTION: Well --

MR. TONER: And as the Secretary said yesterday, that cooperation helped lead us to Sunday.

QUESTION: Well, there are -- from -- Brennan and other officials have all raised very serious questions about whether -- about who, what and --

MR. TONER: Well, I think -- yeah.

QUESTION: -- who in Pakistan knew what and when they knew it about bin Ladin and his location. This has been more --

MR. TONER: Right.

QUESTION: I mean, this -- the talk coming from the Hill, from people who just eight months ago or less were all on board with Kerry-Lugar-Berman assistance to Pakistan are singing a completely different song right now. Your policy there, at least the existing policy, is in serious jeopardy, at least from the Hill, where there's going to be a significant challenge to it. Did Ambassador Grossman make it clear to the Pakistanis that they're going to have to answer these questions, and --

MR. TONER: Well --

QUESTION: -- did he explain to them what the consequence is for not?

MR. TONER: Matt, again, I'm not going to talk about his specific conversations, but I think the President's counterterrorism advisor, John Brennan, was very clear yesterday in saying that we're working with the Government of Pakistan to determine what, if any, support systems may have existed -- were in place for bin Ladin.

QUESTION: Is that a topic of conversation between Ambassador Grossman and the Pakistanis -- support systems?

MR. TONER: I'm not going to get into details of their conversations. I'm going to say that we've been -- we've publicly acknowledged that we're going to raise those issues with the Pakistanis -- that we have indeed raised those issues in our conversations with the Pakistani Government. That said, we've also -- the Secretary as well as the President have talked about the fact that our counterterrorism cooperation helped lead us to -- over the course of many years, lead us to Sunday's event.

QUESTION: Mark?

MR. TONER: Yeah. Sure.

QUESTION: Has the Secretary herself spoken with Zardari or her counterpart in Pakistan, or does she have any plans to do that?

MR. TONER: Yeah. I don't believe so. I know the President spoke with Gilani right after the operation, but I don't believe she's spoken to anybody else.

QUESTION: Okay.

MR. TONER: Yeah. Elise.

QUESTION: And back to sort of the tenor of Matt's question, I mean, the Secretary herself repeatedly has talked about a trust deficit. I wonder, is it in the view of this building, has the -- have the events of the last 48 hours increased the trust deficit between the United States and Pakistan?

MR. TONER: I don't know that they've increased or decreased the trust deficit or -- yeah, the trust deficit, in the sense that we recognize that Pakistan, as the President had said and the Secretary said yesterday, Pakistan was equally affected by Usama bin Ladin's campaign of terror. They have suffered grievous losses by al-Qaida, from al-Qaida attacks over the years. And they have been a partner with us in counterterrorism operations, and we have made progress. Sunday's action, in many ways, was the result of some of that cooperation over the years. We believe it's not only in Pakistan's long-term interest but in our national security interest that that cooperation continue.

QUESTION: Mark?

MR. TONER: Yeah. Go ahead, Jill.

QUESTION: You quoted Brennan in talking about we'll look at the supports -- possible support systems. What's happening in this building? What are the contacts? Are there senior officials talking to senior Pakistani officials to get to the bottom of this, as people have been saying?

MR. TONER: Well, again, those conversations, as Brennan acknowledged yesterday, are ongoing. They're -- I think he said they're understandable.

QUESTION: Right. Between whom?

MR. TONER: Right. Right. Right. Again, I don't necessarily want to get into the details. I mean, obviously, our SRAP Ambassador Grossman is on the ground. I don't want to get into the details of what his conversations were, but obviously, the bin Ladin operation and killing were discussed but was also discussed -- that was discussed in the broader framework of our ongoing cooperation both on the counterterrorism front but also in terms of building stronger democratic institutions and putting Pakistan on a path towards a more prosperous future.

So I mean, Sunday was a pivotal event. It was a great achievement. It was the result of cooperation over many years. It was a singular achievement for our armed forces and special forces. That said, we are still moving forward on a path to help Pakistan build better democratic institutions, to build a stronger economy, and to help its -- help it combat the extremist elements in its society.

QUESTION: Right. But I mean, again, these conversations with the Pakistanis, what is the -- how are they being conducted? Is it the U.S. is demanding that Pakistan explain what happened, how they didn't know, or what --

MR. TONER: I would --

QUESTION: I know you can not tell us the people, but tell us what are they looking for.

MR. TONER: Sure. I mean, I think we have an ongoing dialogue with them and I think that we have raised this issue. We've obviously had close contact, close cooperation, with Pakistan, as I said, built over many years. And we are -- we have very candid conversations about these issues and we're discussing it with them.

QUESTION: Can I just follow up, Mark?

MR. TONER: Yeah.

QUESTION: Yesterday, like Matt said, many lawmakers on the Capitol Hill from both aisles spoke about this issue. What they were saying that Pakistan let down what we believed a trusted ally and is no longer -- Pakistan is no longer a trusted ally. And what they're saying is that even Musharraf was lying and let down our trust.

MR. TONER: Goyal, I don't mean to cut you off, but I mean, we're really getting ahead of ourselves here. I mean, we're speculating where, frankly, it's dangerous to do so. Clearly, as John Brennan acknowledged, there were questions raised about his location, and we're asking the Pakistani authorities about those questions, raising those questions with them. But there's -- beyond that, there's just circumstantial evidence, and we believe that Pakistan and the U.S. have a strong counterterrorism relationship and we want to continue on that path.

QUESTION: So strong that when you do -- when you conduct the operation, the most significant operation in the war on terrorism yet, you don't even tell them about it?

MR. TONER: Well, Matt, the President said all along that if he had actionable intelligence he would act on that. And the operational security around --

QUESTION: If the Pakistanis were unable or unwilling to do so.

MR. TONER: This operational security around this particular operation was obviously extremely high. He called President Zardari immediately after the operation. And it -- that speaks for itself.

QUESTION: Well, no, what speaks for itself is the fact that you didn't tell him anything about it beforehand. That's what speaks for itself, I think.

MR. TONER: Again, the operational security around this particular operation was, to say the least, intense.

QUESTION: Fair enough. You said earlier that you're still moving forward to help the Pakistanis on their -- has anyone been in touch with the Hill lately, because it doesn't sound -- did you listen at all to what happened at Senator Kerry's hearing this morning?

MR. TONER: I'm very much aware of the hearings going on and that are going on this week. And we're obviously going to collaborate closely and work closely with Congress going forward.

QUESTION: Well, is there any concern in this building that people who were fervent (inaudible) of Kerry-Berman-Lugar -- or whatever it was called, Kerry-Lugar-Berman --

MR. TONER: Kerry-Lugar-Berman.

QUESTION: -- are now -- appear to be changing their minds about this?

MR. TONER: I think there's questions.

QUESTION: Your --

MR. TONER: I think there's questions that were raised that will be addressed in due time. Yeah.

QUESTION: And the other thing is that the President and then the Secretary again and then you have all said that this -- that the cooperation that Pakistan has given you in the past has led to -- helped lead to bin Ladin's -- what exactly was that cooperation?

MR. TONER: Well, I'm talking --

QUESTION: (Inaudible).

MR. TONER: I mean, obviously, I can't talk about particular details, but there has been close cooperation that has increased pressure on al-Qaida. That is, I think, inarguable, that on a number of fronts within Pakistan, al-Qaida has been put under tremendous pressure.

QUESTION: But they were specific in saying that it helped lead to bin Ladin's location and to where he was found hiding. That's -- those -- that's exactly what they said and that's what you repeated. So I'm just -- I just want to know -- I mean, if they weren't told anything about this, had no idea that you had even found the hideout, this location, what exactly did they do?

MR. TONER: Well, again, Matt, I don't want to get into --

QUESTION: I'm asking to prove that there is strong -- to prove your statement that there is a strong counterterrorism relationship with Pakistan in a situation in which that cooperation wasn't good enough, or it doesn't appear good enough that you would even tell them that this was happening.

MR. TONER: Again, we've been very clear from immediately after announcing this operation and its success that it was undertaken under extreme measures of operational security. We notified the Pakistanis immediately afterward. And frankly, there has been close cooperation between our intelligence agencies. I don't

want to get into specifics. As Brennan and others have said, this was a result of multiple threads of intelligence over many years that led to this one conclusive event. And certainly, our cooperation with Pakistan was an element of that culmination.

QUESTION: Mark, how would you rate the cooperation on other groups of interest, specifically the Haqqani Network, the LET? Are you getting similar types of cooperation from Pakistanis on those groups, and do you expect them to take a different or a more aggressive line going forward?

MR. TONER: Well, again, this is – we've had good cooperation built over a number of years. This is, in many ways, a work in progress. We obviously have very – we very much have shared goals in this. We may not always see eye to eye on how to approach every issue, but our cooperation is ongoing, and we believe it's been effective. Again, I believe it's been effective – we believe it's been effective on putting pressure on al-Qaida. And also Pakistan's military has, again, suffered pretty substantial losses in battling extremists in Waziristan and elsewhere.

QUESTION: Mark --

QUESTION: In battling the extremists elements, when was the last time they updated you on where they thought he was? And what did they – what was their position before Sunday?

MR. TONER: Well, I think President Zardari talked about it in his op-ed piece today. I don't really want to get into the substance of what they may be telling us or who may have told us, in terms of intelligence. It's not really my role or place, and I'm unable to do so. But they – this was – at the very least, this was a case of someone hiding in plain sight, and as John Brennan said yesterday, we've – it raises questions about whether he had a support network, and we've raised those questions with the Pakistani Government.

QUESTION: Mark, what are lawmakers on the Capitol Hill are saying today, I mean, this – about this now – I've been saying all this for the last 10 years here in this building, also at the White House, that Pakistan is playing a double role, double game, and they cannot be trusted. And they have a revolving door which you must close. Unless until you close this door you cannot bring Usama bin Ladin to justice.

MR. TONER: Again, Goyal – and Goyal, you're making assumptions here that we're – no one is able to make at this point.

QUESTION: Yeah, but you found him inside – deep inside Pakistan.

MR. TONER: I understand where he was found. I understand all the facts of the operation. And yet, again, we can't draw any assumptions.

Okay. Go ahead.

QUESTION: Pakistanis have been denying all these years that he's not in Pakistan.

MR. TONER: Goyal, again, I don't think you can make any assumptions. I think we just need to talk to the Pakistanis and get --

QUESTION: On the issue of funding --

MR. TONER: Yeah.

QUESTION: Just for the record, there are, as we've been saying, people who say pull the plug, don't have any more funding. What is the view of the State Department? What would be the effect of cutting or freezing aid to Pakistan?

MR. TONER: Well, again, I think our view is that this has paid dividends and will continue to pay dividends. And again, this is assistance that is in both Pakistan's long-term interest as well as the United States' national interests and security interests. We believe it is a vital cooperation. As I said, we have shared goals. We are both affected by the scourge of extremism. The vast majority of al-Qaida and bin Ladin's victims were Muslim. Pakistan has suffered grievous losses from al-Qaida attacks. So we believe that this is a shared struggle. We're continuing to work with them. We, again, may not see eye to eye on how to approach every issue, but we're going to continue to work with Pakistan and we believe it's in the best interest of our nation to do so.

QUESTION: So are you saying that regardless of what you find out about a potential support system, you're still going to pump aid into Pakistan?

MR. TONER: Look, again, we're – you're trying to get me to go down a road that I don't want to go down, and I don't think I should go down, which is you're – Goyal is also speculating on this. We – it has raised questions indeed, and those questions are being raised with Pakistan, with the Pakistani authorities going forward. But at this point, we believe that our assistance is still vital.

QUESTION: Right. But the question --

QUESTION: Aid is not --

QUESTION: Forget about going down the road that you don't want to go down. Have you told the Pakistanis the problems that you – that you, the Administration – is going to face on the Hill in trying to get more money?

MR. TONER: I think --

QUESTION: Or should they just know?

MR. TONER: Well, I mean, I think it's --

QUESTION: It should be self-evident to them?

MR. TONER: Well, their ambassador --

QUESTION: Have you said, "Look, people are really pissed off on the Hill and they're going to – and there are calls right now to get rid of this aid, to freeze it

completely," and questions that you, the Administration, are being -- are going to be forced to ask about why -- is this really worth it and are they really a true partner?

MR. TONER: Matt, again --

QUESTION: So what I want to know is are you conveying that huge problem that you have right now and are going to have to the Pakistanis? Do they know that they've got to come up with some explanations here?

MR. TONER: Look, Matt, you saw President Zardari published an op-ed piece today in The Washington Post trying to address some of these questions.

QUESTION: So you're going to take an op-ed that he writes in The Washington Post as a response to these questions?

MR. TONER: They are fully aware of some of the questions that some of these events have raised.

QUESTION: Okay. So the question is: How are they fully aware?

MR. TONER: Well --

QUESTION: Have you -- have they been -- and this began -- why I started -- is Grossman telling the Pakistanis that they're in a bit of trouble here?

MR. TONER: Look, I can try to get you more substance on what Grossman's conversations have been in Islamabad. I can tell you that we have frank discussions with the Pakistani Government. Obviously, bin Ladin's demise -- killing -- has been discussed with his -- in his meetings, rather, and along with many other aspects of our bilateral relationship. But of course, I mean, it's self-evident that this would be a topic.

QUESTION: Mark, Richard Haass of the Council on Foreign Relations is calling on the U.S. to cut aid to Pakistan, and also many others are calling -- and to declare Pakistan as a state sponsor terrorist.

MR. TONER: I'm sorry, your -- the last part of your question was?

QUESTION: Many others are calling that Pakistan should be declared as a state sponsor in terrorism --

MR. TONER: I mean, clearly --

QUESTION: -- because what we found inside -- what we found now there.

MR. TONER: Again, let's not get ahead of ourselves here. What happened has raised questions. We've said we've raised those questions with the Pakistani authorities. I don't want to speculate beyond that.

QUESTION: Let me just ask you one more quickly. Is Pakistan sorry for what happened, or are they shocked or surprised?

MR. TONER: Again, you'll have to ask the Pakistani Government. I think that in their public statements, they've called this a great achievement, or something -- and I'm paraphrasing -- but a shared achievement as well as reflected in Ambassador Grossman's statement earlier today as -- well.

QUESTION: Last night --

MR. TONER: -- which is a good thing for them.

QUESTION: Last night --

MR. TONER: I think that goes without saying.

QUESTION: But last night on CNN, General Musharraf, who was part of this 10-year (inaudible), he blamed the U.S. and the CIA for this -- all this drama. That's what he called it.

MR. TONER: I don't know what he's referring to.

QUESTION: Hey, Mark --

MR. TONER: Yeah. Sure, Matt. Yeah.

QUESTION: -- just one other thing -- not on the state sponsor of terrorism question, but on something that is -- another designation, which is that shortly after the war, Pakistan said that it would cooperate with the U.S. in the war on terrorism in Afghanistan. The former Administration made Pakistan a -- what's called a major non-NATO ally, which allows it to get certain --

MR. TONER: Correct.

QUESTION: -- material, certain military equipment, gives it special benefits. At the time, this angered the Indians. In particular, one reason was because they weren't notified that it was going to happen when Secretary Powell went to Islamabad and announced it. Have you heard any talk or are you aware of any discussion about removing Pakistan from the list of major non-NATO allies?

MR. TONER: I have not. Anything else?

QUESTION: All right. Well, then let's continue with another problematic aid package that you have. (Laughter.) And this one is probably -- is a little bit more imminent.

Tomorrow, the Palestinians -- Hamas and Fatah -- are supposed to sign their unity pact and form a unity government. I understand the Secretary spoke

yesterday to Prime Minister Netanyahu and Prime Minister Fayad about the consequences of what that would – of what would happen. Can you tell us about those conversations, one?

And two, can you tell us about your discussions with lawmakers on the Hill who say that the Palestinians should get no aid at all if they go into a deal with Hamas?

MR. TONER: Well, Matt, I can confirm that she did speak with Prime Minister Netanyahu and Prime Minister Fayad, and they discussed – they did indeed discuss Palestinian reconciliation and related developments. I don't want to get into the details of those discussions. But it's important to – I know you talked about this event in – scheduled for Cairo tomorrow, but it's also important to note that to date, there's – the current Palestinian Government remains in place, and we continue to work with that government.

Once – if a new Palestinian government is formed, then we'll assess that government based on its composition.

QUESTION: Well, it's coming down the pike. They say it's happening tomorrow. Are you just hoping that if you ignore it, it will go away and they won't do it?

MR. TONER: I wouldn't say that, but we're also not going to --

QUESTION: Well, so there must be some kind of planning going on there.

MR. TONER: We're also not going to make public pronouncements about what may happen tomorrow. It's premature and --

QUESTION: Well, is it?

MR. TONER: -- right now, we're working with a Palestinian Government that's – that we believe has been effective in establishing security and establishing institutions.

QUESTION: Right. But that may change radically tomorrow. Is a Palestinian government with Hamas playing a major role in it acceptable to the United States?

MR. TONER: Well, again, we've – our long-stated policy on this is that if Hamas wants to play a political role, or a role in the political process, then it needs to abide by the Quartet principles, and those have been quite clear. It needs to accept those principles, which are renouncing violence and terrorism, recognizing Israel's right to exist, and abiding by previous diplomatic agreements.

QUESTION: How many of those do they accept, do they agree with right now?

MR. TONER: You'll have to ask them. I'm not --

QUESTION: Well, okay. I think the answer would be none.

MR. TONER: I agree.

QUESTION: So then is – my question is: As it stands today, is a Palestinian government with Hamas as a major player in it acceptable to the United States? It's not a hypothetical question, so please don't out of it.

MR. TONER: Well --

QUESTION: It's is, as of today, a Palestinian government with Hamas as a major player in it acceptable to the United States?

MR. TONER: And I will say that – and my answer will be the same, which is for Hamas to play a political – a role in the political process, it needs to accept the Quartet principles. That's very clear. Once it's done that, it can play a role.

QUESTION: Right. According to you, right? But the Palestinians, apparently Fatah, says no, they don't have to do that; they're going to do it anyway. So --

MR. TONER: If and when a new Palestinian government is announced, we'll assess that, based on its composition.

QUESTION: But right now, then, you would not be able to support a Palestinian government that includes Hamas in it, as its position stands today?

MR. TONER: Again, I'll say that Hamas needs to abide by the Quartet principles in order to play a role in the political process.

QUESTION: Mark, did you say that – did Clinton – did Secretary Clinton touch on the aid issue specifically with either Netanyahu or Fayad in her talks? Can you say?

MR. TONER: I think she talked a little bit about the significance of that assistance package, and again -- .

QUESTION: The legalities of it?

MR. TONER: I'm sorry?

QUESTION: The legalities of it?

MR. TONER: Legalities in terms of --

QUESTION: In terms of --

MR. TONER: -- if there's a Hamas --

QUESTION: Right.

MR. TONER: Again, I think we are waiting to see what happens. There's been an announcement. There was an announcement last week. Nothing has happened so far. The composition of the Palestinian Government remains the same. Therefore, it's important that that assistance remains in place.

QUESTION: Can I just --

MR. TONER: Yeah. Sure.

QUESTION: -- rephrase his -- Andy's question? Did the Secretary directly talk to them about the legal issues tied with aid and the fact that the Palestinians might lose it? And secondly, separately, is anyone from the State Department or the USG or a representative working on behalf of the government speaking directly to Hamas about what's at stake and what they -- what the U.S. thinks they should do?

MR. TONER: The answer to your second question: I'm not aware of that.

QUESTION: Could you ask around?

MR. TONER: I'll certainly ask. I'm skeptical but, yeah, I'll ask. In answer to your first question, I don't want to get into the details of their discussion, but we've been very clear that both U.S. assistance and other assistance to the Palestinian Authority has been important in helping them build the kind of democratic institutions that lead to an eventual statehood.

QUESTION: Do you have any -- just on Hamas in itself, do you have any comment on the remarks by the leader of Hamas about the raid that killed bin Ladin and what bin Ladin --

MR. TONER: This is -- if you're referring to Ismail Haniya's --

QUESTION: Yeah.

MR. TONER: Well, they're outrageous. And it goes without saying bin Ladin was a murderer and a terrorist. He ordered the killings of thousands of innocent men, women, and children, and many of whom were Muslim. He did not die a martyr. He died hiding in a mansion or a compound far away from the violence that was carried out in his name. And his defeat is a victory for all human beings seeking to live in peace, security, and dignity. So I just echo my first statement, which is his remarks we find outrageous.

QUESTION: Right. And so -- but you're not prepared at this point to say that if this guy plays a major role in the new Palestinian Government, that that would be unacceptable? You just basically -- you said -- I mean, you --

MR. TONER: And I'm going to reiterate what I said before, Matt, which is that --

QUESTION: You said his comments were outrageous. You say that --

MR. TONER: Again --

QUESTION: -- they're ridiculous, and yet you think there might be a way --

MR. TONER: But again, there is not --

QUESTION: -- for the U.S. Government to deal with this guy.

MR. TONER: I'm saying that there might be a way, but until the new Palestinian Government, if and when this is formed, we will assess our policy based on that composition of that government. But until then, I'm not going to speculate.

QUESTION: New subject?

MR. TONER: Yeah.

QUESTION: Mark, is there a policy change in the U.S. as far as visa for Indians traveling on a tourist visa or a student visa after that Tri-Valley case? Because now I see a lot of -- more and more rejections in Delhi at the U.S. Embassy because many people are rejected and they're crying because they have relatives here in the U.S. like U.S. citizens, and they just want to visit them. And they're all, like, over 70.

MR. TONER: Goyal, I'm not aware that there were any -- that there's been any kind of new processes or requirements based on student visas. Those remain the same. I think in the wake of the Tri-Valley scandal, there was obviously a desire and an effort to look at some of these academic institutions more closely and to make sure that indeed these students are not -- that -- are not falling victim to some kind of scam. So I believe on that and on the fraud side of it, I think those have been stepped up measures to prevent that kind of event. But in terms of student visas to Indian students, Indian students play a vital role in our higher education system here.

QUESTION: Or in tourist visas like, as I said, that --

MR. TONER: I don't -- again, I'm not aware of any changes to the tourist visas.

QUESTION: Can you check this and what is going on at the U.S. Embassy in Delhi because more and more tourists who --

MR. TONER: I will reach out to the Embassy and ask them, sure.

QUESTION: Thank you, sir.

MR. TONER: Yeah. Yeah, go ahead.

QUESTION: Bahrain arrested two prominent politicians today. They continue to oppress the opposition. It seems they are not listening to your messages.

MR. TONER: Well, you're right in the sense that targeting opposition politicians does undermine any attempt by the Government of Bahrain to engage in a national dialogue. We've said many, many times – and I'll repeat it today – that there's no security solution to resolve the challenges that Bahrain faces. We call on Bahrain to respect detainees' rights to due process in all cases and abide by its commitment to transparent judicial proceedings conducted in full accordance with Bahraini law and Bahrain's international legal obligations.

QUESTION: Do you --

MR. TONER: Yeah.

QUESTION: On Bahrain, do you have any comment on their trying physicians and nurses who treated wounded demonstrators?

MR. TONER: Well, again, I think it speaks to the fact that any judicial proceedings need to be done in a way that's transparent and in accordance with both Bahraini law and its international obligations. And that requires respecting detainees' rights as well as a clear explanation of the charges that they're – that are being filed against them.

QUESTION: What – yeah, but – so the U.S. doesn't have a standard opinion or a blanket opinion on trying – arresting and trying medical --

MR. TONER: Medical professionals?

QUESTION: -- professionals who treat wounded civilians?

MR. TONER: I would – again, I'm not aware of that particular story. But we would obviously be very concerned about that.

QUESTION: Mark, will the Secretary be meeting with any Bahraini officials at the Libya Contact Group meeting, and will she be raising these issues with them? And also, could you preview that meeting at all?

MR. TONER: Sure. I can't answer your first question. I don't know all the details about her bilateral meetings. She certainly will have, obviously, bilateral meetings on the side of the conference itself. But if I get more information, I'll let you know.

But I think Jake talked a little bit about the goals of Rome. Obviously, it's going to be a chance to sit down with our key partners in the Contact Group and talk a little bit about the situation in Libya and how we can take more concrete steps to help the Transitional National Council, as well as ways we can improve the implementation of Security Council Resolutions 1970 and 1973.

One of the things they're talking about, obviously, is this financial mechanism that would help get funding to the TNC. That's obviously vital. We've talked before – I have, Ambassador Cretz has talked about it, Jake's talked about it – the need that the TNC has for funding if it needs to – if it – so that it can survive, remain operational – that's obviously a key element – but also other forms of non-lethal assistance, and then finally, I think trying to find – trying to talk about more ways to increase the diplomatic and political pressure on Qadhafi and his regime.

QUESTION: Has Turkey's Erdogan briefed the Secretary on this plan he's talking about to get Qadhafi to go?

MR. TONER: I'm aware of the Turkish plan. I don't know that he's spoken directly to Secretary Clinton about it.

QUESTION: Are there details that you could share with us?

MR. TONER: But obviously, I mean, we've been clear about where we would fall in any – on any kind of plan, which is that he must – obviously, he's de-legitimized as a leader, and he needs to step aside and allow for a democratic process – peaceful democratic transition and process to take place.

QUESTION: And logistically on that, have you come up with a new protecting power in Libya yet?

MR. TONER: My understanding, Matt, is that the Turkish Embassy has closed temporarily and that Turkish diplomats remain on the ground in Tripoli. We remain in contact with them.

QUESTION: So there's no --

MR. TONER: There's no – I mean, they remain our protecting power in Tripoli. I think for – again, really, the Turkish Government is obviously best informed about this, but my understanding is that there were some security concerns that led them to temporarily close their mission but that they remain there.

QUESTION: Well, I mean, and then right after they close the mission, Erdogan came out and said Qadhafi has to go.

MR. TONER: Right.

QUESTION: Which reminds me of kind of the way you closed down your Embassy there and then you came out and said Qadhafi was de-legitimized.

MR. TONER: Again, Turkey – what I'll say is Turkey remains – but again, I'll just reiterate Turkey remains our protecting power in Libya.

QUESTION: All right. And speaking of legitimate leaders who lose or don't lose their legitimacy, has Assad yet gone too far in your eyes, or is he still okay? (Laughter.)

MR. TONER: I'm still trying to graph your question. I mean, obviously, we're very disturbed about recent reports, credible reports that – of a Syrian military operation in Daraa that includes the use of tanks. We've also seen reports that the Syrian Government is conducting a widespread campaign of arbitrary arrests of – that target young men in Daraa. It's our – also our understanding that electricity, communications, and other services – public service has been cut off now for several days and that the humanitarian situation there is quite grave. These are, quite frankly, barbaric measures and they amount to the collective

punishment of innocent civilians.

QUESTION: But he's still – and that's still not enough for you to question his legitimacy as a leader?

MR. TONER: Again, we've – his – he needs to cease all violence. His government needs to cease all violence against innocent protestors. We need to – or he needs to answer the legitimate aspirations of his people. He needs to address their concerns and to seek ways to answer their aspirations. Violence is not the answer.

QUESTION: Well, yeah, but – well, you just accused him of barbarism.

MR. TONER: Yes. His --

QUESTION: Which on the – that spinning wheel of State Department condemnation is pretty strong. (Laughter.) It's reserved for people like Qadhafi and Robert Mugabe, maybe.

MR. TONER: And we've taken steps last week. We instituted sanctions against key members of his regime who have been carrying out some of these actions. We've also raised the issue of human rights abuses in Syria at the Human Rights Council, which then, in turn, authorized a fact-finding mission to investigate these human rights abuses with the goal that Syria – that Asad will be held accountable for his actions.

QUESTION: The French president said today in an interview that he's considering putting sanctions against the president – Asad himself. Is the U.S. considering such actions?

MR. TONER: Look, I would just say many options remain before us. We obviously took action last week on people – individuals we believed were key actors in carrying out some of the regime's policies and actions against protestors. But other options remain on the table.

QUESTION: Well, when you say that Asad should be held accountable for his actions, how?

MR. TONER: Well, again, there are mechanisms in place. There are – let's let this fact-finding --

QUESTION: In the courts or --

MR. TONER: Let's let this fact-finding mission take place. But the United Nations Human Rights Council has spoken out strongly about the Syrian Government's abuses.

QUESTION: You'd like to see a referral to the ICC?

MR. TONER: Again, I – let's just --

QUESTION: Or perhaps the creation of a special tribunal?

MR. TONER: Let's --

QUESTION: Given Syria's --

MR. TONER: Let's let the process play out.

QUESTION: Given Syria's warm embrace of the last special tribunal that the UN convened for a situation in that neck of the woods, would you expect that there would be any support for it from Syria itself?

MR. TONER: Again, let's let the process play out.

QUESTION: Mark?

MR. TONER: Yes.

QUESTION: Just one quick question on Usama bin Ladin.

MR. TONER: Sure.

QUESTION: When those helicopters went into Pakistan, was that a violation of their airspace?

MR. TONER: That's a fair question, Jill, and I'll take it. I'm not sure. Again, there was a decision made here to act on operational intelligence or actionable intelligence, rather, and to – basically to get one of the – well, not one of – the most wanted man in the world, and that was undertaken. I'm not sure that it was a violation of their airspace. Obviously, there was – there were some Pakistani jets that were scrambled, but I'm not aware that it was a violation of their airspace.

QUESTION: Is that something you could pin down? Is that something you decide or you define?

MR. TONER: It may very well be the Pakistani Government has the best information about that. But I could certainly ask.

QUESTION: Is it your understanding that the Pakistanis regarded bin Ladin as the number one – what you just – regarded him as the number one most wanted terrorist alive?

MR. TONER: I think if you asked people around the world who the most wanted man alive, they would probably have said bin Ladin.

QUESTION: But you believe that that was the position of the Pakistani Government as of Sunday afternoon?

MR. TONER: I – we believe that he was a brutal killer --

QUESTION: But what do you think --

MR. TONER: -- not only to the – not only for Americans but many other nationalities around the world, including Pakistan.

QUESTION: Is it your understanding that that what's the Pakistani Government believed as well?

MR. TONER: I have no idea what their most wanted list looks like.

QUESTION: Well, that's – really? Well, that would seem to be a bit of a problem if you have such strong counterterrorism cooperation, if you're not sure that they shared your --

MR. TONER: He was clearly a killer whose death leaves both Pakistan and the United States on more secure footing.

QUESTION: Could I just ask one more question about Bahrain?

MR. TONER: Yeah.

QUESTION: They have done things that you've criticized other countries for doing. Has the U.S. done anything beyond verbally criticize them? Have you raised the prospect of sanctions, or – sorry--

MR. TONER: Well, again – I didn't mean to cut you off, but Assistant Secretary Feltman's made several trips out there, and --

QUESTION: I know. But, I mean, beyond saying we don't like what you're doing, have you taken any action? Have I missed something, I'm wondering.

MR. TONER: I mean, look – I mean, it's important that our assistant secretary has spent a significant amount of time out there trying to work with both the government and the opposition to bridge some of these gaps, but also to make very clear to the government that there's no – as we've said multiple times, there's no security solution to this and that they need to take steps to address the legitimate concerns of their people.

QUESTION: Okay.

MR. TONER: That's it? Thanks.

QUESTION: Thank you.

(The briefing was concluded at 2:39 p.m.)

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