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Spokesperson
Daily Press Briefing

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TRANSCRIPT:

12:56 p.m. EST

MS. NULAND: All right, everybody. Happy Friday. Apologies for the delay. I think you know that the President is coming out with a statement very shortly, so we will do as much as we can until we hear that he's going out. And then if we have things to clean up later, we can do it by phone or by email.

I want to just start by coming back to something that we mentioned either yesterday or the day before, which was that we would be participating in some Hill engagements next week on Benghazi. Just to give you the list there, on Tuesday, Under Secretary Kennedy and Assistant

Secretary Boswell will brief members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Let me, sorry, go back and say that all of these are going to be closed sessions at the Hill's request. Okay?

So first, on Tuesday, Under Secretary Kennedy and Assistant Secretary Boswell will brief members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. On Wednesday, Under Secretary Kennedy and Assistant Secretary Boswell will brief members of the Senate Homeland Security and Government Affairs Committee. On Thursday morning, Under Secretary Kennedy will testify in a closed hearing before the House Permanent Select Intelligence Committee, and in the afternoon, he'll testify before the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence. And on Friday morning, Under Secretary Kennedy will brief Chairmen and ranking members from the House. And again, all of those are in closed, classified session and at the Hill's request. Let's go to what's on your minds.

QUESTION: I'm sorry, because I came in late. This is on Benghazi, right?

MS. NULAND: Correct.

QUESTION: All of these are in closed session at the Hill's request?

MS. NULAND: Correct.

QUESTION: Do you have – did they say why these needed to be closed sessions, since they seem to be the source of all the documents that are leaking out in dribs and drabs?

MS. NULAND: Well, my understanding is that they wanted to have a conversation that incorporated classified information, including intelligence reporting.

QUESTION: Was there not classified information – did members of Congress not complain that classified information was released at the House Oversight Committee hearing that already had been held?

MS. NULAND: Matt, they've asked for closed hearings, closed briefings; that's what we're complying with.

QUESTION: The Secretary won't appear before any of these committees?

MS. NULAND: The Secretary has not been asked to appear. They've asked for the individuals that are coming.

QUESTION: Would she be willing to fly back from Australia to appear?

MS. NULAND: Again, she has not been asked to appear. She was asked to appear at House Foreign Affairs next week, and we have written back to the Chairman to say that she'll be on travel next week.

QUESTION: Are you aware that any Libyans will be called to the hearings to be talked to?

MS. NULAND: That sounds like a question for the Hill. I'm not aware of any panels other than the government panels.

QUESTION: But you have not been asked to facilitate any visas or anything like this for –

MS. NULAND: To my knowledge, no.

QUESTION: -- maybe some Libyan officials?

MS. NULAND: No.

QUESTION: Toria, I'm sorry. I was running down here to get here. You may have said this: Is there any effort by the State Department to brief us on anything that might not be classified or any information, any progress that we could talk about next week that could come out of that?

MS. NULAND: I don't anticipate that we're going to have new information for the press before we have the ARB report, but let's just see where we go there.

QUESTION: Do you know – do you anticipate that you'll have new information for members of Congress?

MS. NULAND: Well, again, they've asked for classified hearings.

QUESTION: I understood that.

MS. NULAND: Some of them have been – there are a lot of folks who have been out of town during this – the period that the Congress was out of session. These hearings and briefings were requested by them now that they're coming back into session, so I can't speak to what different members know and how much different members have followed.

QUESTION: Yeah. But, I mean, do you expect Pat Kennedy to get up there and say anything substantially different than what he's already said in public?

MS. NULAND: I can't speak to what might be spoken about in a classified session. I would guess, Matt, that it's also going to go to issues of intelligence, which we haven't been briefing.

QUESTION: And Pat is the person that's discussed issues of intelligence with them?

MS. NULAND: Again, Pat is the Under Secretary for Management. He can speak to the entire threat environment that we were working under, which included both unclassified and classified information.

Jill.

QUESTION: Toria, the Congress has asked for a lot of documents, obviously. Can you give us an update on even percentage-wise how much the State Department has collected, how you're

giving them these documents, or whether you're waiting to get everything together, compiled, and then you will give it to them?

MS. NULAND: Well, thanks for that question, Jill. As you know, we've had requests for documents from a number of committees and from a number of staff and members. We have now made documents available to members of and staff on the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee, the Senate Homeland Security and Government Affairs Committee, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. We have told all of these requesting committees and their staff that they can see these documents as many times as they'd like to see them, for as long as they'd like to see them.

Our understanding, in fact, is that today Senator Corker of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee is reviewing documents at his request. So there have been some reports out there that we've been withholding information or that we've been limiting time. None of that is accurate. We've really done our utmost under the Secretary's instructions to be fully compliant, transparent, and open with the Congress.

QUESTION: And do they come over here to view them?

MS. NULAND: No, we take them up there to their classified rooms.

QUESTION: And same question really, and then you – and they review them, and then you take them back and await the next request to see them?

MS. NULAND: Exactly. We arrange whatever requests are needed after they've had a chance to take a first look. And sometimes you have staff looking and then they want their members to see, subset, et cetera. So we've been facilitating all of that.

QUESTION: Just on these hearings, I'm wondering, given the fact that the refrain from the Hill or at least some members of the Hill, has been since this all began that the American people have the right to know, they deserve to know, was there any pushback from you guys when they said that we want to have these closed, we want to have these closed hearings rather than having open so that the American people could hear?

MS. NULAND: Well, as you know, relatively soon after the events, there was a set of open hearings. It's obviously up to the Congress to ask for what it wants to have. In this case, they've asked for a set of closed briefings and hearings, so we're going to comply with that.

QUESTION: Fair enough. I understand, but did – was there any suggestion from this building that, hey, if you really want the American people to know, maybe these shouldn't be held behind closed doors?

MS. NULAND: I think we are in the posture of complying with what the Congress is asking for to help them in their review and to be supportive of their understanding of the situation as we go forward. As we've said, we have the ARB running. We also have whatever the FBI will come

forward with. So there will be a time to be as open as we can be about the findings of the ARB with the public understanding the need to protect classified.

Please.

QUESTION: More clarification on the documents. Many – there have been many different requests and sometimes defined with different parameters. How did you collect those documents? Is it the full collection of documents that has been asked for? Is it this committee gets exactly what they ask for? Or if you can get into a little more depth in terms of which documents go where and how many, and whether this is it or whether there will be more.

MS. NULAND: Whether this is it, whether this – there'll be more, I mean, that depends on whether the scope is broadened by committees. But in fact, whenever we have – particularly when we have classified documents requested, we have to do a full search. It involves both telegrams, intelligence reports, classified email, all of that kind of thing. And then we meet the requests that the different committees have, that the different staff members have. It's not unusual for a first set of documents to be reviewed and then additional things to be requested. All of that has to be gone through. So it's really specific to the requests as they come in.

QUESTION: Toria, there are currently Pentagon teams that are studying the situation in Libya to see how best an army, or a Libyan army, can be built. Is the State Department involved in any way in these processes, or are you involved in any way in sort of restructuring Libyan security?

MS. NULAND: Well, first of all, as you know, there is a UN-sponsored effort underway to be supportive to the Libyans. We also have made bilateral proposals. We've had teams, mil-mil teams and other teams, out there offering support in all of the various categories where we often help transitioning countries, whether it's destruction of excess equipment, whether it's nationalizing a military, whether it is training, all those kinds of things.

I think one of the issues, as the Libyans have been clear about, is that in this – in the context of there being an interim government first and then having a relatively protracted period of establishing the current transitional government, they have been loath to make some of the larger structural decisions that would enable us to provide more help. But we are hopeful that, now that they have a fully agreed upon transitional government, that we will be able to do more together to help them meet the security needs of the country and to provide stronger population security. And we're open to doing all of that.

Please, Margaret.

QUESTION: Toria, when you're talking about this process, going up to the Hill, delivering these documents, is there a chief Benghazi point person at State? Who's doing this? It sounds extremely time consuming. So who is focused on this specifically?

MS. NULAND: Well, there are a whole bunch of folks who, obviously, have to look at things to ensure that we've been complete. But as has been clear by our public presentations, Under

Secretary Kennedy has the line authority for ensuring that we're fully compliant, and obviously, our Assistant Secretary for Legislative Affairs Dave Adams.

Andy.

QUESTION: You mentioned that Senator Corker is looking at some of this stuff today. Is he the only person up there who's so far gotten hold of any of these documents, or have they gone to other offices as well? Can you tell how many?

MS. NULAND: I think I just did that about five minutes ago.

QUESTION: Did you? I'm sorry.

MS. NULAND: Maybe you slept through that piece, Andy. (Laughter.) I can do it again.

Members and staff of House Oversight and Government Reform, Senate Homeland Security and Government Affairs --

QUESTION: Okay. I got that list. So it's actually gone up to all of these folks?

MS. NULAND: Correct. Correct. Yeah.

QUESTION: Okay. That was it. Right.

MS. NULAND: And again, with members in and out before they came back into session, we now have some members whose staff have seen documents who want to see them themselves, et cetera.

QUESTION: Okay.

MS. NULAND: Yeah. It's the usual --

QUESTION: Victoria, will the Secretary be appearing before the House Foreign Affairs Committee next week?

MS. NULAND: I spoke to that about 15 minutes ago.

QUESTION: Oh, sorry. It's just been posted on their website.

MS. NULAND: She is traveling next week, as you know. We just put out a message. So she will not appear, but we -- I did give a list, at the top of this, of multiple briefings and hearings where Pat Kennedy will be appearing.

QUESTION: So just to make 100 percent sure, the Secretary is not going to interrupt her trip to come back and testify?

MS. NULAND: She has a commitment with the Secretary of Defense to the AUSMIN Ministerial. So --

QUESTION: And doesn't she also have a commitment with the President to go to certain other countries in the region?

MS. NULAND: She does. Was that the -- okay. Sounds like the President's going to come out, so we can do the rest of this in gaggle format afterwards. Thanks.

(The briefing paused at 1:08 p.m. and resumed at 1:28 p.m.)

MS. NULAND: Here we go. Friday briefing, round two. All right, where were we, guys?

QUESTION: (Inaudible) fiscal cliff and the President's plan to avert going over it. Are we done with Libya?

MS. NULAND: I think we are. Let's keep moving on.

QUESTION: Can we go to Iran or, more specifically, Austria? The IAEA says that it's going to have talks with the Iranians on the 13th. What do you see, if anything, as coming out of this? Is this a sign of possible moderation -- possible progress?

MS. NULAND: We've seen these same reports that Iran and the IAEA are going to go back to the table in December. As you know, the IAEA Board of Governors passed a resolution in September, which called on Iran to conclude a structural approach for resolving their outstanding concerns with the IAEA. They had a couple of rounds, they did not have success. So we will see how this round goes. In the past, Iran has been unwilling to do what it needs to do, despite the best efforts of the IAEA. But we commend the IAEA for keeping at it, and we call on Iran to do what it needs to do to meet the international community's concerns.

QUESTION: And does this have any bearing on any potential future P-5+1 meeting?

MS. NULAND: Well, obviously, these two things have been pursued in parallel. We want to see Iran comply with the demands of the IAEA. We also want to see them be more forthcoming and more engaged in the P-5+1 process, so we these moving very much in parallel.

QUESTION: Right. But I mean in terms of a meeting of the P-5+1.

MS. NULAND: No.

QUESTION: Do you expect one before, after, at the same time? Not necessarily with Iran at the table, but just to -- kind of a strategy session?

MS. NULAND: I think we're still looking at that. What Lady Ashton has said is that her next step, and the P-5+1 agrees with this, is that she'll have a phone call with Mr. Jalili following up on the call that her deputy had a couple of weeks ago, and then we'll see from there. But

traditionally, we have coordinated in the P-5+1 before seeing the Iranians at one level or another, but I don't have anything to announce today, Matt.

QUESTION: Are there any secret talks ongoing directly between the United States and Iran?

MS. NULAND: No.

QUESTION: Yes. (Laughter.)

MS. NULAND: For the record, without Matt over me, no, there are no secret talks.

QUESTION: There are absolutely no talks, directly or indirectly, going on with Iran?

MS. NULAND: There are no secret talks. What you see is what you get.

QUESTION: Can we move to Syria?

QUESTION: Oh, wait, wait. Hold on. What do you mean, "What you see is what you get?"

MS. NULAND: Meaning --

QUESTION: Because we don't see nothing -- we see nothing, that we get nothing?

MS. NULAND: You have all seen when the P-5+1 has sat down with Iran, and I've got nothing else to share with you.

QUESTION: Well, that means that you have nothing else to share with us. That doesn't necessarily mean there are no secret talks going on.

MS. NULAND: I am --

QUESTION: What you are saying, that all of these, or that the several reports with dubious sourcing are incorrect.

MS. NULAND: Correct. Correct, they are incorrect.

QUESTION: Valerie Jarrett is not running around on the President's behalf, negotiating with the Iranians in Bahrain. Is that what you mean?

MS. NULAND: As my colleague Tommy Vietor has already confirmed, these reports are ridiculous. There are no Valerie Jarrett talks.

QUESTION: Are there --

QUESTION: She has no role in the negotiations with the Iranians?

MS. NULAND: Correct. She has no role.

QUESTION: Not even (inaudible)?

QUESTION: Aha. Wait a second. She has no role in the direct talks with the Iranians. And you said, “No,” – (laughter) – but that suggests there are direct talks with Iranians going on. She just isn’t part of them.

MS. NULAND: Okay, guys. I think we’ve done this one.

Margaret.

QUESTION: Can you give us a readout on the diplomatic response to the event that was reported out by the Pentagon yesterday in regard to the attack on the U.S. drone by Iranian forces?

MS. NULAND: Well, as you know, our colleagues in the Pentagon yesterday briefed about the shot against the drone. As they said, we have raised this with the Iranians through our regular channels to them. I don’t have any response to report to you today.

QUESTION: So that would be the Swiss?

MS. NULAND: Yes.

Please.

QUESTION: And that – sorry. That would have been in Tehran, or that would have been in Bern?

MS. NULAND: My understanding is that it’s the Swiss mission in Tehran that usually makes the representations on our behalf.

All right? Moving on.

QUESTION: Can we move to Syria?

MS. NULAND: Yeah.

QUESTION: Do you have a readout of the talks in Doha and whether it looks like the SNC is ready to compromise in terms of a final group?

MS. NULAND: Well, as we’ve been saying all week, the initial part of this week was SNC talking to itself.

QUESTION: Right.

MS. NULAND: The talks actually didn't begin today until just a couple of hours ago because it's Friday, the traditional day of prayer out in that part of the world. So they've really only just gotten started in the larger plenary session, and we are not inside the room, as we've said. But I think we need to give them a little time and space. Apparently, it is very focused, it's very vigorous, and there are a broad representation of groups participating. So that's a good thing, but now we have to see if they can come up with some results.

QUESTION: There were some reports coming out of the meeting that specifically the United States and some other countries are not demanding, but really putting pressure on them to leave this meeting with a formation of some kind of new council.

MS. NULAND: There is not a country represented in international observer status who does not want to see this meeting bring results specifically in the form of a more diverse, broader Syrian opposition leadership structure that is more connected to leaders on the ground, the situation on the ground, and that protects and advances the rights of all Syrians. We all want to see that. We're all putting up pressure on them to do as much as they can and not to miss this opportunity to come together in defense of the Syrian people.

QUESTION: Do you want them to stay there until they do?

MS. NULAND: Again, this is their meeting. They've got to make those decisions. But we want to see, and the Syrian people certainly want to see, results.

I'd like to also call your attention to the fact that while the Syrian opposition is doing this work on behalf of the Syrian people in Doha, the regime has, nonetheless, intensified its aerial bombing of civilian areas. It seems to be intentionally increasing its targeting of civilians. We are seeing intensified fighting and explosions in neighborhoods all over the country, but particularly in Damascus, including the fact that this fighting is getting closer and closer to government installation. So obviously, even as they attack their own people, the regime is losing more and more control, including in Damascus.

QUESTION: Did – I forgot to ask about this yesterday – did you have any particular reaction to President Assad's interview?

MS. NULAND: I wasn't asked for reaction. I think --

QUESTION: No, it was because we – I forgot to ask about it. So I'm asking now, do you have any reaction to his comments about him being Syrian, staying Syrian, born in Syria, will die in Syria?

MS. NULAND: Well, you know our view. Our view is that he needs to leave, he needs to leave power, he needs to transfer power to a group that can take Syria into the future. That remains our view. He is living in his own parallel universe.

QUESTION: So just --

QUESTION: Do you support safe passage for him out of the country?

MS. NULAND: I think I said a couple of days ago that we understand a number of countries have made that offer to him. We haven't seen any openness or willingness on his behalf to do the right thing.

QUESTION: That wasn't the question. The question was: Do you support safe passage for him to go somewhere to exile?

MS. NULAND: We're not going to get ahead of a decision by the Syrian people. Again, he hasn't shown any willingness to do that. A number of countries have offered it. We want to get him out of there so we can move on. That said, we also support accountability for him and for everybody else with blood on their hands.

QUESTION: But just to put a fine point on it, you – him staying in Syria, even in a non-leadership or nonpolitical role, is not acceptable; he's got to get out of the country is what --

MS. NULAND: Look, we've obviously said, as most members of the Syrian opposition have said, that it's hard to imagine him staying in the country and not trying to be a spoiler and actually turning over power. Were he willing to have that conversation with his own opposition, that would obviously change the game, but there's no evidence that he's interested in walking that walk.

QUESTION: So your stance or your position now is that he has to leave the country and leave power, same as it was with Qadhafi?

MS. NULAND: Let's start with the fact that he's got to leave power. That's the only way we see things moving.

QUESTION: Victoria, on the talks in Doha --

MS. NULAND: Yeah.

QUESTION: -- you're saying that they're meeting – you're not in there in the meeting, but how are you kept abreast of what's going on in the meeting?

MS. NULAND: Well, we, like about 15 other countries, have relatively senior representatives there. We are meeting with a broad cross-section of Syrians who want to meet with us and with other countries who are there, so we're hearing about the process that way, and encouraging them to stay at it and get something serious done there.

QUESTION: Toria, there's some – sorry, there are some reports in the Western media now about growing revulsion, concern, et cetera, among Syrians about the opposition fighters who are carrying out atrocities as well. Is there any indication that the State Department has that the situation is worsening, that there are more atrocities, more violence on the part of the opposition fighters?

MS. NULAND: I don't think that we are in a position to really keep a tally here. We're obviously watching with concern reports by any Syrian groups or any international human rights organizations about human rights violations by any side.

But I think you've heard the Secretary say for many, many months, we've been saying here, other leaders have been saying that the way the Syrian opposition comports itself in this period will send a signal to the Syrian population about whether they can and should be trusted to lead a democratic transition; that we are all looking for – first and foremost, the Syrian people are looking for respect for international human rights standards, for respect for the rules of war, Geneva Conventions, et cetera, and the treatment of prisoners, that all eyes are on them. And if they want the Syrian population in all of its colors to trust them and trust that a future without Assad is going to be better, then they need to demonstrate that in the way they comport themselves now and the way they lead into the future.

QUESTION: On the humanitarian side of the things, the State Department put out a statement saying that the United States has increased its humanitarian aid by \$34 million today at a meeting in Geneva, and this coincided with the UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs saying that they think by this – by next year, we could have 4 million people in need of humanitarian aid within Syria.

I just wondered what the United States' assessment is about this growing humanitarian crisis, particularly with the approach of winter now and these people – these refugees in camps along the borders in various countries.

MS. NULAND: Well, first, to confirm what we put out in our statement that at the monthly humanitarian meeting in Geneva today, the U.S. did announce that our humanitarian contribution to Syrians is being increased by some \$34 million, bringing our total up to 165 million; that 16.7 of this is going to UNHCR for winterization support in Jordan, in Libya^[1], in Turkey; 3 million for UNICEF priority needs outside of Syria; 323 for UN Food Program support in neighboring countries as well; and 6 million for UNICEF inside Syria for health, for relief supplies; 2 million for the World Food Program for logistics and relief supplies inside Syria; and 5.7 million to NGO partners for health, logistics, relief, protection, shelter, and settlements also inside Syria. We are gravely concerned with the onset of winter that we need to provide winterization support not only inside Syria, but also in these neighboring countries as the weather gets cold.

The numbers are very concerning, very disturbing, and they don't actually capture the totality of displaced Syrians because you also have huge numbers of Syrians displaced inside the country but also living with relatives and not taking advantage of formal relief in Turkey, in Lebanon, in Jordan, in other neighboring states. So again, this is what Assad has wrought on his country.

QUESTION: Are you satisfied that your partners are also taking a sort of aggressive enough stance on the humanitarian side? Are they keeping pace with your increase in donations or do you think that more can be done by others as well?

MS. NULAND: I actually don't have a final result out of the UN meetings today in Geneva. As you know, the UN appeal overall was less than half filled before this meeting, so I just don't

have a full picture of how other countries stepped up. But it is something that we work very hard to coordinate on and to encourage countries to meet the UN's needs.

QUESTION: Can you confirm that the number of refugees is 400,000 Syrian refugees?

MS. NULAND: Is --

QUESTION: The figures that are suggesting the number of Syrian refugees has reached 400,000.

MS. NULAND: That the total number has reached 400,000?

QUESTION: Right.

MS. NULAND: I'm going to take that. I don't know what our guesstimate is at the moment.

QUESTION: And a quick follow-up --

MS. NULAND: I've got -- there are now upwards of 170,000 Syrians in Turkey, 118,000 in Turkish camps. UNHCR's estimate -- this is their estimate, and they're in a better position to estimate than we are -- is that the total number of Syrian refugees is approximately 408,000 now.

QUESTION: Does that include displaced persons inside the country?

MS. NULAND: This is refugees.

QUESTION: Refugees.

MS. NULAND: So it's people who have fled Syria.

Please.

QUESTION: Just a quick follow-up on Jill's question?

MS. NULAND: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: It is said that there something like 300 militant groups in Syria fighting the regime, many of whom are not represented in the opposition that is meeting in Doha. How do you -- are you suggesting anything to the opposition to bring them under control?

MS. NULAND: Well, this is part and parcel of why we want to see a strong, unified, diverse political opposition that's well connected to the ground, because when the political opposition has its act together, it's in a position to speak to and for and with the Syrian people and those fighting on their behalf about not only the appropriate manner in which to conduct themselves but about the future. So it's hard to imagine you can have a political conversation with fighters unless you're unified as a political entity.

Please.

QUESTION: What else are you expecting from this broadening of the opposition structure?

MS. NULAND: Well, we've talked about this a number of times. I can repeat it again today. But internally, we want to see a more unified, more diverse, more geographically representative group that is connected to what's going on on the ground, not only so that they can provide that political cohesion inside the country, but so that they can attract those Syrians who are still on the fence to trust that a Syria without Assad is going to be better, those who are still on the fence and peel off more defections from the Assad regime. So that's one thing.

The second piece of this is to provide better political cohesion in terms of the way areas that are now liberated from the regime are managing the transition and preparing for a better day, that they're meeting the needs of citizens, that they're doing it in a way that reflects the Syria we want to see, not the Syria of the past.

And then the third piece is the international piece that we've talked about, that we want to see a strong, unified opposition that can be persuasive in terms of a future set of leaders for the country to those countries like Russia, China, et cetera who are on the fence about breaking with Assad, and who can also work with all of us to help us better direct the assistance that we're providing to the places where it's most needed.

QUESTION: So the next step for them is agreeing on a transition plan that would be also comprehensive and --

MS. NULAND: Well, they have -- as you know, on July 3rd they agreed a set of principles and then they agreed on a transition plan. And our sense from talking to them is that those documents are very much live and still the basis of conversation among this group. So the question has always been not starting from scratch again, but how you build on the work that's already been done, how you socialize it inside Syria, how you make it the basis of the way they operate inside Syria now and prepare for a transition. So it's a matter of broadening and deepening.

QUESTION: So it's just bringing people on board? There is nothing new you expect from them?

MS. NULAND: No. I mean, the question will be, once they've unified, how they want to take that work forward, do they want to put more specificity on it, do they want to start governing according to those principles in those areas that they control, et cetera.

QUESTION: Will the international community be -- accept doing more things for them if they are united? I mean --

MS. NULAND: We have said that it will be easier to do more when we are better connected to a unified opposition that is itself connected to more Syrians on the ground.

QUESTION: Do more even militarily?

MS. NULAND: Again, you know where we are on that issue. I'm not going – I don't have any change of policy on that issue.

QUESTION: But one of the problems is – you were saying that you don't – one of the problems in not giving lethal aid is, you said, you don't know where these weapons would be going; you have to make sure they're going to the right person. If you are in touch with an opposition entity that has greater access and communication and coordination with people on the ground that are actually doing the fighting, that would eliminate, or at least kind of dampen, some of those concerns.

MS. NULAND: We're talking about a political leadership structure here – that's what we're talking about – that can lead Syria to a better political day. We don't have any change in our current approach, which is that we are providing nonlethal assistance. We want to make sure that that nonlethal assistance we provide, including in things like communications, which help the opposition to resist and coordinate among itself in defense of the people, are going to the right people and are going where it's most needed. So among the things that can be better directed if we have a more unified opposition is all of that – the assistance that we are already providing.

Please.

QUESTION: Do you see today the possibility of a political solution in Syria? Today.

MS. NULAND: Again we – a more unified opposition makes that more likely, in our view.

Please.

QUESTION: Victoria, do you have an update about military defections from Syria? There's a report today that more than 25 officers defected to Turkey.

MS. NULAND: We've seen those same reports that some 71 Syrian soldiers, including two generals and 11 colonels, have defected to Turkey. We are not able at this point to confirm those, but they would be in keeping with the steady stream of defections, losses in territorial terms, losses in materiel terms, that we're seeing the regime forces suffer.

QUESTION: Thank you.

MS. NULAND: Please.

QUESTION: Can I change the subject?

MS. NULAND: Yeah.

QUESTION: India.

MS. NULAND: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: The British Government today has said it's going to halt all its aid to India from 2015, partly because of austerity measures, but also because, I think, there's a recognition that India is a country with a space program and maybe it doesn't need the same amount of aid as it has been having.

I wondered specifically if the United States is also looking at – so now you have a very broad USAID program with India – whether there's any possibility that the United States might slash its budget to India, and more generally whether, in these times, tough times, whether you're looking at the overseas aid programs and ways of recalibrating that.

MS. NULAND: Well, we're constantly, particularly in tough budget times, looking at ensuring that our assistance dollars are spent as well as we possibly can. You know that we've been talking in general about trying to move, in as many countries as we can, from aid to trade, empowering individuals, but most of our programs are directed already in that – along that vector, supporting all of the kinds of things that we do in India, including the strengthening and deepening of the nongovernmental sector, the health and human security issues. But I don't see – I don't have any change in our India assistance to announce today, but obviously in every budget cycle, we look at all the priorities across the planet, and we have to make tough decisions in consultations with those governments in terms of what's effective.

QUESTION: (Inaudible) want to remind us again how much – what percentage of the budget is foreign aid?

MS. NULAND: Less than 1 percent.

QUESTION: Oh, wow.

MS. NULAND: Thank you, Matt.

QUESTION: Just one question. Last night, the Secretary said that they had – that the State Department and Defense had sent out teams around the world to different posts, embassies, to assess the security situation and, obviously, try to improve it if necessary. Are there any conclusions or have there been any steps taken or is this still the assessment period?

MS. NULAND: Well, the teams have been going out over the last week and half, so they are largely still out in the field. Just to say a little bit more, these are joint State-DOD teams to review the security environment at a number of our high-threat posts. They're going to visit more than a dozen posts in regions around the world. I would say, though, that obviously, as we always do, this is not an exhaustive list of what we are up to. We review our security at every single post around the world on a daily, weekly basis, and we're going to continue to do that.

QUESTION: Is that just about – when you say review security, do you mean for diplomats and U.S. facilities overseas or also the environment for – security environment for Americans living overseas?

MS. NULAND: Well, we're looking at the security environment in general. So that means what's going on in the host country nationally in general. As you know, whatever decisions we make about our security posture generally also are reflected in the warnings that we give to American citizens about travel. Usually there's a direct correlation there.

Please.

QUESTION: Change topic?

QUESTION: I have a planning question for you. We all know Secretary Clinton has said she's going to be leaving. I'm wondering if you have some sort of timetable you can share with us about what this transition will look like.

MS. NULAND: Not beyond what she has said, which is that she is committed to see through the term. She's committed to ensuring that the transition to a successor is smooth. But in terms of how the timing rolls out, obviously the first decision will be for the President to make a decision on the successor. Then that person would have to be confirmed and all that stuff.

QUESTION: But just to put a fine point on it, and a lot of people are saying, oh, she agreed to stay to the end of the month, she said – she – once a new secretary takes office and is confirmed, she intends to leave. Is that –

MS. NULAND: Well, you only have one secretary at a time, so –

QUESTION: Well, no, I understand but she's going to wait until a new secretary is confirmed and ready to be seated before she leaves. Is that right?

MS. NULAND: Look, I can't give you an hour or a date, but she has – beyond what she has said, which is that she is committed to staying through the end of the term, that is January, that she's committed to seeing a smooth transition. So I'm not going to herein give you the hour so that we can all start wearing our mourning clothes, but we'll – as the situation becomes clearer and as we move through a transition, we'll obviously be as transparent as we can.

QUESTION: You would expect that to be after the Inaugural then?

MS. NULAND: Traditionally, that is the way it has gone, but because it's usually the newly seated Senate that wants to confirm the newly appointed secretary, but I think we don't know anything yet until the President makes his decision and we go from there with the Congress.

Please.

QUESTION: Change topics to the Palestinian issue?

MS. NULAND: Please.

QUESTION: Today a Palestinian spokesman said that they are going to the United Nations on the 29th of this month to seek a statement of observer status. The day happens to mark the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. That's the 29th of November. Do you have any comment on that?

MS. NULAND: I'm going to make a comment that you've heard me make many, many times before, Said. Action of this kind is not going to take them any closer to having what they really want and need, which is a functioning, independent state living at peace with Israel.

QUESTION: Are you – have you taken any measures or have you spoken to them to dissuade them from the –

MS. NULAND: We speak to them constantly about this. We've been making this case for a long time and will continue to do so.

Please.

QUESTION: On Mexico?

MS. NULAND: Yeah.

QUESTION: Today, the Mexican authorities have charged 14 police officers with the shooting in August of two U.S. Government employees, who were wounded in the attack. I just wondered if you had heard that they'd been charged, whether this is likely to change anything with your cooperation with the Mexican authorities?

MS. NULAND: I hadn't heard that the charging had actually happened. If we have any particular comment on that, we'll get back to you, Jo. But I think you know that we work very hard on both sides of the border when these incidents happens to be prompt and quick in judicial proceedings and being transparent with each other and to try to correct any issues that we have along the border.

QUESTION: So you don't foresee any changes in cooperation between the two sides on --

MS. NULAND: No. In general we continue to enjoy excellent cooperation and we work very hard at it, so --

QUESTION: There were reports initially that these two guys were CIA employees. Can you confirm this?

MS. NULAND: I'm obviously not going to speak to intelligence. I don't have anything for you on it one way or the other. But if we have anything to share, we will.

All right? Thanks everybody.

(The briefing was concluded at 1:56 p.m.)

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^[1] Lebanon

Original Source: <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/dpb/2012/11/200409.htm>