

Newsmaker Transcript

White House Off-Camera Briefing

Monday, March 6, 2017

MR. SPICER:

Good afternoon, everybody. Another quiet weekend. (Laughter.)

QUESTION:

You sure you don't want to do this on camera? (Laughter.)

MR. SPICER:

The President signed a new executive order this morning that continues to protect the nation from terrorists entering into the United States, and a related presidential memorandum. As we've always maintained, the executive order was fully lawful in the first place, and we would have won the related legal cases on the merits. But rather than leave America's security in limbo while the litigation dragged on, some estimates having that go up to potentially a year, the President acted to protect the national security by issuing a new executive order that addresses the court's concerns, some of which merely involve clarifying the intent of the original executive order.

After reviewing the facts and in thorough consultation with the Cabinet, the President had concluded these actions are necessary to protect the United States from those who, unfortunately, wish to do us harm.

Two areas that I want to highlight in the executive order. There will be a 90-day suspension of travel to the United States by nationals from Iran, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen, during which time the Department of State and Homeland Security will conduct a review to determine how we can improve the screening process for foreign nationals seeking to enter the United States.

These six countries have been previously identified by Congress and the Obama administration as presenting heightened concerns about terrorism. Specifically, Iran, Sudan and Syria have been designated as state sponsors of terrorism. Libya is an active combat zone where violent extremist groups thrive in ungoverned territory. Portions of Somalia have been a safe haven for terrorist groups. Most countries don't even recognize the Somali documents.

Yemen is the site of an ongoing conflict between the government and Iran-backed armed opposition. Both ISIS and al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula have exploited this conflict to expand their presence in Yemen and carry out hundreds of attacks.

These governments simply cannot or not adequately supply satisfactory information about their own nationals. In the absence of adequate information from these governments, the President has had to act to protect the security of the American people.

After the original executive order, Iraq's government took steps to increase their cooperation with our immigration authorities and improve their vetting process, leading them to be removed from the list of countries covered by the temporary travel suspension. We hope other countries will also take proactive action to ensure the security of all of our nations.

This is proof of both the need for and the effectiveness of the President's actions. There are a number of exceptions to this temporary travel suspension. The order explicitly states that the suspension does not apply to, one, green card holders; two, foreign nationals currently in the U.S.; three, foreign nationals currently holding valid visas; four, foreign nationals who are dual citizens of a designated country traveling on a passport issued by a non- designated country; and last, foreign nationals who have been granted asylum or admitted as refugees previously.

There will also be a temporary 120-day suspension of the United States refugees' admissions program. More than 300 people who have entered the United States as refugees are currently the subjects of counterterrorism investigations by the FBI. We must find a way to better screen refugee applicants to maintain the safety of our own communities.

This suspension will temporarily reduce the investigative burdens on the agencies that participate in our refugee program, allowing them to properly review and revise their standards and practices.

In regard to both of these provisions, the President places his full faith and trust in the experience and knowledge of his Secretary of State and his Secretary of Homeland Security. This order makes it clear that they have broad authority to grant waivers based on their expert judgments. This suspension does not apply to refugees already scheduled for travel by the Department of State, which is explicitly stated in the text of the executive order. Additionally, this suspension does not treat Syrian refugees different than any other refugees. It does not separately address the persecution of religious minorities, but does permit waivers in the cases of undue hardship.

This order was drafted in close consultation with the relevant agencies. It also includes a delay-effective date of March 16th, giving those involved in its enforcement even more time to facilitate an orderly rollout.

We welcome those who come to our country wishing to contribute and share in our nation's prosperity and wellbeing, but we cannot allow our immigration system to become a vehicle for admitting people who intend to do us harm. It is the President's solemn duty to protect the American people, and President Trump has taken an important step in securing our borders through this order.

Moving on to today, the President had a full day of meetings with the Cabinet and members of his staff. The President received his intelligence briefing this morning. He had a call earlier with the Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu, where they discussed regional security challenges. The Prime Minister thanked the President for his strong stance on anti-Semitism during his joint address to Congress last week.

The President had lunch with the Vice President, and, as I'm speaking to you now, he is beginning a meeting with the Secretary of State. Later today, he'll have meetings with his National Economic Council and Secretary of Veterans Affairs Shulkin. This evening, he'll have dinner with OMD Director Mulvaney and Secretary of Health and Human Services Tom Price, where he will talk about the repeal-and-replace efforts regarding Obamacare.

With that, I'll be glad to take a few questions.

QUESTION:

Follow-up on the executive order? Have you told --

MR. SPICER:

John Roberts.

QUESTION:

Thank you. (Laughter.) You told us -- I figured since it's just a gaggle -- you told us many times that the President was going to continue with the case in Seattle federal court, yet paragraph 13 in the new EO says he's going to revoke the original one. What changed?

MR. SPICER:

As you know, he met with his team over the weekend down in Mar-a-Lago -- general counsel, Secretary Sessions, Secretary Kelly, Stephen Miller, other members of the team -- where they discussed -- continued discussing the current executive order, as well as the strategy. And they made a determination that it was best to pursue this track.

And again, I think, as I mentioned in the opening remarks, we continue to maintain that the order was fully lawful but there were some legal hurdles that we'd have to potentially cross in terms of injunction and things like that.

So it was discussed with the President Saturday, and he made a decision that this was how he wanted to proceed going forward, based on the advice and counsel of his team.

QUESTION:

DOJ has informed the 9th circuit of the existence of the new executive order. Will they move to dismiss the 48 cases that are facing that original order?

MR. SPICER:

That's a good question. I know that there's the issue of both the 9th circuit and then the other ones. And I'll have to get back to you on that. I don't know what posture they're going to take, so we'll go forward.

Margaret.

QUESTION:

I was just going to say, would you be able to let all of us --

MR. SPICER:

Oh, yeah, I'm sorry. Yeah, I'd be glad to let everybody know.

QUESTION:

I've got a question too but I can wait until he's finished, it's fine.

MR. SPICER:

John, are you done?

QUESTION:

Oh, I'm done.

MR. SPICER:

Okay. See how much nicer this is? Margaret.

QUESTION:

Oh, thank you. Well, actually I'd like to move away from this subject to the other subject.

MR. SPICER:

Sure.

QUESTION:

Is the President going to clarify what he meant when he accused President Obama and White House officials of doing wiretaps? Is that what he meant, or did he mean that he thinks there were wiretaps that the FBI authorized? And does he want to kind of, like, amend his previous statement?

MR. SPICER:

I think the statement that we issued yesterday where -- President Donald J. Trump is requesting as part of the investigation of Russian activity that congressional intelligence committees exercise their oversight authority to determine whether executive branch investigative powers were abused

in 2016. Neither the White House nor the President will comment further until such oversight is continued.

He wants Congress to look into this. I've spoken to the President again today. He would ask that they, additionally, look into this issue of leaks of classified and other information coming from the government. He believes that it undermines our national security and that Congress -- the intelligence communities in Congress, using their oversight authority, look into these pervasive leaks of national security -- of classified information. So he would do that.

I would note, it's interesting that when you look at what former DNI Clapper said on "Meet the Press," when he was asked if there was any evidence that the Trump campaign was colluding with the Russian government while the Kremlin was working to influence the election, his quote was, "Not to my knowledge."

I think we've continued to see people who have been briefed and are aware of these stories that have existed -- Congressman Chairman Nunes of the Intelligence Committee, Tom Cotton of the -- he's on the Senate Intelligence Committee, Richard Burr, Marco Rubio -- you name it, on and on and on, have said that the information that they've been provided -- and this is -- I get it, there's two separate issues here. But I think on the first one, you saw over and over again the continued comments by people who are in the know or have been in the know on that situation saying that there was no knowledge. Conversely, you saw former Attorney General Mukasey come out and talk about -- that it's pretty clear that there was some sort of surveillance or wiretaps that had to have existed.

All that being said, I think that's why the President is asking Congress, the intelligence committees to use their oversight authority to further understand what's in this.

I'm sorry.

QUESTION:

And so --

MR. SPICER:

I'm not sorry but I knew you --

QUESTION:

No, no, no -- yeah. Just before we move on -- okay, so for now, the President is not amending what he tweeted.

MR. SPICER:

No.

QUESTION:

And Jim Comey, in the meantime, I guess wanted Justice to knock it down. Has the President talked to Jim Comey?

MR. SPICER:

I'll be honest with you, I have not seen anything aside from another report based on anonymous sources that that actually happened. So aside from anonymous sources saying that a conversation happened, I'm not aware that that occurred. I don't know that we're aware that that occurred. And I, frankly, don't see anything on the record that show that that actually occurred.

So just to be clear, this is one of the problems that I think occurred in the whole first set of stories. People start taking things as fact because a series of off-the-record and anonymous sources say they do. We have started to become a series of believing all of these stories, and yet -- I've addressed this in the past -- there's nothing there to substantiate it.

In fact, all of the people, from -- I mean, Clapper's comment, "Not to my knowledge." You saw Nunes, Rubio, all these senators and House members that have been briefed by the FBI coming out and saying, we have not seen anything, either. At some point, I would ask people to take on-the-record sources and quotes as important as the countless numbers of anonymous off-the-records.

Zeke. Oh, I'm sorry --

QUESTION:

Sean --

MR. SPICER:

No, no, no, I just saw the top of a head. Hallie, I'm going to get to you, don't worry. I'm sorry, that was my bad.

QUESTION:

It's okay, it's all right. So explain this to me, then. You're talking about not using anonymous sources. What is, then, the sourcing for the President's tweet on Saturday morning?

MR. SPICER:

As I said, I think, look --

QUESTION:

And does he believe it's a FISA warrant. Is it some other -- of surveillance?

MR. SPICER:

It could be FISA. It could be surveillance. There's no cameras, slow it down.

QUESTION:

So he doesn't know?

MR. SPICER:

Look, I think he has made it clear that there are continued reports that have been out there. I'm not going to continue to -- I think the President made it clear yesterday that he wants Congress to go in and look at this. I think there is substantial reporting out there from individuals and from sources.

QUESTION:

But what sources --

MR. SPICER:

Okay. Sara, you're not on camera. You don't need to jump in. We'll get to your question in turn. Hold on.

The answer is, is that the President has made it clear he wants Congress to look into this. And we're encouraging the House and Senate intelligence committees to use their oversight capabilities and look into this.

John Gizzi.

QUESTION:

Sean, does he not know whether -- what kind of surveillance it was?

MR. SPICER:

Well, I think that there's no question that something happened. The question is, is it surveillance, is it a wiretap, or whatever. But there's been enough reporting that strongly suggests that something occurred. And I think that that's why what he has said yesterday is that he wants Congress to look into this. And I think that there is enough out there now that makes one wonder how some of this happened without the existence of surveillance.

QUESTION:

But when he published his tweet --

MR. SPICER:

Right.

QUESTION:

-- did he know what kind of surveillance?

MR. SPICER:

All I'm telling -- like I said, I'm going to put a pin in this and say, the statement yesterday made it very clear that he wants House and Senate Intelligence Committee members to use their oversight authority to look into this situation.

John Gizzi.

QUESTION:

Thank you, Sean. Has the President ever said there's hypocrisy and a double standard in the reporting of things? For example, about alleged Russian involvement in U.S. elections, and then on the other hand, relatively little attention paid to the leaking of conversations with world leaders that are classified? And does the leaking of his conversations with world leaders bother him and make him want to investigate that as well?

MR. SPICER:

Yeah, I mean, I think he is very concerned about that. There is obviously information that affects national security that has been leaked out that concerns him. I mean, it's -- and I think when you've seen some of the leader calls being leaked out that are sort of congratulatory or not necessarily dealing with state secrets or national security, that's one thing to seem -- but it gives you pause and concern to realize that, if you're talking about something of national security, of something that affects two of our different economies or countries, that -- whether it's China or North Korea, whether you're actually talking to them or talking about them with another leader, that there is obviously concern that those calls are getting leaked out. And I think that's why the President is also now asking Congress to additionally use its oversight authorities to also look at those leaks and wonder why that's happening.

So I think he is concerned. I think we've said it several times before, and it's obviously something that is of major concern. And, frankly, when you recognize the potential that that could have on the safety of our country, it should give everyone pause.

Hallie.

QUESTION:

Sean, two topics for you here. I want to clarify some questions again from my colleagues. Has the President spoken with the FBI director about the allegations he made Saturday morning, and does he have confidence in his FBI?

MR. SPICER:

To the best of my knowledge, I'm almost 100 percent certain that he has not, but I've not specifically asked him. I'm not aware that that occurred. Obviously I'll give myself -- and I'd be glad to get back, but I have not known that that existed. So I'm giving myself the ability to get back to you on this, but I'm not --

QUESTION:

And all of us.

MR. SPICER:

And all of you. We're making a list. But I am not aware that that actually happened.

QUESTION:

And the confidence question. Does he have confidence in his director?

MR. SPICER:

There's nothing that I have been told by him that would lead me to believe that anything is different than when it was prior.

QUESTION:

And before I get to the second topic, a clarification here. You're talking about the President wanting to go to Congress, specifically on the wiretapping question, but this is information that is held by the executive branch. So why would the President, if it's information the executive branch has --

MR. SPICER:

Because I think that there's -- like, again, and I'm not going to -- I want to stay in my wheelhouse here. But my understanding is, is that the President directing the Department of Justice to do something with respect to an investigation that may or may not occur with evidence may be seen as trying to interfere. And I think that we're trying to do this in the proper way, and that's --

QUESTION:

So his tweets about it -- sort of saying that this information exists does not --

MR. SPICER:

That doesn't interfere with an investigation.

So, Zeke.

QUESTION:

Okay, the second topic was actually on the immigration executive order. The President back in January tweeted about a one- week delay on the travel ban, would have let "bad dudes" enter the country. This particular revised order doesn't go into effect for another 10 days.

MR. SPICER:

The 16th.

QUESTION:

So what changed? How does that under -- does that undercut your argument that the nation was at risk?

MR. SPICER:

Well, I would argue that the court kind of undercut our argument by not reading the U.S. code the way it's intended to. But I think we lost the element of surprise way back when we said we were going to issue a second executive order.

QUESTION:

So that's what it was about, the element of surprise?

MR. SPICER:

Oh, absolutely. I think we said at the beginning. The whole reason that we did it in the way that we did was because if you -- started to telegraph it. But I think that when we started talking about a second executive order a couple of weeks back, I think that that generally took away -- whether it was done on Friday or Sunday or Monday, it wouldn't have mattered. And people have been able to -- we have telegraphed what we're doing for the last couple weeks. We took that away, and the President, as you've seen, has been very methodical about making sure we've talked about this for the last week --

QUESTION:

Since the --

MR. SPICER:

Right, but talking about implementing it correctly. And I think Saturday night, if you saw the group of individuals who were down in Florida sitting with him, this is part of that implementation process that we've been talking about, that we were continuing to tweak it, to get it ready to speed, overcome a lot of issues and concerns that had to get added in or out, and make sure that the government was properly -- but make no mistake, we lost the element of surprise back when we said -- when the court enjoined this in the 9th circuit, and then we had to go back to the drawing board and we talked about doing a second order. That was the intent of it the entire time. You lose that back then.

Zeke.

QUESTION:

Going back to the previous topic, the President calling for Congress to investigate these specific issues. Does that mean that the President is willing -- or is committing now to accepting the conclusions of these congressional investigations no matter what they say on anything? So because he's now calling for this investigation, he is now committing to accept the outcome?

MR. SPICER:

Well, I don't think you would ever just blanketly say "I'm going to accept any outcome." That doesn't matter what it is. You can go to court and -- it doesn't mean that you get found guilty or innocent that you're accepting the outcome, it means that you're agreeing that that's a legitimate -- but I think we're going to let Congress work its will. I think if we have a problem with one of the conclusions, we'll let it be known.

But I think that, for right now, the issue is, is that we think that that's the appropriate place for this to be looked into. And they have the resources, and they, themselves, have admitted that.

Alexis.

QUESTION:

Sean, can I ask two topics?

MR. SPICER:

Sure.

QUESTION:

On this topic, let me just follow up. If members of Congress pursue an investigation that looks into surveillance in the way the President would like them to, and he believes that that surveillance is potentially against the law, they would make recommendations to the executive branch to pursue and prosecute anyone responsible for that. So their recommendations would come back to the Justice Department. So to ask the question again, would the President accept the recommendations

of the legislative branch that potentially laws were broken and that those accusations should come back to the Justice Department to investigate?

MR. SPICER:

I think it's hard to prejudge what they're doing. Obviously, the reason that he's asking the House and Senate Intelligence Committee to go through this is because he thinks that they are the appropriate venues. They have the appropriate staff to look at them, and I think it's an appropriate way of having that separation of powers, if you will, where it's not asking -- directing the Department of Justice to do something that they may or may not be the ones conducting.

But again, the reason I don't want to give a blanket statement, Alexis, isn't because I'm trying to prejudge it. But I think that depending on a lot of things, you don't want to say, we're going to accept every single thing they do. I think we definitely will have a lot of respect for what they do and what they look into, but I think to blanketly accept -- just say, we're going to accept anything they say or do, might be a bit premature and not exactly the way to go.

QUESTION:

And I had a healthcare question but before I do that, it was reported that the President was interested in having the White House Counsel pursue information that would help support the President's argument that he may have been under surveillance. Is it the case that the President has indeed asked Don McGhan to continue doing that? Or is he dropping that and --

MR. SPICER:

No, Don McGhan was never asked -- all Don McGhan was ever asked to do was to review what options, if any, were available. That's it. Just review internally and tell the President, this is what's -- but we made very clear to anyone who asked -- and if you know Don and the team here -- these are unbelievably talented lawyers. They're very skilled in understanding their -- where the bounds are, and would understand that any type of interference would be -- it was an internal review of what options, if any, were available. So it's full stop.

QUESTION:

And that was completed?

MR. SPICER:

That guidance was made available to the President.

QUESTION:

Okay. Here's my healthcare question.

MR. SPICER:

It was also reported that the President's desire for speed with the administration's own Affordable Care Act replacement plan has kicked the ball to the OMB Director rather than the HHS Secretary to complete that work and get it out this week. Who is in charge of actually completing that? Is it more now in the ball court of OMB rather than HHS? Or are they working together? How would you describe it, and is it still coming out this week?

MR. SPICER:

I believe it is coming out -- I have every intention that it comes out this week. But I think it's a joint effort. I think Secretary Price is obviously the lead; it's HHS. But Director Mulvaney, his time -- I mean, they've both served in the House and were champions of budget issues. Obviously, there's a huge budgetary impact on that, and his understanding of the budget, his role here, and, obviously, his understanding of Congress makes Director Mulvaney a great partner.

So it's not a question of -- and this is the same issue that came up during the transition on trade. I think we have an unbelievably talented team -- everybody from Robert Lighthizer, when he gets confirmed as the U.S. Trade Rep, you've got Wilbur Ross at Commerce, Peter Navarro here -- it's not an either/or thing. It's I think bringing the best and the brightest together to get something through.

Obamacare and repealing and replacing it with something that's more accessible, affordable, more innovative is not something that just has to land in one person's hand. It can be covered -- and I think there are great partners and great teammates.

Yes.

QUESTION:

Yes, please, thank you, Sean. I'm just wondering when you said that it's pretty clear that there was some sort of intelligence or wiretaps and that that's why we need to move forward with an investigation, is that based on people speaking on the record, or anonymous sources?

MR. SPICER:

On the record. I think General Mukasey was very much on the record when he came to that conclusion. I think that when you -- anyway. I will leave it to Congress to further follow up on that.

QUESTION:

And one more, if I may. The President has yet to announce the vast majority of his sub-Cabinet-level nominations, such as Ambassador to Japan. Does the White House have a long-term timeline for all the rest of these nominations?

MR. SPICER:

Yeah, I think that you should -- there's a bunch of sub-Cabinet individuals and ambassadorships that should be coming out very soon. One of the things that I think -- I'm glad you kind of gave me an opportunity to touch on personnel. There was a report the other day that of, like, the 1,927 positions that -- someone went through, I think one of the things that people have to recognize is -- we talked about this a lot during the transition. We had about 600 members of these beachhead teams that went in under a special hiring process -- that they're able to be there for 120 days. For the most part, most of those people transition into Schedule C positions. It's not a given. It is not a default, meaning -- and I think we made it clear during the transition -- it's not just if you showed up for the first 120 days you get to stay. But sort of -- they were chosen specifically because of their understanding of the issue, their expertise or their desire to serve in that particular capacity.

And so we actually -- when you actually look at the numbers, we are well ahead, if not on par with -- we're well ahead of almost every modern administration. I think we're right on par with Obama '08. But you think about it, of the 1,927 or so positions, we've got over 600 of those individuals, and -- most of whom so far are looking like they're fully going to convert to Schedule C. But they are performing the duties that would be done by a Schedule C.

So when you look at the totality of what we're doing, we were well ahead on the Cabinet. And again, one of the other things is, you've got Congress still holding up the Cabinet getting appointed. And so I think there's a degree to which Senate Democrats, before we get a lot of stones thrown at us about where we are on the rest, they haven't even finished the job at hand of getting the full Cabinet.

Jon Decker.

QUESTION:

Thanks a lot, Sean. Two questions on the executive order. With the first executive order, there was a lot of fanfare when the President signed that executive order; in the Oval Office today, not so much. We didn't see the President, no cameras, no pool. Why didn't he want to show us him signing this new executive order?

MR. SPICER:

I tweeted a picture out.

QUESTION:

That's your picture, that's not independent --

QUESTION:

Well, I know -- from today. Yeah, that's your --

MR. SPICER:

I know, I'm -- I think -- (laughter) -- there are three agencies that are dealing with -- to your point, we went through this. We talked about the courts issue, we talked about this ad nauseam; the President got asked about it over and over again. I think today was about the implementation of it, was about having the three Departments that are expressly named to implement this to talk about what they're doing to implement it. And I think they did a phenomenal job about it.

And that's what we wanted to highlight today, is the government getting it done. And the way that the Department of Justice, the Department of Homeland Security and the Department of State were implementing the measures that the President laid forth -- again, if you think about it, the principles of the executive order remain the same. We looked at what the court said, we put together a thing -- we consulted with the relevant agencies and Departments. We talked to Congress. We had an extensive morning of briefings. The call to the press lasted about an hour, I guess.

And so we made sure that everybody knew what we were doing. We sent them out to make sure that the American people could see what they were doing.

And so I just want to be clear that I think we did a phenomenal job of rolling it out and making sure the American people saw the faces of the Departments that were instrumental in implementing it.

I'm sorry, Jon, go ahead.

QUESTION:

That's all right. The second one has to do with this idea of "element of surprise." With the first executive order and also with this one, there's a 90-day temporary ban on residents entering this country from six predominantly Muslim countries. What's to stop a so-called "bad dude" from one of these countries from coming into the country on the 91st day, or the 92nd day? Why 90 days? Doesn't that get rid of that element of surprise when you say --

MR. SPICER:

No, I think that -- no, but -- thank you, that's actually an interesting question. I think part of it is, is that we feel confident that during that 90-day period, the processes could be put in place.

Now, remember, there's two key things that are important. Number one is these six countries are the ones that we don't have the information currently that we feel comfortable -- and as I lifted off why -- I mean, there are some that literally are state-sponsors of terror. And I think when you recognize -- I don't think there's any American that wants a country that is a state-sponsor of terror to be sending their individuals here without us properly vetting them.

You talk about Yemen, the documents that people use in Yemen are not accepted by a whole host of countries because they lack the integrity to ensure that they are not compromised. And I think that there is a big difference in that, but we can -- at the end of that 90-day period, we can let a

country off, we can expand the list of countries, we could indefinitely address the countries that are on the list, we could expand that list to other countries that aren't on it.

But there's two things that are happening. One is, we're putting a ban on those countries, the six that are named. But two is, we're looking at an entire -- at the rest of the entire world, and all of the procedures that we use to address all countries.

And so at the end of that period, we could add countries. We could subtract countries. We could decide to indefinitely continue with one of the two -- one of the six, rather. But if you look at the case of Iraq, after the first order, they stepped up with four very specific things that they did to ensure that people traveling from Iraq, we had certain things -- whether it be biometrics and others -- that let us ensure that people coming into the country, we felt confident in knowing that they were coming in.

But that's an important thing. It's not just those six. We're looking at that time -- we're dealing with those during that 90-day -- but we're also looking at everybody else at the same period.

Kaitlan.

QUESTION:

So why doesn't the order prevent people who didn't have visas by the day of the first order from coming in the country? Because wouldn't that safeguard from the people who went and got visas during this revision period?

MR. SPICER:

I would just say I think that there's appropriate steps that have been taken during that period to ensure that the homeland has been protected.

Go ahead, I know you have another one.

QUESTION:

Just one more question.

MR. SPICER:

Of course.

QUESTION:

Does the President think that Barack Obama himself wiretapped him, or someone in the administration?

MR. SPICER:

I'm just going to say that as the President noted in his statement, we're going to let Congress look into that and then we'll get back to you -- we'll discuss it after Congress comes with -- Erin.

QUESTION:

Since the President contends that he and President Obama like each other, has he picked up the phone and called President Obama since the inauguration, or did he think about asking him directly before accusing him publicly?

MR. SPICER:

I have not -- I'm not aware of whether or not they've talked. I can ask and find out and get back to you.

Cecilia.

QUESTION:

Does the fact that you're rescinding this first executive order -- is it at all an admission that things just didn't go right the first time around?

MR. SPICER:

No. I think the first executive order, we've made clear time and time again -- when you look at how the court adjudicated that, their facts were wrong. Just in terms of how many people had come into the country, they based it off of several things that I think were not factually accurate. I think we recognized that we could have been in litigation for up to a year on this, and that would have left the country exposed.

And I think that that's -- there is a goal here that we sought to achieve the first time that we have to maintain. But by no means -- we 100 percent maintain that the executive order as initially drafted is completely constitutional and legal, and that what we've done is to do the best of our ability based on what the court --

QUESTION:

Sean --

MR. SPICER:

Hold on, it's still Cecilia's turn.

QUESTION:

Thank you. What about this issue of radicalization after people are here, which is what DHS raised in that report? One of the examples that's cited in the EO today is the Somali man, now, who came as a child and was radicalized here. So what does this order do about that population of people?

MR. SPICER:

The people that are here --

QUESTION:

That are here, which is what -- the concern that DHS raised in this report, that said people -- the bigger concern is people who are here and are radicalized after the fact, not those that are here just stopping to --

MR. SPICER:

I think that what we need to do -- this isn't a one-stop shop. I think that we have to look at this -- the entire problem. This is one piece of the problem that we're looking at to make sure that we keep the country safe. It's not a either/or, or only-this-then. But I think you're going to see a continuation of steps that the President takes to make sure that the country is protected.

One small correction that I've been made aware of, it's Somalia, not Yemen, that the travel docs are not accepted. So my apologies to Yemen.

Jeff, did you -- hold on. Thanks. Jeff.

QUESTION:

Thank you, Sean. You've mentioned a couple times and referred a couple times today to DNI Clapper -- former DNI Clapper's comments on -- over the weekend about Russia and the Trump campaign. Are you encouraging people to take those comments seriously but not the comments where he said there was no wiretapping?

MR. SPICER:

No, I'm just -- well, first of all, he also said that he wasn't aware -- he couldn't speak entirely when it came to wiretapping. He said that he wasn't aware of anything. I take him at his word that he wasn't aware, but that doesn't mean that it didn't exist.

But I also think that it's interesting that the double standard that has existed for so long when it comes to -- you have these sources over and over again who have been briefed by the FBI that say, I was briefed, there's nothing there. You have Clapper saying, "Not that I'm aware of." And yet, we still have these stories over and over again citing anonymous sources.

At some point, you have to question how many times are you going to take "didn't see anything there" before we start seeing these stories getting rewritten over and over and over again? I think

that is a valid question. It's interesting how everyone today is asking what sources we have, and yet we've been asking the same question about the sources for these anonymous sources and story after story for the last six months. And it's just, don't worry, we have these trusted anonymous sources that may or may not be true. And at the bottom of every story it has some kind of caveat that -- however there has been no formal evidence presented.

I think there's been a malignment for so many months about what may or may not have happened, and yet not a shred of single truth has actually come that shows any evidence that existed except for anonymous source after anonymous source after anonymous source.

QUESTION:

On a different issue?

MR. SPICER:

Yeah.

QUESTION:

What is the White House's reaction to North Korea firing four ballistic missiles into the sea off of Japan's northwest?

MR. SPICER:

The launches are consistent with North Korea's long history of provocative behavior. The United States stands with our allies in the face of this very serious threat. The Trump administration is taking steps to enhance our ability to defend against North Korea's ballistic missiles, such as through the deployment of a THAAD battery to South Korea -- South Korea.

QUESTION:

I just want to circle back around to a couple things that you said. You said it could be FISA, it could be surveillance. So are you saying that the administration is conceding that somewhere there was evidence presented before a judge that shows there could be collusion with the campaign and that it was okay to surveil them?

MR. SPICER:

No, what I'm suggesting is that, as I said, that our goal is to allow Congress to do its job, as the statement said yesterday.

Olivier.

QUESTION:

And then the follow-up on the new order. You had said that there are a hundred or so that had been inspected, but how many total that came in that you all have detained.

MR. SPICER:

It's 300.

QUESTION:

Of 300 -- 100 refugees? You said hundreds of -- or 300 refugees. How many total came in, and how many did you detain?

MR. SPICER:

I'd ask you to talk to the Department of Justice -- actually, Homeland Security on that one. I know the top-line stat on that one.

Olivier.

QUESTION:

A couple for you. One, just scheduling. The Israeli defense minister is in town tomorrow. Will he meet with the President?

MR. SPICER:

I'll have to get back to you on that. I'm not aware that that's on the schedule at this time, but -- I don't know. I know that he and Prime Minister Netanyahu spoke earlier. I'm not aware that that came up.

QUESTION:

And can you flesh out this notion of 300 refugees being investigated? What are they being investigated for, specifically? What's the source for this information --

MR. SPICER:

The FBI.

QUESTION:

So the FBI is investigating 300 refugees currently on U.S. soil on terrorism-related charges?

MR. SPICER:

That's what I have been -- yes. I'll get you the stat for that, but that's --

QUESTION:

That would be great. Thank you.

MR. SPICER:

Anita.

QUESTION:

Can you talk a little bit about Iraq and how they're not -- why they're not in the executive order anymore? So is this a signal to the other six and to other countries that they can also get removed if they -- I think you called it "proactive," if they were proactively having their own actions?

MR. SPICER:

I think what I would say, and I think the way you phrased it is right. It's not just the six countries, it's countries throughout the globe. I think that we are -- it is in every country's best interest to know who's coming in and out of its country and to do things. And I think there are things that we've asked countries to do. And it's not inclusive, it's not "have you hit these four." I think each country is a separate case. So I don't want to say, "if you do these four you're in."

QUESTION:

But is it possible, then, to --

MR. SPICER:

Absolutely. I think there is -- now, in some cases, like anything else, Anita, it may be easier for one country to achieve something than for another. But at the end of the day, I think there are certain things that -- there are certain steps that Iraq went through, including things like biometrics and turning over lists of -- updating lists, rather, of people within their country that have -- that pose a threat.

And so that -- they've agreed to do certain things after the first one was ordered that give us a much greater degree of confidence in knowing who is coming in and out of the country.

QUESTION:

And then on another topic. What was the President's reaction to hearing about Vice President Pence's email use, personal email for government business? I ask, obviously, because he had so many things to say about Hillary Clinton using personal email for government business last year?

MR. SPICER:

I was going to insert, like, an AOL joke here. (Laughter.)

But I think, look, I don't -- I think there's a big difference. The Vice President complied with Indiana law, turned over all of his emails and made sure that everything was done. I mean, that's a very big step. There's no question that I've been made aware of that he didn't do everything in compliance with Indiana law. There's a big difference between doing what is common practice within a state government and what is in compliance with that state's laws, then setting up a private server that seeks specifically to go around the government protocols and the Federal Records Act.

There's a big difference between that. But I mean, the governor at the time, and now the Vice President, did everything in compliance with Indiana law. And I think that's a big difference, is that it's not a question of -- it's a question of was there a law and was there a rule and did you follow it. In the case of Governor Pence, he did. In the case of Secretary Clinton, I would let the record speak for itself on that.

Sara. Gabby, I'm sorry.

QUESTION:

Thanks, Sean. Part of the justification for the hurried rollout of the initial executive order on immigration was that if it wasn't rolled out immediately, that people would take advantage of that and come into the country. So why has the administration decided to delay the implementation of this new executive order until March 16th?

MR. SPICER:

I'm going to refer you Hallie Jackson. (Laughter.) That was what Hallie asked earlier.

QUESTION:

Sorry.

MR. SPICER:

No problem, it's in the -- but basically the answer that I gave Hallie that I'll give to you is, I think the first order -- one of the goals of the first order was an element of surprise, to implement it in a way that didn't allow people to get in, right?

Since the 9th Circuit acted, we've been talking about a second executive order. I think we lost the element of surprise back in mid- to early February when the 9th Circuit acted the way they did. So that element -- what we've tried to do now is to make sure, with that element gone, that we've implemented this in a way that ensures the greatest degree of confidence that we know what we're doing.

One quick item -- I'm not done, so don't -- you can keep your hands -- someone asked earlier, and I'm trying to remember who, about the source for DOJ. Was that you, Olivier? The Department of

Justice, FBI investigation, section one, subsection H, the text of the EO notes -- you can check on that for the source.

I'm sorry. Matt.

QUESTION:

Thanks. Sean, doubling back to something we talked about earlier. President Trump accused President Obama of criminal conduct. One, can you tell us what his source was for that accusation? Two, can you tell us, unequivocally, that he was basing that on more than a talk radio report and a Breitbart article about that talk radio report?

MR. SPICER:

I'm going to tell that -- I've said it over and over again, I think the President made it very clear in the statement yesterday that he is not going to comment any further on this until Congress does --

QUESTION:

So maybe it was just based on the talk radio report?

MR. SPICER:

I'm not going to -- I'm just going to say that the President made it very clear that, based on numerous things, including -- and I think there's a New York Times story on it, there's several sources that made this clear or brought this to light -- but I'm not going to go into anything further, as the President noted, until this is resolved.

Mara.

QUESTION:

I have two topics. One, on the EO that maybe is coming later this week -- an EO on the Obama administration's fuel- economy standards. Are you going to have an EO reversing those, and will that also negate California's waiver?

MR. SPICER:

I don't see anything on -- I'll have to get back to you, as my standard. I'm not so sure on the timing -- I was just looking at my date.

QUESTION:

Oh, okay. Thank you.

MR. SPICER:

But I'd just -- I wouldn't get -- I don't have anything to announce at the time, is generally how I answer that, and I'm going to stick to it.

QUESTION:

Okay, but I have just one more question on the other topic. You said that you pointed rightly to Clapper's comments -- nothing that he knows of suggests there was any collusion between the campaign and Russia. But he also said that he didn't know of any wiretap FISA order. Why are you willing to accept his --

MR. SPICER:

That's what Jeff asked.

QUESTION:

Well, I guess the thing I'm asking is that the President of the United States has unilateral authority to declassify anything that he wants. He said in his tweet, I just learned of this. So he obviously had some kind of evidence. Why not declassify it?

MR. SPICER:

I think that's -- as I have made clear, there's a reason that we want Congress, the intelligence committees to do their job in terms of making sure that there's a separation of powers.

QUESTION:

He's afraid it would look like interference?

MR. SPICER:

I think that, again, I'm just going to leave it at that he thinks it's appropriate for Congress to do this instead of trying to point to his own Department of Justice.

Ashley.

QUESTION:

Sean --

MR. SPICER:

Hold on, you're going to wait your turn. It's Ashley's turn.

QUESTION:

Thank you. This morning, Kellyanne Conway went on Fox News and she said, "He's the President of the United States. He has information and intelligence that the rest of us do not." So that seemed to be referring not to these news reports you're talking about, but to specific, tangible evidence. So what can you tell us about what that evidence is, where it came from? And then secondly, if he has this evidence, why is he asking Congress to investigate?

MR. SPICER:

Well, I just -- I think the point that Kellyanne was making at the time is that the President, because he's President, gets access to NSC and other intelligence documents. I don't know -- I haven't seen the exact transcript, so I can't --

QUESTION:

I can read it to you.

MR. SPICER:

I appreciate that, thank you. But I also haven't talked to Kellyanne about it, so I don't think you can do that part. But I don't -- so I can't specifically respond to you in terms of what she was referring to, whether she was referring to the exact nature of his charge or whether, generally speaking, he is given information.

But again, on all of this, I'm going to go back to the statement earlier that the President's goal right now is to make sure that House and Senate can do this -- yes.

QUESTION:

Thank you, Sean. China is retaliating against the THAAD deployment in South Korea. What is the U.S. position?

MR. SPICER:

It's retaliating against what? QUESTION: Against the THAAD deployment in South Korea, THAAD battery deployment.

MR. SPICER:

The THAAD battery?

QUESTION:

Yes.

MR. SPICER:

Yeah, I think we're going to work with South Korea. I mean, obviously, North Korea's missile launches present a danger to our friends down south. And I think, as I mentioned in our response, we're going to continue to work with the government of South Korea to address this thing.

QUESTION:

Would the U.S. -- the Chinese government?

MR. SPICER:

I'm not at this point -- huh?

QUESTION:

-- the Chinese government?

MR. SPICER:

We have not had any further conversations on this. I think this is consistent with U.S. policy.

Margaret.

QUESTION:

Sean, two points of clarification. Did the President mean in any way to suggest that the FBI broke the law, or any other intelligence agencies, with this allegation of wiretapping?

MR. SPICER:

In the tweet?

QUESTION:

Yes.

MR. SPICER:

I'm just going to let the tweet speak for itself. I'm not going to get into --

QUESTION:

Well, that's why I'm asking this question?

MR. SPICER:

I get it, but I think that I'm not going to try to --

QUESTION:

Because it opens that up.

MR. SPICER:

I understand that, and I think I will seek further clarification on that. For right now, I would just suggest to you that I'm going to let it speak until I can get further clarification.

QUESTION:

My second point of clarification here. You said, you know, you didn't want to really get into what the triggering event was for the tweet in the first place, but I want you to address this part if you would. The question has been raised -- or the allegation has been raised that the President was simply trying to change the topic off of an unfortunate news cycle that week. Can you address that portion of the question, that this was deliberately about changing the media narrative and not anything having to do with the story itself?

MR. SPICER:

No, I don't -- I mean, that's -- I have nothing to lead me to believe that that was the case. I'm not sure -- and I think he had a great week last week. He had a phenomenal joint address. We had a great visit down in Norfolk, talked about rebuilding the military. He was in Orlando, in Florida, talking about how school choice can help children and parents and create better schools.

So I just -- I can't say that I've talked to him specifically about this, but I think the President had a good week. And so I don't see any reason that he would be using -- I mean, that just -- I think it was an issue of concern to him.

QUESTION:

Sean, let's remind everybody what the President did tweet Saturday morning: "Terrible! Just found out that Obama had my 'wires tapped' in Trump Tower just before the victory." He later called Obama a stupid guy -- or whatever it was exactly -- a sick guy. Yeah, sorry. Are the American people supposed to pull back and suddenly think that this is not the President of the United States accusing his predecessor of committing a crime when he writes it that way?

MR. SPICER:

Look, I think the President speaks very candidly. His tweets speak for themselves, as we've said before, and he's asked the House and Senate committees to look into this.

Sara.

QUESTION:

Considering the scrutiny surrounding President Trump's then-campaign advisors and Russia, which has carried over at the White House, is he reconsidering at all his hope or his timeline for pairing with Russia to fight ISIS?

MR. SPICER:

Is he -- based on --

QUESTION:

Just based on the amount of scrutiny surrounding his --

MR. SPICER:

No, I mean, I think if Russia wants to join with us to fight ISIS, that's a great --

QUESTION:

So nothing has changed on that front?

MR. SPICER:

No.

QUESTION:

And secondly, in light of the fact that there were previously undisclosed communications between the Russian ambassador and Michael Flynn and Jeff Sessions and Jared Kushner, has White House counsel done anything proactively to try to go to senior staffers or other Cabinet-level officials and say, hey, if you have had contact with a Russian official that you have not previously disclosed, then now is the time to do it?

MR. SPICER:

Not that I'm aware of. I'm not aware of any of that. I would say that there's -- one of the things that is interesting that, you know -- in the course of people conducting their business here at the White House or during a transition or in the House or the Senate, you contact a whole host of people -- diplomats, government officials, you know, association representatives, corporate representatives. I mean, that's -- those are the kind of folks that talk to people in government.

And I think that there's one thing between talking with somebody -- I mean, I think -- and again, I'll get back to you so don't be prescriptive on this. I think someone had told me earlier today that there were something like 20 visits to the Russian ambassador in the last, you know, 10, maybe, years. I don't -- huh?

QUESTION:

Twenty-two.

MR. SPICER:

Twenty-two. Thank you for helping fact check me. (Laughter.)

QUESTION:

-- is not here, so somebody's got to do it. (Laughter.)

MR. SPICER:

Thank you. Where's Knoller? But I think at some point, there's nothing wrong with people doing their job, right? I mean, that's what I think that there is a big difference between so- and-so met with someone. There's nothing to disclose with a meeting. If I have a meeting with a member of the media, no one says, hey, did you know that you need to report every time you meet with this individual or this outlet or whatever. There's nowhere to report that kind of stuff. There's a big difference between doing something nefarious or illegal and conducting yourself in a routine course of business.

QUESTION:

But there were clearly a number of instances where people in this administration suggested they did not have any contact or misled you guys about the amount of contact they had, which has then caused some unflattering news cycles.

MR. SPICER:

Well, and I think -- so in one case, Michael Flynn was, you know -- the President said the inconsistencies and him not being straight with the Vice President -- he asked him to resign. I think the President dealt with it.

But that was -- again, if you note the President's comments at the time, he was very clear that the issue wasn't that he's doing his job. The issue was him misleading the Vice President. And that's a very different thing.

So he had no problem with him doing his job and contacting individuals that we were going to need to be in contact with during the administration. And that's where I think there is a big difference between a lot of these stories saying, did you know that so and so did this? There's nothing wrong with people meeting with ambassadors, or government officials, or corporate representatives, or members of the media. That's part of what we do in government.

And so I think there's a big difference in the question that you're asking about whether or not someone is doing something that's wrong and inappropriate or illegal, and someone doing what they would do in a normal course of business.

QUESTION:

Well, I think the other question is just whether there have been more instances in this that are going to catch you guys by surprise since he --

MR. SPICER:

And I guess --

QUESTION:

-- the President himself has denied that there was any kind of this contact throughout the campaign, and then we found out there were national security --

MR. SPICER:

But hold on. Actually --

QUESTION:

-- advisors you didn't mention meeting with the Russian ambassador as well as Jeff Sessions, and then there was this meeting with Michael Flynn, as well as Jared Kushner, which was not previously disclosed.

MR. SPICER:

Okay, so there's two things. You said the President found out about this. What's "this?" Having a meeting? Again, I don't think that -- there's countless meetings that members of his senior staff and the rest of people throughout government have on it every day. That's why he's asked us to come here and work, is to facilitate some of these meetings and get some of this stuff done.

There is no one to disclose stuff to. I don't disclose the --

QUESTION:

That sounds like you're saying you're not concerned that they're --

MR. SPICER:

No, it's not that I'm not concerned. I guess there's -- but what I'm getting at, Sara, is that there's a difference between being concerned about somebody -- I could equally be concerned that if a member of the media said, hey, I want to take a member of your staff out, and we're going to break

some kind of ethics rule. I would be concerned about that. But I wouldn't be concerned if they said, hey, we want to go have coffee with a member of the media.

They don't disclose all that on our staff. And I think -- but that's essential to your question is, is a meeting -- there's nothing wrong with a meeting. There's nothing wrong with meeting with a government official, or a diplomat, or a member of the media, or a corporate individual, or association, or a constituent, or a citizen that has an issue. But on any of those categories, once they cross the line and do something wrong, and I think to the answer of your question, the issue was specifically -- or the question surrounded attempts to influence the election. Those are very different than people meeting also during a transition period, or people meeting in their White House capacity. But those are three separate instances.

All of the stories that I've heard so far, previously all detailed just action with respect to the campaign and Russia's attempt to influence the campaign, right?

QUESTION:

Yes, I mean, I think --

MR. SPICER:

Yes, I mean that's --

QUESTION:

That was the backdrop.

MR. SPICER:

Right. That's the backdrop. And then -- and so I think in the one instance where it happened where there was someone that misled someone, they were let go.

So for you to start asking questions about, well, what if these other individuals had a meeting? Well, were they ever asked about it? I mean there's a big difference between did someone meet with someone; and did someone mislead somebody about meeting someone. And that is a very, very big difference in those questions.

And that's one of the things that I think is important to distinguish. People can meet with people. The question is did they do something wrong. Did they mislead somebody? And those are all very, very different categories.

April.

QUESTION:

Okay, Sean, I have a couple of topics. And back on this following up, so the question is: Under what capacity was he in when he met with the ambassador? And what did they talk about?

MR. SPICER:

Who is he?

QUESTION:

Sessions.

MR. SPICER:

I don't know.

QUESTION:

And then under -- then when he was under oath, he said he didn't do it. But then we find out later, so what do you say --

MR. SPICER:

No, no. Well, first of all, I'm not going to -- I'll refer you back to the Department of Justice. I know -- my understanding is he's amending his testimony to the Senate Judiciary Committee from what I've heard. So I'll let his people -- but I do think that his explanation that he gave was very -- was that he was answering a question did you have any meetings with anyone with respect to the campaign.

And I think in his mind, it was very clear that, I never met with anybody with respect to the campaign. I met with someone in my Senate office, in my capacity as a United States senator, with Senate staff to discuss foreign policy or whatever it was that he was discussing.

I think the Senator discussed this in his media conference last week Thursday. So I don't -- I guess the issue is with respect to what was talked about, I don't know. That's up to him.

But I do think the way he described it was very clear that he believed he was answering Senator Franken's question with respect to activity involving the campaign and attempts to -- as I said to Sara, like this whole idea of influencing the election. Meeting with an ambassador about an area of foreign policy in his Senate office with his Senate staff was clearly not a campaign event.

QUESTION:

Okay, so now on the leak issue. You're talking about Congress doing an investigation. But some of these leaks are coming from top officials, people who know insider information. What has the President said to his staff as it relates to the leaks in reference to trying to find out himself, not just

from top-level people, what has he said to people about the leaks, about trying to stop it, or trying to find out what's happening?

MR. SPICER:

Well, I think the President made clear in his comments when he stood before you all a couple weeks ago that his main concern is national security. That's -- when he keeps talking about the leaks, his concern is the leaks that damage and undermine national security, the leaks that deal with classified and other information. That's what his main concern is. And I don't think -- that's not a White House issue. That's sort of -- that is an issue that is beyond the White House. We're not --

QUESTION:

Other leaks don't matter, but the national --

MR. SPICER:

No, no, I think -- it's not that other leaks don't matter. I think his issue that he has talked about and his concern is the leaks of national security. It's not that he's saying, other leaks are okay.

But I think the ones that threaten our public safety or potentially put our country in harm are the ones that he really cares about.

Peter.

QUESTION:

I have a question. I'm sorry. This President reached out to former President Obama several times when he was President.

MR. SPICER:

That's right.

QUESTION:

They started building something. There was a bridge. Now some people in the Obama camp are considering these conversations about, or these tweets crazy. And the question is now: With this divide between these two, and President Trump may need to one day reach back to former President Obama, how do you think that will play out? Do you think that these two will never come back together again? Is this something he could have talked to him about before he went on Twitter? There is now a chasm. There's a divide that wasn't there a couple of weeks ago.

MR. SPICER:

Okay, well, there was a divide during the campaign, too. I don't think that -- I think that, as you saw, and the President has made it very clear, he said some things about the President. And the President said stuff -- about the campaign. I think they came together for the good of the country. And in cases where they can come together for a common good and to talk about what's in the country's best interests, they will.

But I understand your point. I just think the President --

QUESTION:

Did he burn a bridge?

QUESTION:

Hold up, hold on.

MR. SPICER:

Thank you. But I think that they'll be just fine. So go ahead. That's you.

QUESTION:

Oh, good.

MR. SPICER:

Yes.

QUESTION:

Hi, Sean.

MR. SPICER:

Hi, Julie. You've been very patient.

QUESTION:

Yes, I have. Thanks.

MR. SPICER:

I think it's your first time.

QUESTION:

It is, yes.

MR. SPICER:

Well, welcome. See how pleasant this is?

QUESTION:

I was feeling like how can I not get called on my first time? Ten years ago, Bob Levinson disappeared in Iran. And I know the President talked about this a little bit on the campaign trail. Is there anything you can tell us about how the administration is approaching this case? Have they been in communication with his family or any updates on that?

MR. SPICER:

I think we put out a statement from the NSC on Friday on this -- Victoria. I think we -- so we have been in communication with his family. I believe they were here -- or we were in touch with them last week. And obviously, we continue to hold out hope. But the administration has been in touch with his family.

QUESTION:

Sean, the call to Netanyahu, what prompted that?

MR. SPICER:

I don't know, Dave. I'll find out. I just know it happened. And I got a little bit of a --

QUESTION:

As you might know, the Prime Minister is meeting later this week with Vladimir Putin. Did the President and the Prime Minister talk about Syria at all?

MR. SPICER:

I don't know. I know that they had a discussion about regional threats, so I don't want to get ahead of this.

David Jackson.

QUESTION:

Comey did tell people this weekend that President Obama did not order these wiretaps, and he did want the Justice Department to put out that statement. Does President Obama believe --

MR. SPICER:

Are you -- like I said, I am not -- wait, so --

QUESTION:

Does President Trump believe Comey when he says that President Obama did not authorize these wiretaps?

MR. SPICER:

My question is, is that I don't think that we've confirmed that Director Comey did say that. I don't -- I'm not aware. Aside from reading stories that cite anonymous sources saying that he did, I'm not aware that that actually happened. So that's the first issue that I think we need to resolve.

QUESTION:

Well, people we trust did tell us that he did.

MR. SPICER:

Well, with all due respect, not you, but I think that we've had a number of reports that I've seen that -- about things that have occurred in the last 40-some-odd days that actually didn't occur, but anonymous sources said they did.

Peter Alexander.

QUESTION:

Sean, to be clear, you said earlier as an on-the-record source for the President's wiretapping claims, he referred to the former Attorney General Michael Mukasey. I just want to ask you to clarify if you could because his public comments were on Sunday, a day after the President tweeted about this. And even in his public comments, he said that he based his information "on news reports."

MR. SPICER:

Okay. But I'm just saying that he is -- someone asked whether it was an on-the-record comment. And that is on the record.

QUESTION:

But I was saying, was there an on -- you were being asked was there an on-the-record comment in advance of the President's tweets to which he was basing his information? Did he have anything better than anonymous sources?

MR. SPICER:

I don't -- I'm not -- as I said before, I'm not going to get into the elements of that. I'll just -- I'm going to wait until the House and Senate.

QUESTION:

Really, just on a past comment that the President had made about the suggestion that there were - or the claim, in fact, that there were 3 million to 5 million people who voted illegally in this country -- he made this claim more than a month ago. I just want to get a sense now on the update on any investigation into that and where it stands, given the explosive nature of such a claim.

MR. SPICER:

I think we've touched on this, but he has asked Vice President Pence to lead a task force on this. We have -- I'll get more for you. I know that there's been some discussion with some Secretaries of State and others on some of this. I know you had that issue in Texas come -- last week, and I'm trying to remember the exact nature of it, but there has been now further evidence that people have voted illegally. And I think that one of the things the task force is looking to do is to gather additional information of what -- it's still in the process of getting the task members named.

QUESTION:

Does the task force, I guess, exist yet? Or is --

MR. SPICER:

Yeah, the Vice President has been talking to folks potentially to serve on it, and I know that several Secretaries of State have expressed --

QUESTION:

It hasn't convened yet, but he's been talking to folks about it.

MR. SPICER:

That's correct. That's correct.

QUESTION:

Sean, two subjects here, following up on the wiretap question. Stepping away from what the President knew or the basis of his tweets, how appropriate is it for a President to make an explosive charge as fact and then send you folks out to step away and say this maybe happened and we should investigate it?

MR. SPICER:

Well, again, I think there's two things. One is the President's tweets speak for themselves. We're making that very --

QUESTION:

But --

MR. SPICER:

Hold on. And I think the President has been very clear, as we've stated, that I think there's enough there that we want the House and Senate intelligence to use the resources they do to make sure that they look into this matter. I mean, that's -- there is -- anyway, I do not want to get ahead of where they may go with this or what they may look at, but I'm going to leave it to them. If we start down the rabbit hole of discussing some of this stuff I think then we end up in a very difficult place.

I look forward to seeing you guys tomorrow. If you can bring your cameras --

QUESTION:

Sean, housekeeping-wise, you said that we'd get some clarification on a number of questions -- to all of us. If you could do that today through the pool --

MR. SPICER:

Yeah, I think we can try to do that through the pool. If not, we'll write everything -- we generally write down everything and try to get back to the reporters. So I will have the team -- and then get it out by the pool.

QUESTION:

Will we be hearing from the President this week, since we didn't today?

MR. SPICER:

I'm sure at some point we'll do either something that we -- a photo spray or something. I think that we have a pretty good track record of making the President available to folks.

QUESTION:

-- kind of unusual.

MR. SPICER:

What's unusual?

QUESTION:

To not --

MR. SPICER:

It's Monday.

QUESTION:

Exactly.

QUESTION:

But you see -- everything is closed. Normally we have a photo spray or something.

MR. SPICER:

I just -- I think that's -- don't give me this "normally we do." I made it very clear at the beginning of this, April, that we have some things on camera, some off. Last week the President traveled two days, he had the joint session. We briefed every single day --

QUESTION:

It's not about us, it's about the American public seeing their President. And we have to --

MR. SPICER:

Wait, hold on. Seeing their President. The guy is in meetings all day. I'm trying -- how many times did you complain about the President --

QUESTION:

He signed executive orders. You had us -- last week you said --

MR. SPICER:

Hold on, hold on. He signed an executive order. I mean, this is a President, when it comes to accessibility and allowing the press access, I think I've heard from several of you -- we have gone above and beyond allowing the press into events, into sprays. We've had greater access.

So, with all due respect, I mean that's not been the case. One day out of the last 41 or 40, whatever it's been -- but I think this President has been extremely accessible, extremely transparent, as far as -- he signed an executive order this morning that we then put all three Cabinet Secretaries that were relevant to implement this out.

I'll be out tomorrow. I think we have an opportunity -- look, I made it very clear from the beginning of this that we'd have a briefing every day. We've gaggled every day, we've made ourselves available to you. So, with all due respect, that's not a very accurate assessment of how we've been acting.

Thanks. I'll see you guys tomorrow.