Briefing Clips Roundup 5/11/15

*Camp David Summit*

**Obama’s plans to reassure Gulf allies at risk of unraveling**

<http://hosted.ap.org/dynamic/stories/U/US_OBAMA_ARAB_SUMMIT?SITE=AP&SECTION=HOME&TEMPLATE=DEFAULT>

BY JULIE PACE May 11, 4:52 PM EDT

"The countries who are participating in the meeting have obviously made decisions about who they believe is best-positioned to represent their countries at the meeting," White House spokesman Josh Earnest said. "We agree that the right people will be attending, and are confident that we will have the right people around the table for discussing and acting on these priorities."

**Along with Saudi king, most Gulf rulers to skip US summit**

<http://hosted.ap.org/dynamic/stories/M/ML_GULF_US?SITE=AP&SECTION=HOME&TEMPLATE=DEFAULT>

BY ADAM SCHRECK May 11, 1:34 PM EDT

However, White House spokesman Josh Earnest told reporters in Washington on Monday that Saudi King Salman had formally accepted the invitation to meet with President Barack Obama ahead of the summit.

**White House: What Saudi snub?**

<http://thehill.com/blogs/blog-briefing-room/news/241643-white-house-what-saudi-snub>

By Jordan Fabian May 11, 2015, 03:28 pm

"There has been some speculation that this change in travel plans was an attempt to send a message to the United States," White House press secretary Josh Earnest said Monday. "If so, that message was not received because all the feedback we have received from the Saudis has been positive.”

Salman had previously confirmed his attendance, Earnest said, but his sudden absence is "unrelated to the agenda that is planned for Camp David.”

Earnest expressed confidence that the Saudis and other nations would be would be “ably represented” at the summit.

“We agree that the right people will be attending,” he said.

**Saudi king to skip meetings with Obama**

<http://thehill.com/policy/international/241582-saudi-arabian-king-to-skip-meetings-with-obama>

By Jesse Byrnes - 05/11/15 07:50 AM EDT

Press secretary Josh Earnest told reporters Monday that the White House does not view King Salman's absence as a snub.

"All the feedback we have received from the Saudis has been positive," he said.

Salman had previously confirmed his attendance, Earnest said, but his sudden absence is "unrelated to the agenda that is planned for Camp David.”

Earnest expressed confidence "the right people will be attending" the summit to discuss greater security cooperation between the U.S. and its Gulf allies.

**A Saudi snub?**

<http://www.politico.com/story/2015/05/saudi-king-salman-to-skip-obamas-camp-david-summit-117801.html>

By NAHAL TOOSI and MICHAEL CROWLEY 5/10/15 7:29 PM EDT Updated 5/11/15 1:56 PM EDT

“There’s been no concern raised by our Saudi partners, either before the change in travel plans or after, related to the agenda at Camp David,” White House spokesman Josh Earnest said. “All the feedback that we’ve received so far from the Saudis has been positive.”

**Obama to meet with Persian Gulf leaders (some of them)**

<http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2015/05/11/obama-gulf-cooperation-council-bahrain-kuwait-oman-qatar-saudi-arabia-the-united-arab-emirates/27129131/>

David Jackson, USA TODAY 5:33 p.m. EDT May 11, 2015

White House spokesman Josh Earnest said officials are confident they are meeting with "the right people" for meetings designed "to deepen and modernize the important security relationship" between the United States and Persian Gulf allies.

"The countries who are participating in the meeting have obviously made decisions about who they believe is best-positioned to represent their countries at the meeting," Earnest said.

Earnest noted that one attendee — the crown price of Abu Dhabi, Mohammed bin Zayid — is the UAE's deputy military commander. That makes him the principal point of contact for the kinds of mutual defense issues to be discussed this week, he said.

**White House: No Saudi concern over Camp David summit agenda**

<http://news.yahoo.com/white-house-no-saudi-concern-over-camp-david-172409814.html>

Reuters 30 minutes ago

White House spokesman Josh Earnest said the United States was confident that the Saudi officials who were coming would be able to represent their country and implement any decisions made during the meetings.

Earnest also said Obama had not spoken to Saudi Arabia's King Salman, but was likely to have an opportunity to do so before the summit.

**What King Salman's Snub Means For Barack Obama**

<http://www.nationaljournal.com/white-house/what-king-salman-s-snub-means-for-barack-obama-20150511>

BY GEORGE E. CONDON JR.

White House press secretary Josh Earnest took direct aim at the notion of a snub. "I know there has been some speculation that this change in travel plans was an attempt to send a message to the United States. If so, that message was not received because all the feedback we have gotten has been positive."

Earnest also joked about the widespread reporting that the Saudi decision is a snub, calling that "the word of the day" at his daily briefing.

He also fired back at the contention that the summit is no longer a big deal and has been diminished. "Not in the mind of the president and not in the mind of anybody here," he said, insisting the talks, which will begin with a Wednesday dinner at the White House will be "worthwhile." The goal, he added, "is for each of these countries to further strengthen the important security relationship they have with the United States."

Earnest said the king's decision is "completely unrelated to the agenda" for the summit. But it is difficult to divorce the decision from the anxiety many of the Gulf countries feel about the U.S.-led negotiations with Iran. All the countries in the Gulf Cooperation Council oppose Iranian efforts to spread its influence across the region and were seeking assurances at this summit of American steadfastness in supporting them.

Earnest, who was clearly on the defensive at his daily briefing, insisted the White House is "confident" that "the right people will be attending." He cast the missing leaders as simply the fact that "the countries participating in the meeting have made decisions about who is best positioned to represent them."

**King Salman of Saudi Arabia pulls out of US talks on Iran**

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/may/11/king-salman-saudi-arabia-pulls-out-us-talks-iran>

Ian Black Middle East editor, and Dan Roberts in Washington Monday 11 May 2015 13.59 EDT

The White House press secretary, Josh Earnest, said on Monday: “I know there has been some speculation that the change in travel plans was an attempt to send a message to the United States. If so, that message has not been received. There has been no concern raised by our Saudi partners, either before the change in travel plans, or after, about the agenda.”

**Saudi King Won't Attend Camp David Summit**

<http://www.npr.org/blogs/thetwo-way/2015/05/11/405866876/saudi-king-wont-attend-camp-david-summit>

MAY 11, 2015 8:19 AM ET EYDER PERALTA

During his daily press briefing, White House Press Secretary Josh Earnest said the White House was not taking Saudi King Salman's decision as a snub.

He said that if the schedule change was intended to send a message to the White House, the "message was not received."

**Rulers of most Gulf nations to miss US summit, administration denies 'snub'**

<http://www.foxnews.com/politics/2015/05/11/saudi-king-salman-to-miss-gulf-nation-summit-in-us/>

Published May 11, 2015FoxNews.com

But State Department spokeswoman Marie Harf rejected the notion this was a "snub," and White House Press Secretary Josh Earnest likewise said the administration is "confident" that Saudi Arabia and other nations will be "ably represented" at the summit.

Earnest confirmed Monday that Saudi King Salman would no longer attend, noting the king originally had accepted the invitation. But Earnest stressed that Saudi Arabia did not express any concerns to the U.S. before or after the Saudi king's change in travel plans.

Earnest said the feedback the U.S. has had from Saudi Arabia has been "positive," and as for speculation that Riyadh might have been trying to send a message to the Obama administration with the change, Earnest said: "If so, that message is not received."

**WH: Saudi king's decision to skip summit not a snub**

<http://www.washingtonexaminer.com/wh-saudi-kings-decision-to-skip-summit-not-a-snub/article/2564308>

BY SUSAN CRABTREE | MAY 11, 2015 | 2:02 PM

"There has been some speculation that this change in travel plans was an attempt to send a message to the United States," White House press secretary Josh Earnest told reporters Monday. "If so, that message was not received."

"Saudi Arabia will be well-represented at the meeting," Earnest said. "... Having the crown prince and the deputy crown prince, both of whom have leadership responsibilities for Saudi Arabia, gives us confidence that we have the right people at the table.

**Saudi king not snubbing Obama, White House says**

<http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2015/may/11/gulf-leaders-skip-obamas-camp-david-summit/>

By Dave Boyer - The Washington Times - Updated: 1:21 p.m. on Monday, May 11, 2015

While foreign-policy analysts are calling the upcoming summit a “diplomatic disaster” for Mr. Obama, White House press secretary Josh Earnest said the withdrawal of newly installed Saudi King Salman from the talks is not being perceived by the administration as a snub.

“If so, that message was not received,” Mr. Earnest said. “There’s been no concern raised by our Saudi partners, either before the change in travel plans or after.”

He said other key members of the Saudi ruling family will attend the meeting on Thursday, which he said “gives us confidence that we’ll be able to have a robust discussion” about security issues in the Persian Gulf region.

**White House summit is no summit: 4 of 6 countries not sending top leaders**

<http://www.mcclatchydc.com/2015/05/11/266281/white-house-summit-is-no-summit.html>

BY ANITA KUMAR McClatchy Washington BureauMay 11, 2015 Updated 2 minutes ago

“I know there had been some speculation that this change in travel plans was an attempt to sent a message to the United States,” White House Press Secretary Josh Earnest said. “If so, that message was not received, because all the feedback that we’ve received from the Saudis has been positive.”

Obama and Salman spoke by phone Monday. Earnest referred questions about why the king changes his plans to Saudi officials.

**1:53 PM ET: Bloomberg Markets**

<http://mms.tveyes.com/PlaybackPortal.aspx?SavedEditID=00c03549-f649-46b0-9cc5-cbaad4d4de57>

Briefing Clip on GCC Meetings

JOSH EARNEST: So it is in the interest of the countries to send senior members of the national security team who can represent the views of their country and assure they can live up to any commitments they make in the context of the meeting, and based on the list of attendees we have seen so far, we are confident.

**3:07 PM ET: Fox News Shepard Smith Reporting**

<http://mms.tveyes.com/PlaybackPortal.aspx?SavedEditID=a12772c0-e171-4861-9ff8-08b9fc70f170>

Briefing Clip

EARNEST: I think we have identified the word of the day in the briefing today. We continue to be confident that these are individuals who can represent the interests of their country, and implement any commitments that they make in the context of this meeting.

**6:06 PM ET: CNN**

<http://mms.tveyes.com/PlaybackPortal.aspx?SavedEditID=18738808-41d0-4027-83e8-19326f7e9f53>

Briefing Clip On King Salman – Arab Summit

JOSH EARNEST: Some speculation that this -- the change in travel plans was an attempt to send a message to the United States. If so, that message was not received, because all the feedback that we received from the Saudis has been positive.

**6:16 PM ET: Fox News**

<http://mms.tveyes.com/PlaybackPortal.aspx?SavedEditID=2691f5d4-493a-4ace-babd-bec7a31ff900>

Briefing Clip On King Salman – Arab Summit

JOSH EARNEST: There has been some speculation that this change in travel plans was an attempt to send a message to the United States. If so, that message was not received because of all of the feedback that we've received from the Saudis have been positive.

*Hersh Article*

**White House calls bin Laden article 'outright falsehoods'**

<http://hosted.ap.org/dynamic/stories/U/US_WHITE_HOUSE_BIN_LADEN?SITE=AP&SECTION=HOME&TEMPLATE=DEFAULT>

May 11, 2:19 PM EDT

Spokesman Josh Earnest says journalist Seymour Hersh's piece in the London Review of Books is "riddled with inaccuracies and outright falsehoods."

Earnest noted former CIA deputy director Michael Morell's reaction to the article - that he stopped reading because every sentence was wrong.

**White House dismisses bin Laden hoax claims**

<http://www.politico.com/story/2015/05/seymour-hersh-osama-bin-laden-story-white-house-reaction-117823.html>

By SARAH WHEATON 5/11/15 2:58 PM EDT

“The Obama White House is not the only one to observe that the story is riddled with inaccuracies and outright falsehoods,” said Press Secretary Josh Earnest at the daily briefing on Monday. He added, “No one here is particularly concerned about it.”

Rather than engage the charges directly, Earnest cited journalists and others outside the administration who have cast doubt on the report’s veracity.

“Former deputy director of the CIA Mike Morrell has said that every sentence was wrong,” Earnest said, adding a quip from CNN’s Peter Bergen: “What’s true in the story isn’t new, and what’s new in the story isn’t true.”

**U.S. officials fuming over Hersh account of Osama bin Laden raid**

<http://www.politico.com/story/2015/05/seymour-hersh-bin-laden-raid-officials-criticism-117826.html>

By BRYAN BENDER and PHILIP EWING 5/11/15 3:34 PM EDT Updated 5/11/15 5:05 PM EDT

“There are too many inaccuracies and baseless assertions in this piece to fact check each one,” White House National Security spokesman Ned Price said in a statement to reporters early Monday. Later, at the daily White House briefing, White House spokesman Josh Earnest chimed in, saying the report is full of “inaccuracies and outright falsehoods.”

**White House: Seymour Hersh Story On Bin Laden Raid 'Riddled With Inaccuracies'**

<http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/05/11/white-house-seymour-hersh-bin-laden_n_7259110.html?utm_hp_ref=politics>

Posted: 05/11/2015 3:15 pm EDT Updated: 4 minutes ago

White House Press Secretary Josh Earnest said Monday that there was next to nothing accurate about Hersh's piece.

"I can tell you that the Obama White House is not the only one to observe that the story is riddled with inaccuracies and outright falsehoods," he said during his daily briefing.

Earnest noted that Mike Morell, the former deputy director of the CIA, has said that "every sentence ... was wrong" in Hersh's story. He pointed out that CNN national security analyst Peter Bergen also rejected the piece, saying that "what's true in the story isn't new and what's new in the story isn't true."

"That's a pretty good way of describing why no one here is particularly concerned about it," said Earnest.

**White House rejects Seymour Hersh 'baseless assertions' on bin Laden raid**

<http://www.cnn.com/2015/05/11/politics/seymour-hersh-obama-bin-laden-raid-lied/>

By Alexandra Jaffe, CNN Updated 2:55 PM ET, Mon May 11, 2015

Other former administration officials have panned the report as well, and during the daily press briefing, White House spokesman Josh Earnest again dismissed the report, citing CNN National Security Analyst Peter Bergen's comment that "what's true in this story isn't new, and what's new in the story isn't true."

"I thought that was a pretty good way of describing why no one here is particularly concerned about it," he said.

**White House, Pentagon reject report claiming gov’t lied about bin Laden raid**

<http://www.foxnews.com/politics/2015/05/11/white-house-pentagon-reject-report-claiming-govt-lied-about-bin-laden-raid/>

Published May 11, 2015FoxNews.com

White House Press Secretary Josh Earnest also said he's not aware of any facts being withheld.

"The Obama White House is not the only one to observe that the story is riddled with inaccuracies and outright falsehoods," Earnest said, citing recent criticism from other observers. "No one here is particularly concerned about it."

**White House: Hersh’s bin Laden Piece ‘Riddled with Outright Falsehoods’**

<http://www.mediaite.com/online/white-house-hershs-bin-laden-piece-riddled-with-outright-falsehoods/>

by Evan McMurry | 2:50 pm, May 11th, 2015

White House Press Secretary Josh Earnest reiterated this in his daily press briefing:

Of Seymour Hersh article on bin-Laden raid, @PressSec says "the story is riddled with inaccuracies and outright falsehoods."

*Stivers NDAA Amendment*

**White House bashes GOP effort to delay regs on predatory loans to troops**

<http://thehill.com/policy/defense/241654-white-house-bashes-gop-effort-to-delay-payday-loan-protections-for-troops>

By Kristina Wong - 05/11/15 04:28 PM EDT

“It’s almost too difficult to believe you would have a member of Congress looking to carry water for the payday loan industry and allow them to target in a predatory fashion military families who in many cases are already in a vulnerable financial state," White House press secretary Josh Earnest said.

**House GOP lending amendment draws White House ire**

<http://www.militarytimes.com/story/military/capitol-hill/2015/05/11/ndaa-wh-lending-amendment/27131013/>

By Leo Shane III, Staff writer 4:50 p.m. EDT May 11, 2015

On Monday, in response to reporters' questions, White House spokesman Josh Earnest called the potential addition to the annual authorization bill a significant concern for President Obama.

"It's almost too difficult to believe that you'd have a member of Congress looking to carry water for the payday loan industry, and allow them to continue to target in a predatory fashion military families who in many case are already in a vulnerable financial state," he said.

Earnest said he "can't imagine (the amendment) earning the majority support in the United States Congress."

**Republicans Try To Strip Predatory Lending Protections For American Troops, Again**

<http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/05/11/predatory-lending-soldiers_n_7258800.html?utm_hp_ref=politics>

Posted: 05/11/2015 2:38 pm EDT Updated: 3 minutes ago

"It's almost too difficult to believe that you'd have a member of Congress looking to carry water for the payday loan industry, and allow them to continue to target in a predatory fashion military families who in many cases are already in a vulnerable financial state," said White House press secretary Josh Earnest.

"In some cases, we're talking about military families who have a loved one that's deployed overseas," Earnest continued. "And as they're trying to makes ends meet, to allow predatory lenders to target them is something that I can't imagine earning the majority support in the United States Congress."

*Trade*

**White House escalates Warren feud**

<http://thehill.com/policy/finance/241653-white-house-escalates-warren-feud>

By Jordan Fabian - 05/11/15 04:23 PM EDT

“There is no need for this false criticism that members of Congress aren’t aware of what’s being negotiated,” press secretary Josh Earnest said Monday.

Earnest said Warren and other lawmakers are able to read the current text of the trade agreement in a secure viewing area in the Capitol building.

“If they are not aware of what’s being negotiated, it’s because they have failed to take responsibility for reading the document that we provided to them,” he said.

Earnest said Obama’s conversations with lawmakers, mostly with Democrats but some Republicans, have “yielded us some votes,” but declined to say how many.

He also put the onus on Republicans to maximize the number of votes from their side of the aisle.

“What’s important is for Democrats and Republicans to have the votes,” he said. “This is something that’s not going to pass on party lines.”

Earnest dismissed the notion that Obama’s blunt criticism of Warren may have alienated potential Democratic supporters on trade.

He said the White House would continue to make its case to members of Congress “right up until the vote, and we’re not going to take any of those votes for granted.”

While Obama has been in "frequent" contact with lawmakers on the trade deal, Earnest was not aware of any conversation he had with Warren in recent weeks, though he added "I wouldn't rule it out."

**'Fast track' trade bill faces first Senate test**

<http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2015/05/11/fast-track-test-vote-senate/27134255/>

Susan Davis, USA TODAY 5:50 p.m. EDT May 11, 2015

White House spokesman Josh Earnest downplayed questions Monday about whether Obama's disputes with his party could alienate some of the Democrats he needs to advance his agenda through Congress.

"I'm not worried about that at all, and I don't think the president is either," Earnest said. "I think that's why he's been blunt about his views on this topic and why he believes that Democrats should be supportive of a trade agreement that, if reached, would clearly be in the best interests of our economy."

**White House Hits Back at Elizabeth Warren: ‘There’s No Need For This False Criticism’**

<http://www.nationaljournal.com/white-house/white-house-hits-back-at-elizabeth-warren-there-s-no-need-for-this-false-criticism-20150511>

BY PRISCILLA ALVAREZ

A heated dispute between President Obama and Sen. Elizabeth Warren over a proposed trade deal spilled into Monday's daily White House press briefing, with the press secretary inviting Warren to "walk over" to read the negotiated document.

"There's no need for this false criticism that members of Congress aren't aware of what's being negotiated," Earnest said at the briefing.

Earnest fielded questions on the president's response, saying, in reference to Warren being "a politician," that "she's making a political debate."

While Earnest confirmed that the president has been speaking with members of Congress about the TPP, he said he was "not aware of" any conversations with Warren but he wouldn't "rule it out."

**White House escalates war with Elizabeth Warren on trade**

<http://www.washingtonexaminer.com/white-house-escalates-trade-war-with-elizabeth-warren/article/2564311>

BY BRIAN HUGHES | MAY 11, 2015 | 2:29 PM

"There is no need for this false criticism that the members of Congress aren't aware of what is being negotiated," said White House press secretary Josh Earnest.

"If they're not aware of what is being negotiated, it's because they have failed to take the responsibility to read the document."

*Texas Storms*

**Texas, Arkansas tornadoes kill at least 4, shatter homes**

<http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/05/11/us-usa-weather-tornadoes-idUSKBN0NW19T20150511>

BY LISA MARIA GARZA AND STEVE BARNES

White House spokesman Josh Earnest told a press briefing that President Barack Obama is receiving updates on the storm situation.

*Russia*

**Kerry heads to Russia in first visit since Ukraine crisis**

<http://hosted.ap.org/dynamic/stories/U/US_UNITED_STATES_RUSSIA?SITE=AP&SECTION=HOME&TEMPLATE=DEFAULT>

BY MATTHEW LEE May 11, 3:50 PM EDT

White House spokesman Josh Earnest acknowledged the "complicated" relationship between the former foes, but insisted they could cooperate on "interests that benefit the citizens of both our countries."

Full Articles

**Obama’s plans to reassure Gulf allies at risk of unraveling**

<http://hosted.ap.org/dynamic/stories/U/US_OBAMA_ARAB_SUMMIT?SITE=AP&SECTION=HOME&TEMPLATE=DEFAULT>

BY JULIE PACE May 11, 4:52 PM EDT

WASHINGTON (AP) -- President Barack Obama's efforts to reassure anxious Persian Gulf nations about his overtures to Iran are at risk of unraveling even before a rare Camp David summit begins this week.

Just two other heads of state will join Obama for Thursday's meetings at the presidential retreat in the Maryland mountains. The rulers of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Oman are skipping the summit and instead sending lower-ranking, yet highly influential representatives.

The absence of Saudi Arabia's newly crowned King Salman has sparked questions about summit's effectiveness. The Saudis are bitter rivals with Iran and among the most outspoken critics of Obama's nuclear detente with Tehran.

Adding to the diplomatic intrigue: Saudi Arabia's announcement Sunday that Salman would not travel to the U.S. came just two days after White House officials said Obama and the king would hold one-on-one talks in Washington ahead of the Camp David meeting.

"The open hand has been turned away," Jon Alterman, senior vice president at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, said of the Saudi decision.

While the White House and Saudi officials deny Salman is snubbing the U.S., the absence of the king and other heads of state does cast a shadow over Obama's summit. For a president who rarely invites world leaders to Camp David and chafes at the choreographed diplomacy of global summits, his invitation to the Gulf leaders was an unusually personal overture and underscored the importance he places on alleviating potential obstacles to an Iran nuclear deal.

The White House insisted there would still be substantive discussions about Obama's pursuit of a nuclear accord, as well as Tehran's meddling in the Middle East, which is perhaps an even greater concern to the Gulf.

"The countries who are participating in the meeting have obviously made decisions about who they believe is best-positioned to represent their countries at the meeting," White House spokesman Josh Earnest said. "We agree that the right people will be attending, and are confident that we will have the right people around the table for discussing and acting on these priorities."

Saudi Foreign Minister Adel al-Jubeir called suggestions of a snub "really off base." He said the king decided to stay in Saudi Arabia to oversee a ceasefire agreement in Yemen, where his country is engaged militarily.

Even before the guest list for the Camp David meeting was finalized, there appeared to be a growing divide between what the Gulf nations are seeking from the U.S. and what Obama is willing to offer. Some Arab nations want a formal, written agreement with Washington that would require the U.S. to come to their defense if they were to come under attack from Iran or another outside actor. The U.S. has a similar arrangement with Japan and South Korea.

But the Gulf leaders appeared all but certain to leave Camp David without that kind of commitment, in part because it would be difficult to get congressional approval.

"They want something that we can't deliver," said Frederic Wehrey, a Gulf security expert at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. He said the Gulf nations would likely have to settle for a verbal and nonbinding commitment from Obama.

Also on the Gulf wish list: weapons sales and more joint military exercises, a renewed call for a coordinated missile defense system, and better cooperation on cybersecurity, maritime and border security. Administration officials say the U.S. will make tangible commitments to boost the region's defenses, with the goal of making countries better equipped to take charge of their own security.

Washington's traditional partners in the Gulf are deeply suspicious of Obama's legacy-building bid to strike a nuclear accord with Iran, a country they see as a destabilizing actor in the region. The U.S., which is negotiating the nuclear deal alongside five other nations, says the Gulf countries would be better off with an agreement that blocks Iran's path to a bomb.

Abdulkhaleq Abdullah, a professor of political science at Emirates University, said Gulf leaders' decision to stay away from the Camp David summit underscores their lack of trust in Obama and his promises.

"There is a fundamental difference between his vision of post-nuclear-deal Iran and their vision," he said.

Health concerns are also believed to have contributed to some Gulf leaders staying in the region.

**Along with Saudi king, most Gulf rulers to skip US summit**

<http://hosted.ap.org/dynamic/stories/M/ML_GULF_US?SITE=AP&SECTION=HOME&TEMPLATE=DEFAULT>

BY ADAM SCHRECK May 11, 1:34 PM EDT

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) -- It is not just the Saudi king who will be skipping the Camp David summit of U.S. and allied Arab leaders. Most Gulf heads of state won't be there.

The absences will put a damper on talks that are designed to reassure key Arab allies, and almost certainly reflect dissatisfaction among leaders of the six-member Gulf Cooperation Council with Washington's handling of Iran and what they expect to get out of the meeting.

Rulers of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Oman never publicly announced they would attend the summit - so officially at least, there was no reversal of plans.

However, White House spokesman Josh Earnest told reporters in Washington on Monday that Saudi King Salman had formally accepted the invitation to meet with President Barack Obama ahead of the summit.

Late on Sunday, Saudi Foreign Minister Adel al-Jubeir announced that newly installed Salman will not be attending. The ostensible reason was because the upcoming summit on Thursday coincides with a humanitarian cease-fire in the conflict in Yemen, where a Saudi-led coalition is fighting Shiite rebels known as Houthis.

Crown Prince Mohammed bin Nayef, who is also interior minister, will lead the Saudi delegation and the king's son, Deputy Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, who is defense minister, will also attend.

Obama had planned to meet Salman one-on-one a day before the gathering of leaders at the presidential retreat but the White House did not take the Saudi king's decision to skip the summit as a sign of any substantial disagreement with the United States.

The king, who took power in January after his brother King Abdullah died, has not traveled abroad since his ascension to the throne.

The tiny island kingdom of Bahrain said separately that its delegation would be headed by the country's crown prince, Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa.

Bahrain, whose leadership has close ties to the Saudis, is an important military ally of the U.S. It is the longstanding host to the Navy's 5th Fleet, which is responsible for operations around the Arabian Peninsula and northern Indian Ocean, and is Washington's main naval counterbalance to Iran.

At the summit, leaders of Gulf nations will be looking for assurances that they have Obama's support at a time when the region feels under siege from Islamic extremists and by Iran's rising influence. The Gulf states worry the nuclear pact taking shape with the U.S., Iran and other nations may embolden Tehran to act more aggressively in the region.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has expressed similar concerns, saying the emerging deal will leave too much of Iran's nuclear infrastructure intact while giving it quick relief from economic sanctions.

Netanyahu has been an outspoken critic of the deal, raising tensions with the White House. U.S. attempts to reassure Israel that the deal will have strong safeguards have done little to ease its concerns. Netanyahu has claimed that moderate Sunni Arab countries see "eye to eye" with Israel on the matter, though he has not elaborated.

Abdulkhaleq Abdullah, a professor of political science at Emirates University, said Gulf leaders were staying away from the Camp David gathering to signal their displeasure over the nuclear talks.

"I don't think they have a deep respect, a deep trust for Obama and his promises. There is a fundamental difference between his vision of post-nuclear-deal Iran and their vision," he said. "They think Iran is a destabilizing force and will remain so, probably even more, if the sanctions are lifted. ... They're just not seeing things eye to eye."

The sultan of Oman, Qaboos bin Said, is among those staying away. The sultanate will be represented instead by the deputy prime minister, Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmoud Al Said, and other officials, the country's official news agency announced.

The sultan's absence comes as little surprise. The long-serving monarch, whose country maintains cordial relations with Iran and has served as a go-between for Tehran and Washington, returned home in March after spending several months in Germany being treated for an undisclosed illness.

Health issues will also keep the president of the United Arab Emirates, Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan, from attending. He suffered a stroke in January last year and has not been seen publicly since.

The influential Abu Dhabi crown prince, Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, will lead the Emirati delegation. The president's half-brother, he held talks with Obama at the White House last month.

Abdullah, the Emirati professor, said the Gulf ties with the United States remain strong, but they have been strained during Obama's tenure.

He said Obama is seen within the region as impersonal compared to his predecessors. He also noted that recent comments to The New York Times in which Obama warned that dissatisfaction at home was perhaps a bigger threat than Iran came across as unnecessary "lecturing."

"You just pre-empted the whole meeting with this kind of statement," he said.

Among those who will be at the summit is the Kuwaiti emir, Sabah Al Ahmad Al Sabah. He arrived at Andrews Air Force Base on Monday, the official Kuwait News Agency reported.

Also, Qatar's emir, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, is scheduled to depart Monday to take part in the meeting.

**White House: What Saudi snub?**

<http://thehill.com/blogs/blog-briefing-room/news/241643-white-house-what-saudi-snub>

By Jordan Fabian May 11, 2015, 03:28 pm

The White House on Monday downplayed the appearance of a rift with Saudi Arabia, after the country’s king pulled out of a summit with President Obama and leaders of Persian Gulf nations.

"There has been some speculation that this change in travel plans was an attempt to send a message to the United States," White House press secretary Josh Earnest said Monday. "If so, that message was not received because all the feedback we have received from the Saudis has been positive.”

King Salman of Saudi Arabia originally accepted an invitation to meet with Obama at the White House this week and attend a summit at Camp David on Thursday with other Gulf Cooperation Council nations.

But, amid Saudi concerns about the United States’ overtures toward Iran, Saudi Arabia announced it would instead send Crown Prince Mohammed bin Nayef, the interior minister, and Deputy Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, the defense minister.

Salman had previously confirmed his attendance, Earnest said, but his sudden absence is "unrelated to the agenda that is planned for Camp David.”

Obama and Salman spoke by phone Monday, the White House said.

Four of the six monarchs from the states invited to Camp David will not attend the summit, with lower-ranking officials participating instead. That raised concerns the gathering would do little to reassure allies in the Persian Gulf, as the U.S. attempts to finish nuclear deal with Iran.

Earnest expressed confidence that the Saudis and other nations would be would be “ably represented” at the summit.

“We agree that the right people will be attending,” he said.

The Saudi government cited a five-day cease-fire in Yemen, where it is fighting Iranian-backed Houthi rebels, and the opening of the King Salman Center for Humanitarian Aid for the leader's decision not to travel to the U.S.

Officials from Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates will attend the summit.

**Saudi king to skip meetings with Obama**

<http://thehill.com/policy/international/241582-saudi-arabian-king-to-skip-meetings-with-obama>

By Jesse Byrnes - 05/11/15 07:50 AM EDT

Saudi Arabia's new leader, King Salman, won't attend meetings with President Obama this week, its state-run news agency announced, amid continued U.S. overtures toward Iran, a regional adversary.

Obama was scheduled to host Salman and leaders of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), including Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, at the White House on Wednesday, as well as Thursday at Camp David.

White House deputy press secretary Eric Schultz said as recently as Friday that the Saudi Arabian monarch and Obama would meet "to build on their close consultations on a wide range of regional and bilateral issues."

On Sunday, the state-run Saudi Press Agency announced that the king would instead be sending Crown Prince Mohammed bin Nayef, the Saudi interior minister, and Deputy Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, the defense minister, according to The New York Times.

The Saudi Press Agency said the summit overlaps with a five-day cease-fire in Yemen intended for delivery of humanitarian aid. Saudi Arabia and Iran are seen as fighting a proxy war in Yemen, with Iran helping supply the Houthi rebels there.

The White House tried to downplay any notion that the Saudis were sending a message about the Iran nuclear talks by dispatching the king's deputies to meet with Obama.

Press secretary Josh Earnest told reporters Monday that the White House does not view King Salman's absence as a snub.

"All the feedback we have received from the Saudis has been positive," he said.

Salman had previously confirmed his attendance, Earnest said, but his sudden absence is "unrelated to the agenda that is planned for Camp David.”

Earnest expressed confidence "the right people will be attending" the summit to discuss greater security cooperation between the U.S. and its Gulf allies.

He said Obama could speak with King Salman ahead of the summit, as soon as today.

Salman is expected to call Obama on Monday to discuss the decision to not attend the meetings, a senior administration official told the Times, adding there was "no expression of disappointment" from the Saudis.

The development comes as the U.S. continues to move with five other world leaders to secure a deal with Tehran over its nuclear program by June 30.

Secretary of State John Kerry met Friday in Paris with counterparts from the Arab allies invited to the summit, and said, "we are fleshing out a series of new commitments that will create, between the United States and the GCC, a new security understanding, a new set of security initiatives, that will take us beyond anything that we have had before in ways that will ask our partners to work with us, and they will contribute and we will contribute."

"It is not a one-way street. It is a two-way street with mutual interests and mutual needs that need to be addressed," Kerry added.

Salman assumed power earlier this year following the death of King Abdullah. Obama traveled to Saudi Arabia earlier this year to pay respects.

**A Saudi snub?**

<http://www.politico.com/story/2015/05/saudi-king-salman-to-skip-obamas-camp-david-summit-117801.html>

By NAHAL TOOSI and MICHAEL CROWLEY 5/10/15 7:29 PM EDT Updated 5/11/15 1:56 PM EDT

Call it the “Saudi snub.” Or, if you are the White House, don’t.

As word spread that the king of Saudi Arabia had decided to skip a summit of Arab states at Camp David this week, the White House raced to push back on the idea that any ill will was involved. Obama administration officials insisted the relatively new monarch has had no tension with U.S. government leaders, and that he was merely preoccupied with his country’s military engagement in Yemen.

Story Continued Below

“There’s been no concern raised by our Saudi partners, either before the change in travel plans or after, related to the agenda at Camp David,” White House spokesman Josh Earnest said. “All the feedback that we’ve received so far from the Saudis has been positive.”

Still, the optics don’t help, and Republican hawks such as Sen. John McCain were quick to cast Saudi King Salman’s stay-away as a lack of confidence in Obama’s agenda.

The summit includes all members of the Gulf Cooperation Council, but the Saudis are the heavyweights in that group and a central goal of the meeting is to comfort the oil-rich, longtime U.S. ally over concerns about Iran’s rise in the Middle East.

Secretary of State John Kerry met with Salman in the Saudi capital last week. A senior administration official said the Saudis made no promise to Kerry that the king would attend the summit. But the White House went ahead and announced last week that President Barack Obama would hold a special meeting with Salman just ahead of the summit, making the news he won’t attend all the more surprising.

Saudi Arabia and other Arab countries invited to the summit are hoping for U.S. security guarantees, perhaps a written pact, in light of the ongoing nuclear talks between the U.S. and its partner countries and Iran. But it’s unclear how much the U.S. is willing to offer, however, especially considering the volatility of the Middle East.

The Saudis announced Sunday that the king had asked his crown prince and deputy crown prince to lead the country’s delegation to Washington. Saudi Foreign Minister Adel Al-Jubeir said the king had decided not to attend in part because of plans to start a five-day humanitarian cease-fire in Yemen, where a Saudi air campaign has been targeting rebels allegedly backed by Iran. Another reason was that the summit coincides with the opening of a humanitarian aid center named after the king.

Analysts and others watching the proceedings suggested that at the very least there were some communication failures between the Obama team and Salman’s crew. Still, a number of them agreed that Salman’s decision not to come isn’t necessarily a surprise.

The king, who took power in January, is 79 years old and rumored to have health problems, so a long overseas trip may not be ideal. He is sending the two people with probably the most power other than himself to the event: The crown prince, Mohammed bin Nayef, and deputy crown prince Mohammed bin Salman, run the interior and defense ministries, respectively, and the talks may focus on technical issues they are far more familiar with.

“I don’t see it as much of a snub as perhaps some of you,” said Frederic Wehrey, an expert on Gulf Arab states with the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, during a session with reporters Monday. “They probably thought it was a little bit of, you know sending a little bit a signal, but I don’t think it’s a catastrophic dismissal of Obama.”

Salman is not the only head of state sending a substitute. The Omani and United Arab Emirates rulers are not coming themselves due to health problems. There also were reports that the ruler of Bahrain would not attend the gathering, which kicks off with a dinner at the White House on Wednesday ahead of meetings at Camp David on Thursday. The rulers of Qatar and Kuwait were expected to attend.

“It’s an indicator of the lack of confidence that the Saudis and others have,” McCain, of Arizona, told MSNBC. “They do not see a way to … be satisfied with the situation when it’s clear that Iranian nuclear deal is the No. 1 priority and this administration feels that they can somehow make agreements with Iran throughout the region when these countries view Iran as a direct threat.”

Another senior Obama administration official said the White House first learned Friday night that the king might stay away, and that Saudis confirmed it Saturday.

“We coordinated closely with our Saudi partners on the alternate arrangement and timing of the announcement, and look forward to welcoming Crown Prince Mohammed bin Nayef and Deputy Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman,” the official said, insisting that the king’s decision is “not in response to any substantive issue.”

It was not immediately clear if Obama would still hold a pre-summit meeting with the king’s heirs.

**Obama to meet with Persian Gulf leaders (some of them)**

<http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2015/05/11/obama-gulf-cooperation-council-bahrain-kuwait-oman-qatar-saudi-arabia-the-united-arab-emirates/27129131/>

David Jackson, USA TODAY 5:33 p.m. EDT May 11, 2015

WASHINGTON — President Obama spoke with Saudi Arabia King Salman on Monday, a day after the new monarch pulled out of a summit featuring Persian Gulf allies who are nervous about developments in Iran.

The call amid questions as just to how high level this week's summit with Obama and the Gulf Cooperation Council really is.

Only two of the six nations that make up the council are sending their top leaders: The emirs of Kuwait and Qatar.

The other invited nations — Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Oman, and the United Arab Emirates — are sending high-ranking deputies to the meeting called in response to concerns about the proposed nuclear deal involving the United States and Iran. Some Arab nations are also worried about what they call Iranian aggression in the Middle East.

Obama administration officials said summit participants are sending the officials who are most involved in the regional defense and counter-terrorism issues that are on the agenda for meetings Wednesday and Thursday.

"We feel like we have the exact right people around the table," said Ben Rhodes, deputy national security adviser for strategic communications.

Saudi Foreign Minister Adel al-Jubeir dismissed reports that Salman was snubbing the summit, calling the reports "really off base."

The foreign minister said his country's relationship with the United States remains solid. "We have no doubt whatsoever about America's commitment to the security of Saudi Arabia," he said.

Obama and the Persian Gulf officials are also expected to discuss the prospects of increased U.S. arms sales and intelligence gathering to combat rising terrorist threats, including cyber-terrorism.

Other likely topics include the fight against the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, the civil war in Syria, and the violence in Yemen.

It is "a critical moment in the history of the Middle East," Rhodes said.

Saudi Arabia cited Yemen as a reason in announcing that 79-year-old King Salman — once on the White House schedule — will not attend the summit. He will be represented instead by the crown prince, Muhammad bin Nayef.

In a statement, the Saudi government said the summit coincides with a cease-fire in the battle between a Saudi-led coalition and rebel forces it says are backed by Iran.

Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., said the king's absence reflects "a lack of confidence" by the Saudis and others in the region have in the Obama administration, especially in light of its talks with Iran.

"This administration feels that they can some how make agreements with Iran throughout the region when these countries view Iran as a direct threat," McCain said on MSNBC's Andrea Mitchell Reports.

Obama first meets with members of the Gulf Cooperation Council a White House dinner on Wednesday evening. They will continue their discussions Thursday at Camp David.

White House spokesman Josh Earnest said officials are confident they are meeting with "the right people" for meetings designed "to deepen and modernize the important security relationship" between the United States and Persian Gulf allies.

"The countries who are participating in the meeting have obviously made decisions about who they believe is best-positioned to represent their countries at the meeting," Earnest said.

Earnest noted that one attendee — the crown price of Abu Dhabi, Mohammed bin Zayid — is the UAE's deputy military commander. That makes him the principal point of contact for the kinds of mutual defense issues to be discussed this week, he said.

Obama is also expected to defend the proposed Iranian nuclear deal during his meeting with Arab allies.

The United States, allies, and Iran are working on the final details of an agreement in which the allies would lift sanctions on Iran if it agrees to give up the means to make nuclear weapons.

Some Persian Gulf nations are skeptical that Iran would adhere to such an agreement, while Obama says diplomacy is the best way to insure that Tehran doesn't get nuclear weapons.

**White House: No Saudi concern over Camp David summit agenda**

<http://news.yahoo.com/white-house-no-saudi-concern-over-camp-david-172409814.html>

Reuters 30 minutes ago

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - Saudi Arabia did not raise any concerns about the agenda for an upcoming regional summit hosted by President Barack Obama at Camp David before or after the Saudi king changed plans and decided not to attend, the White House said on Monday.

White House spokesman Josh Earnest said the United States was confident that the Saudi officials who were coming would be able to represent their country and implement any decisions made during the meetings.

Earnest also said Obama had not spoken to Saudi Arabia's King Salman, but was likely to have an opportunity to do so before the summit.

**What King Salman's Snub Means For Barack Obama**

<http://www.nationaljournal.com/white-house/what-king-salman-s-snub-means-for-barack-obama-20150511>

BY GEORGE E. CONDON JR.

May 11, 2015 You can debate whether Saudi Arabia is intentionally snubbing President Obama by skipping this week's Persian Gulf summit at Camp David. And the White House is aggressively making the case that there is no snub. But you can't debate whether King Salman's decision to stay in Riyadh is a major missed opportunity for Obama.

As recently as Friday, U.S. officials had counted on Saudi Arabia to be represented by King Salman and saw it as a great chance for the president to forge a personal relationship with the newly installed head of the most significant Arab partner in the region. Obama was to hold a one-on-one session with the king on Wednesday, the day before the summit was to convene at Camp David.

And it's hard to debate—even though the White House tried—that his absence, along with those of three other leaders, significantly diminishes a meeting that no longer seems like much of a summit.

White House press secretary Josh Earnest took direct aim at the notion of a snub. "I know there has been some speculation that this change in travel plans was an attempt to send a message to the United States. If so, that message was not received because all the feedback we have gotten has been positive."

Earnest also joked about the widespread reporting that the Saudi decision is a snub, calling that "the word of the day" at his daily briefing.

He also fired back at the contention that the summit is no longer a big deal and has been diminished. "Not in the mind of the president and not in the mind of anybody here," he said, insisting the talks, which will begin with a Wednesday dinner at the White House will be "worthwhile." The goal, he added, "is for each of these countries to further strengthen the important security relationship they have with the United States."

On Thursday night, U.S. officials were confident King Salman would be coming. But that changed Friday when the Saudis sent word of the change of plans. On Saturday, according to U.S. officials, final confirmation was received. "We consulted closely with our Saudi partners on the alternate arrangements and timing of the announcement and look forward to welcoming Crown Prince Mohammed bin Nayef and Deputy Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman," said one official quoted by Fox News.

Earnest said the king's decision is "completely unrelated to the agenda" for the summit. But it is difficult to divorce the decision from the anxiety many of the Gulf countries feel about the U.S.-led negotiations with Iran. All the countries in the Gulf Cooperation Council oppose Iranian efforts to spread its influence across the region and were seeking assurances at this summit of American steadfastness in supporting them.

In a statement issued by the Saudi Press Agency, Foreign Minister Adel al-Jubeir said the king was staying at home because the five-day cease-fire in the Saudi bombing of Houthi rebels in Yemen is scheduled to begin Tuesday night.

Also missing the summit will be the leaders of Bahrain, Oman, and the United Arab Emirates, in most cases for health reasons. Both Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed al Nahyan of the UAE and Sultan Qaboos bin Said of Oman have been ill for some time. Kuwait is sending its crown prince rather than King Hamad bin Isa al-Khalifa. That leaves the president face-to-face at Camp David with only the top leaders of Qatar and Bahrain.

Earnest, who was clearly on the defensive at his daily briefing, insisted the White House is "confident" that "the right people will be attending." He cast the missing leaders as simply the fact that "the countries participating in the meeting have made decisions about who is best positioned to represent them."

For a president who often struggles to build personal ties with other world leaders, the absence of so many is a real blow. The whole point of the gathering was to show "that this is more than just business," said Jon B. Alterman, director of the Middle East program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. "It is meant to generate images of people engaging informally."

It is particularly unfortunate because, as Alterman noted, "King Salman has only just become king, so it's not a long-standing relationship." The king took power Jan. 15.

**King Salman of Saudi Arabia pulls out of US talks on Iran**

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/may/11/king-salman-saudi-arabia-pulls-out-us-talks-iran>

Ian Black Middle East editor, and Dan Roberts in Washington Monday 11 May 2015 13.59 EDT

King Salman of Saudi Arabia has withdrawn from a carefully orchestrated summit with the US that President Barack Obama hoped would assuage Gulf anxieties about the conclusion of a nuclear agreement with Iran.

Until Sunday the monarch had been expected to join other heads of state from the six Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries at an unprecedented meeting at the White House and a day of talks at the presidential retreat at Camp David. Now the only leaders attending will be the emirs of Qatar and Kuwait.

The deal with Iran, Saudi-led attacks on Houthi rebels in neighbouring Yemen, and the crises in Syria and Iraq made for a difficult and crowded agenda.

The summit, scheduled for Wednesday and Thursday, follows months of tension and intensive US diplomacy designed to persuade Riyadh and its neighbours that Washington is not abandoning its Gulf allies in order to normalise relations with Iran.

Salman will be represented instead by the newly appointed Saudi crown prince, Muhammad bin Nayef, the darling of western countries and the first of the younger generation of Saudi royals to look likely to ascend the throne. The king’s son, and Saudi defence minister, Muhammad bin Salman – who is running the campaign of air strikes in Yemen – will also be there.

Salman’s refusal to attend the summit is doubly embarrassing for the White House because, just hours before the news broke, US officials were boasting of how significant his presence was. But officials insisted the last-minute cancellation was “completely unrelated” to the agenda of the meeting and were confident the Gulf delegation remained senior enough for a meaningful summit.

The White House press secretary, Josh Earnest, said on Monday: “I know there has been some speculation that the change in travel plans was an attempt to send a message to the United States. If so, that message has not been received. There has been no concern raised by our Saudi partners, either before the change in travel plans, or after, about the agenda.”

Obama had been expected to make a renewed effort to help the GCC states create a regional defence system to guard against Iranian missiles. The Saudis and others appear to accept that a nuclear agreement is inevitable but are keen to extract guarantees that their interests will not be harmed by it, diplomats say.

“We want to be sure that that it will not affect the GCC,” one senior Gulf official said. “That is the bottom line.” Others described the need for a policy of containing Iran, especially with the lifting of economic sanctions. The Qataris and Saudis – now coordinating closely after ending a long period of estrangement – have also been pushing for enhanced US support for anti-Assad rebels in Syria.

The Saudis and Emiratis in particular emphasise Iran’s role in backing the Houthis, and are deeply concerned about its growing influence in Iraq, Syria and Lebanon, where the Shia militia Hezbollah – fighting openly in support of the Syrian president, Bashar al-Assad – is viewed as a tool of Tehran.

John Kerry, the US secretary of state, referred on Friday to “a series of new commitments that will create, between the US and the GCC, a new security understanding, a new set of security initiatives”.

But the New York Times reported that those with hopes for formal security guarantees would be disappointed, with Obama ready only to issue a “presidential statement” because of the need for congressional approval and the administration’s commitment to maintain Israel’s strategic edge over any Arab state.

“There isn’t substance for the summit,” an Arab official who has held discussions with the Obama administration in recent days told the Wall Street Journal. Lining up for a photo-op would not be enough, another senior figure said.

Arab commentators have emphasised the symbolic nature of the event – especially its intimate Camp David location. But as analyst Hisham Melhem observed: “It’s not symbolism that the GCC leaders are concerned with, rather it’s the nightmarish reality of the unraveling of a century-old political order and the fraying of a large swath of Arab lands around them, as well as an ascendant (and in most of their minds belligerent) Iran, trying to ensure its regional hegemony by projecting its power, sometimes directly but mostly by proxy, to build an alternative, if still vague, political scaffolding on the rubble of the dying order.”

Washington’s foreign policy community put a brave face on the changed political dynamics of the summit. “I don’t see it as as much of a snub as some do,” said Frederic Wehrey of the Carnegie thinktank. “It it really a divorce? I don’t think so. They probably thought it was sending a little bit of a signal but I don’t think it was this catastrophic dismissal of Obama.”

Privately, others speculated on alternative reasons for the last-minute change of royal heart. “The guy [King Salman] is sick, he cannot carry on a conversation for a very long time,” said one former diplomat. “They are sending their two top people. They are the people running the country anyway. You would want them to be there, frankly, not him.”

**Saudi King Won't Attend Camp David Summit**

<http://www.npr.org/blogs/thetwo-way/2015/05/11/405866876/saudi-king-wont-attend-camp-david-summit>

MAY 11, 2015 8:19 AM ET EYDER PERALTA

The kings of Saudi Arabia and Bahrain have dropped out of a White House summit planned at Camp David on Thursday.

NPR's Peter Kenyon reports that the kingdoms will send deputies instead. Peter filed this report for our Newscast unit:

"U.S. officials say there was no snub intended by Saudi King Salman's decision to skip the summit, which was to include a private meeting with President Obama.

"A statement by the Saudi foreign minister cited conflicts, including a proposed five-day cease-fire in Yemen, where a Saudi-led coalition is carrying out airstrikes against Iranian-backed Houthi rebels.

"The heads of Bahran, the United Arab Emirates and Oman will also miss the gathering, where Arab leaders will be looking for security guarantees from the Obama administration and a pledge to curtail Iran's regional ambitions.

"A day ahead of the proposed cease-fire, heavy fighting continues in Yemen, with aid groups saying tens of thousands of civilians are fleeing the Houthi stronghold of Saada in northern Yemen. "

The New York Times cites a senior Obama administration official saying King Salman is expected to explain his decision during a call with Obama.

The Times adds:

"The official said that when the king met Secretary of State John Kerry in Riyadh last week, he indicated that he was looking forward to coming to the meeting. But on Friday night, after the White House put out a statement saying Mr. Obama would be meeting with King Salman in Washington, administration officials received a call from the Saudi foreign minister that the king would not be coming after all.

"There was 'no expression of disappointment' from the Saudis, said the official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to speak publicly. 'If one wants to snub you, they let you know it in different ways,' the official said.

"Jon Alterman, senior vice president at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, said King Salman's absence was both a blessing and a snub. 'It holds within it a hidden opportunity,' he said, 'because senior U.S. officials will have an unusual opportunity to take the measure of Mohammed bin Salman, the very young Saudi defense minister and deputy crown prince, with whom few have any experience.'"

Update at 1:27 p.m. ET. Not A Snub:

During his daily press briefing, White House Press Secretary Josh Earnest said the White House was not taking Saudi King Salman's decision as a snub.

He said that if the schedule change was intended to send a message to the White House, the "message was not received."

**Rulers of most Gulf nations to miss US summit, administration denies 'snub'**

<http://www.foxnews.com/politics/2015/05/11/saudi-king-salman-to-miss-gulf-nation-summit-in-us/>

Published May 11, 2015FoxNews.com

The White House was scrambling Monday to put a positive face on an upcoming summit of Persian Gulf states after learning leaders from four of the six invited nations are expected to skip.

While those nations are still sending representatives to the summit being hosted by President Obama later this week at Camp David, the absence of crucial heads of state -- notably, Saudi Arabia's new king -- could present an awkward situation for the administration. But State Department spokeswoman Marie Harf rejected the notion this was a "snub," and White House Press Secretary Josh Earnest likewise said the administration is "confident" that Saudi Arabia and other nations will be "ably represented" at the summit.

Earnest confirmed Monday that Saudi King Salman would no longer attend, noting the king originally had accepted the invitation. But Earnest stressed that Saudi Arabia did not express any concerns to the U.S. before or after the Saudi king's change in travel plans.

Earnest said the feedback the U.S. has had from Saudi Arabia has been "positive," and as for speculation that Riyadh might have been trying to send a message to the Obama administration with the change, Earnest said: "If so, that message is not received."

Saudi Arabia cited the situation in Yemen for the change.

In a statement Sunday, Saudi Foreign Minister Adel al-Jubeir said Thursday's summit coincides with a humanitarian cease-fire in Yemen, where a Saudi-led coalition is fighting Shiite rebels known as Houthis. He said Crown Prince Mohammed bin Nayef, who is also interior minister, would lead the Saudi delegation and the king's son, Deputy Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, who is defense minister, will also attend -- and the king would not.

Obama had apparently planned to meet Saudi Arabia's King Salman one-on-one a day before the gathering of leaders at the presidential retreat. The White House, though, did not present his decision to skip the summit as a sign of any substantial disagreement with the U.S.

"We first learned of the King's possible change of plans from Saudis on Friday night," a senior U.S. administration official told Fox News. "This was confirmed by the Saudis on Saturday. We coordinated closely with our Saudi partners on the alternate arrangement and timing of the announcement and look forward to welcoming Crown Prince Mohammed bin Nayef and Deputy Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. This is not in response to any substantive issue."

A source familiar with the Saudi delegation's thinking also pushed back on the notion this may be a snub to the administration. The source, further, told Fox News the delegation never announced the king would attend or have a one-on-one meeting with Obama -- though the administration has suggested otherwise.

King Salman, who took power in January after his brother King Abdullah died, has not traveled abroad since his ascension to the throne.

The tiny island kingdom of Bahrain said separately Sunday that its delegation would be headed by the country's crown prince, Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa. Bahrain, whose leadership has close ties to the Saudis, is an important military ally of the U.S. It is the longstanding host to the Navy's 5th Fleet, which is responsible for operations around the Arabian Peninsula and northern Indian Ocean, and is Washington's main naval counterbalance to Iran.

Abdulkhaleq Abdullah, a professor of political science at Emirates University, told the Associated Press Gulf leaders were staying away to signal their displeasure over the nuclear talks.

"I don't think they have a deep respect, a deep trust for Obama and his promises. There is a fundamental difference between his vision of post-nuclear-deal Iran and their vision," he said. "They think Iran is a destabilizing force and will remain so, probably even more, if the sanctions are lifted. ... They're just not seeing things eye to eye."

The sultan of Oman, Qaboos bin Said, is also among those staying away. The sultanate will be represented instead by the deputy prime minister, Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmoud Al Said, and other officials, the country's official news agency announced.

The sultan's absence comes as little surprise. The long-serving monarch, whose country maintains cordial relations with Iran and has served as a go-between for Tehran and Washington, returned home in March after spending several months in Germany being treated for an undisclosed illness.

Health issues are also expected to keep the president of the United Arab Emirates, Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan, from attending. He suffered a stroke in January last year and has not been seen publicly since.

Crown Prince Sheik Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the president's half-brother, held talks with Obama at the White House last month and is expected to lead the Emirati delegation.

At the summit, leaders of Gulf nations will be looking for assurance that Obama has their support when the region feels under siege from Islamic extremists and Syria, Iraq and Yemen are in various states of chaos. Arab allies also feel threatened by Iran's rising influence and worry the nuclear pact taking shape with the U.S., Iran and other nations may embolden Tehran to intrude more aggressively in countries of the region.

"I think we are looking for some form of security guarantee, given the behavior of Iran in the region, given the rise of the extremist threat," Yousef al-Otaiba, the United Arab Emirates' ambassador to the United States, told the Associated Press. "In the past, we have survived with a gentleman's agreement with the United States about security. I think today, we need something in writing. We need something institutionalized."

What are the expectations for Obama's meetings with Gulf Cooperation Council countries — Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain and Oman?

Weapons sales. A renewed call for a coordinated missile defense system. More joint military exercises. Better cooperation on cybersecurity, as well as maritime or border security. Making the countries' defense systems work in concert.

"I don't believe there's a single country (in the council) that doesn't think a defense shield for the region is a bad idea," Otaiba said. "The challenge is how do you turn on a regional defense system when different countries are purchasing different equipment and at different paces? How do you link it? How do you get the radars to talk to each other?"

A high-level Saudi official told The Associated Press in Riyadh that his country wants a defense system and military cooperation similar to what the U.S. affords Israel. The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity because he wasn't authorized to disclose details of the Saudis' wish list at the summit, said they also want access to high-tech military equipment, missiles, planes and satellites, as well as more technology and training cooperation with the U.S.

The U.S. and five other nations are working to complete a deal intended to stop Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons in exchange for easing penalties that are choking the Iranian economy. The White House says the Gulf countries would be better off with an agreement that blocks Iran's path to an atomic weapon.

Arab allies feel threatened by Iran's rising influence and they fear a nuclear pact will embolden Tehran. They worry that the deal would unlock billions of dollars that Iran might decide to use to further intrude in countries or support terrorist proxies.

Sen. John McCain, chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, said Obama will have to work hard to convince the Arab allies that they do not need to fear fallout from any nuclear deal.

"Right now they feel that they have no support from this administration so he has a steep hill to climb," said McCain, pointing to Saudi Arabia's decision to act unilaterally in Yemen.

McCain said that's why the Saudis gave Gen. Lloyd Austin, head of the U.S. Central Command, only "an hour's notice they were going to strike Yemen." Saudi Arabia has led airstrikes against Iranian-backed rebels who have toppled the Yemeni government.

Secretary of State John Kerry declines to say exactly what kind of reassurances Obama is prepared to offer at Camp David.

In general terms, Kerry said Friday in Paris, the U.S. wants to strengthen its "security-military relationship" with its Gulf allies and tackle a variety of problems, "foremost of which is the Iranian interference in the affairs of the countries of the region."

He said U.S. officials were fleshing out commitments that will create a "new security understanding, a new set of security initiatives."

Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., chairman of the Senate panel overseeing foreign aid, warns against the U.S. offering a massive arms package in exchange for Gulf nations' support of a nuclear deal. Graham said he isn't opposed to upgrading the military capabilities of Arab allies, but "if it has a hint of being connected to the Iran deal, I will do everything I can to make sure they never get one bullet or one plane."

Jon Alterman at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington wonders if there is anything the United States can do that would reassure the Gulf states when it comes to Iranian expansionism.

"It seems to me that where they most want reassurance is where the U.S. is both least able and most unwilling to provide it," he said. "My guess is that the summit is going to leave everybody feeling a little bit unsatisfied."

**WH: Saudi king's decision to skip summit not a snub**

<http://www.washingtonexaminer.com/wh-saudi-kings-decision-to-skip-summit-not-a-snub/article/2564308>

BY SUSAN CRABTREE | MAY 11, 2015 | 2:02 PM

The White House is downplaying any intrigue over Saudi Arabia's announcement that its new monarch, King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, would not be attending meetings at the White House with President Obama or a summit at Camp David this week.

"There has been some speculation that this change in travel plans was an attempt to send a message to the United States," White House press secretary Josh Earnest told reporters Monday. "If so, that message was not received."

All of the messages that U.S. diplomats have heard from the Saudis in recent days and weeks has been positive, Earnest stressed, and public statements from Saudi officials over the weekend indicate no animus behind the decision for the king to forego the trip.

"We're confident we will have the right people around the table to attend the meetings at Camp David," he added. "I would refer you to [the king's] office for more information about his change in travel plans."

Saudi Arabia on Sunday announced that King Salman would not be traveling to Washington this week, and the New York Times reported that his absence is an apparent signal of its continued displeasure with the administration over United States relations with Iran.

Instead, the state-run Saudi Press Agency, announced that the king planned to send Crown Prince Mohammed bin Nayef, the Saudi interior minister, and Deputy Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, the defense minister. The agency said the Camp David meeting overlaps with a five-day cease fire with Yemen to allow for shipments of humanitarian aid, the country's immediate national security focus right now.

The White House, as recently as Friday, had planned on King Salman participating in the meeting.

In addition to the crown prince, the White House on Monday said Saudi Arabia plans to send the king's son and the country's defense minister, deputy Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman to the Camp David talks.

"Saudi Arabia will be well-represented at the meeting," Earnest said. "... Having the crown prince and the deputy crown prince, both of whom have leadership responsibilities for Saudi Arabia, gives us confidence that we have the right people at the table.

**Saudi king not snubbing Obama, White House says**

<http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2015/may/11/gulf-leaders-skip-obamas-camp-david-summit/>

By Dave Boyer - The Washington Times - Updated: 1:21 p.m. on Monday, May 11, 2015

The White House rejected the suggestion Monday that the king of Saudi Arabia is snubbing President Obama by canceling plans to attend a summit of Gulf state leaders at Camp David this week.

While foreign-policy analysts are calling the upcoming summit a “diplomatic disaster” for Mr. Obama, White House press secretary Josh Earnest said the withdrawal of newly installed Saudi King Salman from the talks is not being perceived by the administration as a snub.

“If so, that message was not received,” Mr. Earnest said. “There’s been no concern raised by our Saudi partners, either before the change in travel plans or after.”

He said other key members of the Saudi ruling family will attend the meeting on Thursday, which he said “gives us confidence that we’ll be able to have a robust discussion” about security issues in the Persian Gulf region.

Four of the six rulers of the participating states in the Gulf Cooperation Council are skipping the event, which some view as a message about their dissatisfaction with the administration’s nuclear talks with Iran.

“President Obama had hoped to reassure Gulf leaders about his intentions and, of course, Iran’s,” said Danielle Pletka, an analyst on Middle East security issues at the American Enterprise Institute. “Instead, he has yet another diplomatic and political disaster on his hands.”

**White House summit is no summit: 4 of 6 countries not sending top leaders**

<http://www.mcclatchydc.com/2015/05/11/266281/white-house-summit-is-no-summit.html>

BY ANITA KUMAR McClatchy Washington BureauMay 11, 2015 Updated 2 minutes ago

WASHINGTON — The White House Monday defended the importance of a meeting this week between the United States and Arab countries at Camp David after the king of Saudi Arabia backed out at the last minute.

King Salman had officially accepted the White House invitation, but on late Friday the U.S. learned that Saudi Arabia, a key ally, planned to send lower-level emissaries instead.

“I know there had been some speculation that this change in travel plans was an attempt to sent a message to the United States,” White House Press Secretary Josh Earnest said. “If so, that message was not received, because all the feedback that we’ve received from the Saudis has been positive.”

Still, some say the change in plans was meant to signal displeasure with President Barack Obama over a nuclear deal between six world powers and Iran. Tehran and Riyadh are bitter rivals in the region.

“It certainly doesn’t look good,” said Simon Henderson, who studies the Gulf countries at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. “It looks as if they are snubbing and I think they are snubbing.”

Obama and representatives of the so-called Gulf Cooperation Council will meet Thursday to discuss a series of issues, including combating the Islamic State, the troublesome situations in Syria, Iraq and Yemen, and the deal struck by the U.S. and five other nations to limit Iran’s nuclear program. They will attend a dinner Wednesday at the White House.

Though the meeting is being billed as a summit – a meeting of top leaders – only two of the six Gulf counties will send their leaders, Qatar and Bahrain.

Two of the six nations – the United Arab Emirates and Oman – already had been expected to send others in their place because of health reasons. The UAE’s Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed al Nahyan is sending Crown Prince Mohamed bin Zayed, and Oman’s Sultan Qaboos bin Said is sending the deputy prime minister.

Separately, Bahrain also said Sunday that it would send its crown prince, Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa.

“We very much feel we have the right group of people around the table,” said Ben Rhodes, the White House deputy national security adviser.

The White House until Friday had expected King Salman to attend. Just last week, Secretary of State John Kerry met with Saudi officials, including Salman, in Riyadh and Paris.

Salman, 79, took the throne upon the death of his half-brother, King Abdullah, in January, and within hours people were speculating he was in ill health.

Saudi Arabia announced Sunday in the state-run Saudi Press Agency that the king would send Crown Prince Mohammed bin Nayef, the interior minister, and Deputy Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, the defense minister. It said the king had decided to stay in Saudi Arabia to oversee the five-day cease-fire in the bombing campaign against rebels in Yemen, which begins Tuesday.

Obama and Salman spoke by phone Monday. Earnest referred questions about why the king changes his plans to Saudi officials.

At the State Department, spokeswoman Marie Harf told reporters that U.S. officials learned of the Saudis’ decisions late on Friday; counterparts in Riyadh confirmed it Saturday. Harf insisted that the Obama administration didn’t consider the move an insult – “nothing could be further from the truth.”

Harf dismissed the reports of chilly relations between the United States and Saudi Arabia. She said that Kerry had enjoyed good talks with Salman and other Saudi officials during his recent trip to Riyadh.

“We believe the right mix of people will be there,” Harf said.

The Gulf countries remain apprehensive about the nuclear deal between Iran and six world powers that would curb Iran’s ability to build nuclear weapons in exchange for the lifting of sanctions.

The Obama administration says the countries would benefit if Iran is prevented from ever obtaining a nuclear weapon, as Obama says. But leaders of the nations worry that Iran’s influence in the region would grow after the sanctions are lifted. Saudi Arabia has expressed the most concern.

The Obama administration has not indicated what assurances the U.S. may offer, and experts say it’s unclear if any specific and concrete results would be agreed upon.

Anthony Cordesman, a military analyst with the Center for Strategic and International Studies, said it’s unclear why heads of states were expected to attend a meeting not expected to produce significant results.

“Why should the king have come?” he said.

**1:53 PM ET: Bloomberg Markets**

<http://mms.tveyes.com/PlaybackPortal.aspx?SavedEditID=00c03549-f649-46b0-9cc5-cbaad4d4de57>

Briefing Clip on GCC Meetings

MARK CRUMPTON: later this week, president obama host leaders to talk about iran and the nuclear deal, but one critical player is skipping the meeting. the saudi arabia and king has decided to stay home. washington correspondent peter cook joins me with more on this story. eater, i guess the first question is, is this a snob?

PETER COOK: well, the white house is going out of their way to say this is not a snob, but you have to look at the timeline. not only was the king willing to participate in this gulf leaders coming to camp david this coming week, but he was also planning to have a personal meeting with the president ahead of the meeting. now that is off. he is staying and saudi arabia. the public reason is that it conflicts with the humanitarian cease-fire that is going to be triggered in yemen, and at the white house, they say the president himself is not disappointed with that. here is josh earnest.

(CLIP BEGINS)

JOSH EARNEST: so it is in the interest of the countries to send senior members of the national security team who can represent the views of their country and a sure they can live up to any commitments they make in the context of the meeting, and based on the list of attendees we have seen so far, we are confident.

(CLIP ENDS)

COOK: despite will be heard from josh earnest, others today, it is pretty clear, mark, that this does expose some tensions between the u.s. and saudi arabia, a longtime ally, with the, administration and what is happening with iran. they are concerned that the u.s. with iran could in the and risk their own stability, and that is just one of the tensions. there are some questions about what exactly plays out at this meeting with not only him but some other gulf leaders choosing to skip it, as well.

CRUMPTON: those other gulf leaders, what do they want out of this meeting?

COOK: they want to make sure the u.s. maintains its pledge to basically stand by their side, and the question whether or not that is going to happen if the u.s. improved its relationship with iran. they were looking for, among other things, for a defense treaty. that is unlikely to happen. they want assurances that the u.s. is ready to stand by their side in the event of instability in the future. they have not yet gotten those assurances. now, there'll be some others in the room, but not the king.

CRUMPTON: washington correspondent peter cook joining us there. peter, thank you.

**3:07 PM ET: Fox News Shepard Smith Reporting**

<http://mms.tveyes.com/PlaybackPortal.aspx?SavedEditID=a12772c0-e171-4861-9ff8-08b9fc70f170>

Briefing Clip

EARNEST: I think we have identified the word of the day in the briefing today. We continue to be confident that these are individuals who can represent the interests of their country, and implement any commitments that they make in the context of this meeting.

**6:06 PM ET: CNN**

<http://mms.tveyes.com/PlaybackPortal.aspx?SavedEditID=18738808-41d0-4027-83e8-19326f7e9f53>

Briefing Clip On King Salman – Arab Summit

WOLF BLITZER: we’re following other breaking news. a phone call from president obama to the saudi king, who suddenly pulled out of a white house summit of persian gulf leaders this week. some see the move by the king as a snub of president obama over the nuclear deal in the works with iran. let's go to jim acosta. what's the latest you're hearing?

JIM ACOSTA: aides to the president are straining to push back on this notion that this is some kind of a snub. they note if two spoke earlier by phone today, just days after the saudi mornnonark. officials confirmed the king was coming, but then the saudis pulled out, the king pulled out, and will be represented by the crown prince instead and the king's son. the saudis say the king's absence is due to the timing of the summit and the opening of something called the king solomon center for humanitarian aid. but bahrain's king also announced he won't be attending. that is not the summit the president envioned, as he's trying to's concerns who are far from convinced that the nuclear deal will stop tehran from obtaining nuclear weapons. here is what he had to say.

(CLIP BEGINS)

JOSH EARNEST: some speculation that this -- the change in travel plans was an attempt to send a message to the united states. if so, that message was not received, because all the feedback that we received from the saudis have been positive.

(CLIP ENDS)

JIM ACOSTA: administration officials say privately they do believe the king's health is a factor in his last-minute decision to pull out of the summit. but the saudi foreign minister, wolf, he's denying that. either way the white house says the president is not disappointed in his guest list for camp david, adding the right people are attending. and just in a conference call that wrapped up here at the white house, one top official here said that they have not picked up a hint of disappointment in the saudis about what is happening with respect to the president's so they're pushing back hard on this notion that this was any kind of a snub.

**6:16 PM ET: Fox News**

<http://mms.tveyes.com/PlaybackPortal.aspx?SavedEditID=2691f5d4-493a-4ace-babd-bec7a31ff900>

Briefing Clip On King Salman – Arab Summit

BRET BAIER: six invites but just two gulf leaders have rsvp for the summit of persian gulf states. what has all of them staying away. kevin corke is joining us.

KEVIN CORKE: from the white house to the state department, it was the elephant in the room. was it a snub or wasn't it? >> i think we've identified the word of the day in the briefing today. despite strong push back from the administration, questions abound about why king salman will not attend the summit meeting at camp david. this comes after a meeting with secretary of state john kerry on thursday in riyad in which both talk about the crisis of yemen.

(CLIP BEGINS)

JOSH EARNEST: there has been a speculation that this is a message being sent to the united states. if tho so, that message was not received because of all of the feedback that we've received from the saudis have been positive. >>

(CLIP ENDS)

KEVIN CORKE: state department officials say it's the cease-fire. >> given what is going on in yemen, the start of the cease-fire, hopefully, if the houthis agree to it, the king made the decision. reporter: the fact that leaders from four of the six invited expected to skip underscores a widening division between the administration and kuwait, bahrain, qatar and uae and saudi arabia and oman. what is not on that list is iran that has the partners concerned. saudi arabia in particular h been sharply critical of the white house effort to curb tehran's nuclear capacity in exchange for lifting international sanctions. that's the real reason they are passing up thursday's meeting in maryland.

**White House calls bin Laden article 'outright falsehoods'**

<http://hosted.ap.org/dynamic/stories/U/US_WHITE_HOUSE_BIN_LADEN?SITE=AP&SECTION=HOME&TEMPLATE=DEFAULT>

May 11, 2:19 PM EDT

WASHINGTON (AP) -- The White House is dismissing as untrue an article alleging that President Barack Obama misled the public about how the U.S. killed Osama bin Laden.

Spokesman Josh Earnest says journalist Seymour Hersh's piece in the London Review of Books is "riddled with inaccuracies and outright falsehoods."

Earnest noted former CIA deputy director Michael Morell's reaction to the article - that he stopped reading because every sentence was wrong.

Hersh attributes his information to a retired general of the Pakistani intelligence service and several unidentified sources in the U.S. and Pakistan. He says bin Laden was secretly kept as a prisoner by the Pakistanis and that they helped the U.S. stage the raid on his compound.

The Obama administration says the Pakistanis didn't know about the raid in advance.

**White House dismisses bin Laden hoax claims**

<http://www.politico.com/story/2015/05/seymour-hersh-osama-bin-laden-story-white-house-reaction-117823.html>

By SARAH WHEATON 5/11/15 2:58 PM EDT

The White House on Monday rejected assertions by a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist that President Barack Obama lied about the killing of Osama bin Laden.

A 10,000-word report by Seymour Hersh published in the London Review of Books online on Sunday alleges that – contrary to the administration’s narrative – Pakistani intelligence services were aware of the Al Qaeda mastermind’s location in Abbottabad and that the Navy Seal raid that killed him was essentially staged.

“The Obama White House is not the only one to observe that the story is riddled with inaccuracies and outright falsehoods,” said Press Secretary Josh Earnest at the daily briefing on Monday. He added, “No one here is particularly concerned about it.”

Rather than engage the charges directly, Earnest cited journalists and others outside the administration who have cast doubt on the report’s veracity.

“Former deputy director of the CIA Mike Morrell has said that every sentence was wrong,” Earnest said, adding a quip from CNN’s Peter Bergen: “What’s true in the story isn’t new, and what’s new in the story isn’t true.”

Considered one of America’s preeminent investigative journalists following his uncovering of the My Lai massacre in Vietnam, Hersh’s reporting has more recently faced criticism and questions about accuracy.

**U.S. officials fuming over Hersh account of Osama bin Laden raid**

<http://www.politico.com/story/2015/05/seymour-hersh-bin-laden-raid-officials-criticism-117826.html>

By BRYAN BENDER and PHILIP EWING 5/11/15 3:34 PM EDT Updated 5/11/15 5:05 PM EDT

One of America’s most revered investigative journalists has questioned the veracity of one of the Obama administration’s proudest achievements — and the firestorm of criticism has been immediate and unforgiving, from the White House to the Pentagon to the CIA.

The publication Sunday of a 10,000-word article questioning the official version of the 2011 raid that killed Al Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden might have received scant attention had it it not been penned by Seymour Hersh.

The award-winning reporter, 78, who uncovered one of the worst war crimes by U.S. troops during the Vietnam War and disclosed the torture of inmates at the U.S military-run Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq in 2004, is now questioning the entire national security bureaucracy in one fell swoop. And its members were taking it personally.

“If you were to believe Sy, you would have to believe this massive conspiracy that President Obama, Robert Gates, Leon Panetta, and Mike Morell were all lying to you,” said Bill Harlow, the agency’s former top spokesman, referring to two recent secretaries of defense and a former acting CIA director. “It makes absolutely no sense.”

Harlow said the puzzlement, even anger, at the charges stemmed from the fact that the mission to kill the mastermind of the worst terrorist attacks on U.S. soil, which officials said was the culmination of a years of painstaking intelligence work, remains a crowning achievement of the war on terrorism.

“It was a source of national pride, not just the CIA but the entire country,” Harlow said.

According to Hersh’s article, top Pakistani officials initially did not inform the U.S. about bin Laden’s whereabouts in the hope of using the late Al Qaeda leader as “leverage” in negotiations.

The report also states that Pakistani officials knew about the raid before it happened in May 2011 and instructed those monitoring bin Laden’s compound to allow the SEALs to conduct the operation unobstructed.

Hersh’s story relies heavily on the account of a single unnamed source, referred to as a “a retired senior intelligence official who was knowledgeable about the initial intelligence about bin Laden’s presence in Abbottabad.”

“The person obviously was not close to what actually happened,” Morell said of Hersh’s anonymous source in a CBS interview. “The Pakistanis did not know.”

Morell, in a new book, “The Great War of Our Time,” dedicates a whole chapter about how he had to smooth the ruffled feathers of Pakistani leaders who were outraged that they were not made aware of the raid.

“Both the Pakistani military and Pakistani intelligence were embarrassed by this,” Morel told POLITICO. “A much better outcome would have been if we did do this together. It would have cemented the relationship. Because we couldn’t trust them we couldn’t tell them.”

One former intelligence official knowledgeable about the bin Laden raid also called Hersh’s report “a fictional account.”

“This was indeed a unilateral American operation, one that involved months of painstaking intelligence analysis, and the Pakistanis were never read in on the raid before it happened.”

American intelligence officials, including CIA Director John Brennan, have speculated openly that bin Laden may have had some help from within the Pakistani government, or others inside Pakistan, but no connection has never been made definitively. At the same time, about four years after the raid, nearly everything about it has been revealed either in authorized releases by the administration or unauthorized revelations, including by some of the SEALs who participated in it.

Given all the information that has materialized, the former intelligence official asked, how could it be that some details Hersh includes are only surfacing now?

“The portrayal that Hersh offers – if it were accurate, it’s likely that it would have been exposed long ago,” the former official said. “It defies logic the way this town operates.”

The pushback from the White House and the military was just as fierce.

“There are too many inaccuracies and baseless assertions in this piece to fact check each one,” White House National Security spokesman Ned Price said in a statement to reporters early Monday. Later, at the daily White House briefing, White House spokesman Josh Earnest chimed in, saying the report is full of “inaccuracies and outright falsehoods.”

The criticism of the article was bipartisan.

“I simply have never heard of anything like this,” Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.), chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, said on MSNBC, saying he is convinced that the circumstances of the raid were as the administration described. “This is a great success on the part of the administration. We all admire the president’s decision…The president and his team did the right thing here.”

At the Pentagon, the article struck a particular nerve, especially among those with ties to the elite Special Operations Command.

They consider the raid on bin Laden’s compound in Abottabad, Pakistan, to be a high point in the history of American special operations. The raid, Operation Neptune Spear, is often contrasted with a low point — Operation Eagle Claw, the botched 1980 attempt to rescue American hostages in Iran ordered by President Jimmy Carter that killed eight troops and freed no captured Americans.

That bitter embarrassment led to decades of spending billions of dollars on new training, technology and intelligence-gathering capabilities that made possible the raid on Abbottabad, defense officials have argued.

“There are too many inaccuracies to even bother going through them line by line,” Col. Steve Warren, a Pentagon spokesman, told reporters of the Hersh piece, which appeared in the London Review of Books. “But there should be no question that this was a unilateral action and it was conducted in accordance with all standing laws of armed conflict. The public record on the operation there is clear. The president announced it within 24 hours of completion of it, and there is nothing to add to what the president’s already said. This article appears, from where I sit, to be largely a fabrication. I’m too busy to waste my time with it.”

Hersh did not return calls to his Washington home seeking comment, though he appeared on CNN on Monday to defend his reporting.

“I’ve been around a long time,” said Hersh, “and I understand the consequences of what I’m saying.” He called Morell’s account of what happened in Abbottabad, which is consistent with those of other officials in the Obama administration, a “Lewis Carroll fairy tale.”

In 2012, New York University’s Arthur Carter Journalism Institute named Hersh among the top 100 American journalists of the past century, along with the likes of Ernest Hemingway, Langston Hughes and pioneering foreign correspondent Hannah Arendt. Among his stories that had stood out most were those about about the 1968 My Lai massacre, in which U.S. troops were implicated in the killing of Vietnamese civilians. Ultimately, an Army lieutenant was convicted of killing 22 villagers and sentenced to life in prison. Hersh, also then a freelance journalist, was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for his work in 1970. He recently published a retrospective on the story in The New Yorker after traveling back to My Lai.

Hersh also received the National Magazine Award for Public Interest, among other prizes, for his disclosure of the abuses at Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq.

In recent years, however, Hersh’s reporting has increasingly been called into question — and his almost exclusive reliance on anonymous sources widely criticized.

For example, a 2013 piece claiming that the Obama administration “cherry-picked” intelligence about the use of chemical weapons by forces loyal to Syrian President Bashar Assad was turned down by both The New York Times and The Washington Post.

But his reputation, at least in the halls of power in Washington, seems to have hit a low point.

“Have you ever spoken to him?” asked Harlow. “It is kind of a psychedelic experience. He talks to you and then says thanks and hangs up. You don’t know what he could have got from you.”

Another former intelligence official with direct knowledge of the Bin Laden operation speculated that the Pakistanis, who were “furious” that U.S. troops entered the heart of the country without being detected, were behind the false story as a way to save face.

“They finally found somebody to bite.”

**White House: Seymour Hersh Story On Bin Laden Raid 'Riddled With Inaccuracies'**

<http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/05/11/white-house-seymour-hersh-bin-laden_n_7259110.html?utm_hp_ref=politics>

Posted: 05/11/2015 3:15 pm EDT Updated: 4 minutes ago

WASHINGTON -- The White House on Monday dismissed new claims by journalist Seymour Hersh that the Obama administration lied about the way Osama bin Laden was killed in 2011.

Hersh wrote in the London Review of Books over the weekend that the administration worked with Pakistani intelligence officials to kill bin Laden and that Pakistani military officials knew in advance about the planned raid on bin Laden's compound, which is contrary to President Barack Obama's claim that the U.S. acted alone. Hersh cited an anonymous "major U.S. source" for his information.

White House Press Secretary Josh Earnest said Monday that there was next to nothing accurate about Hersh's piece.

"I can tell you that the Obama White House is not the only one to observe that the story is riddled with inaccuracies and outright falsehoods," he said during his daily briefing.

Earnest noted that Mike Morell, the former deputy director of the CIA, has said that "every sentence ... was wrong" in Hersh's story. He pointed out that CNN national security analyst Peter Bergen also rejected the piece, saying that "what's true in the story isn't new and what's new in the story isn't true."

"That's a pretty good way of describing why no one here is particularly concerned about it," said Earnest.

**White House rejects Seymour Hersh 'baseless assertions' on bin Laden raid**

<http://www.cnn.com/2015/05/11/politics/seymour-hersh-obama-bin-laden-raid-lied/>

By Alexandra Jaffe, CNN Updated 2:55 PM ET, Mon May 11, 2015

Washington (CNN)The White House is dismissing as "baseless" a controversial report alleging President Barack Obama's administration lied about the circumstances surrounding the 2011 killing of Osama bin Laden.

"There are too many inaccuracies and baseless assertions in this piece to fact check each one," White House National Security spokesman Ned Price said in a statement to reporters.

He took aim specifically at journalist Seymour Hersh's assertion that the administration collaborated with Pakistani officials to kill the al Qaeda leader, saying that "the notion that the operation that killed Usama Bin Ladin was anything but a unilateral U.S. mission is patently false."

"As we said at the time, knowledge of this operation was confined to a very small circle of senior U.S. officials. The President decided early on not to inform any other government, including the Pakistani Government, which was not notified until after the raid had occurred," Price said.

"We had been and continue to be partners with Pakistan in our joint effort to destroy al-Qa'ida, but this was a U.S. operation through and through."

It was the White House's first response to Hersh's stunning report, published this weekend in the London Review of Books, outlining what he describes as the true circumstances surrounding bin Laden's death. Other former administration officials have panned the report as well, and during the daily press briefing, White House spokesman Josh Earnest again dismissed the report, citing CNN National Security Analyst Peter Bergen's comment that "what's true in this story isn't new, and what's new in the story isn't true."

"I thought that was a pretty good way of describing why no one here is particularly concerned about it," he said.

Citing an anonymous "major U.S. source," Hersh writes that the Obama administration cooperated with Pakistani intelligence officials to kill bin Laden, and that the chief of staff of the Pakistani army and director general of the Inter-Services Intelligence Agency knew about the mission, contrary to Obama's claim that Pakistani officials weren't aware of the raid in advance.

A U.S. official with detailed knowledge of the outreach to the Pakistanis after the raid tells CNN that based on the reaction it was clear the Pakistanis did not know in advance

CNN National Security Analyst Peter Bergen immediately rebutted Hersh's allegations in a post that contradicts most of the claims in his 10,000 word report.

"Hersh's account of the bin Laden raid is a farrago of nonsense that is contravened by a multitude of eyewitness accounts, inconvenient facts and simple common sense," Bergen wrote Monday.

Hersh's source is identified as a "retired senior intelligence official who was knowledgeable about the initial intelligence about bin Laden's presence in Abbottabad."

And on CNN's "New Day" on Monday morning, Hersh defended that sourcing and questioned why the Obama administration hadn't yet responded to the report.

"This is not a wager — this is a story that has to be dealt with by this government very seriously," he told CNN's Chris Cuomo.

Hersh stuck by his claims on CNN. In explaining why he relied largely on the "major U.S. source," Hersh said that it's "very tough for guys still inside to get quoted extensively," and declared that he "vetted most and verified" his sourcing with further reporting in Pakistan.

But Hersh, who has drawn criticism for his heavy use of anonymous sourcing before, admitted that he had gotten some things wrong in his reporting before.

"I would argue that a lot of the stories I wrote were pretty much on-mark," he said, but he acknowledged: "Nobody's perfect, of course -- everybody's done bad stories."

Indeed, he said he may have gotten the state where the military practiced the operation wrong in the piece because "sometimes my geography gets lousy."

Hersh also revealed that the piece hinged in part on an on-the-record interview with former ISI head Gen. Assad Durrani who told him, "look, you got the story." That was "one of the things that made the story doable now where it wouldn't have been" before, he said.

Bergen, in his report pushing back on Hersh's claims, says he reached out to Durrani and received a far different response.

Durrani said there was "no evidence of any kind" that the ISI knew that bin Laden was hiding in Abbottabad but he still could "make an assessment that this could be plausible."

Hersh also pushed back against skepticism over the claims in his article, calling it a "Lewis Carroll fairy tale" to believe bin Laden would've been hiding in such an easily accessible region of Pakistan.

The administration has said they received information on bin Laden's whereabouts by tracking his courier, and that the top military target was killed in a firefight with an elite team of Navy SEALs.

But Hersh writes that the Obama administration had initially agreed to say bin Laden had been killed by a drone strike; that ISI was holding bin Laden a prisoner at the Abbottabad compound where he was killed, and that a former senior Pakistani intelligence officer told the U.S. of his whereabouts for the $25 million award being offered at the time.

Hersh also reports on boasting from some SEALs that bin Laden wasn't given a burial at sea that adhered to Islamic religious traditions as the administration had claimed -- rather, his remains "were thrown into a body bag and, during the helicopter flight back to Jalalabad, some body parts were tossed out over the Hindu Kush mountains."

Hersh also alleges Obama's speech announcing the successful mission was "put together in a rush," not vetted or cleared by national security officials and created "chaos in the weeks following."

"This series of self-serving and inaccurate statements would create chaos in the weeks following," he said.

Hersh quotes his source as saying: "This was not the fog of war.

"The fact that there was an agreement with the Pakistanis and no contingency analysis of what was to be disclosed if something went wrong -- that wasn't even discussed," the source says. "And once it went wrong, they had to make up a new cover story on the fly."

Hersh won the Pulitzer in 1970 for his shocking report on the My Lai massacre during the Vietnam War that was widely credited with contributing to the public backlash against the war, and has since reported on conflicts in Iraq, Iran and Syria.

But Hersh has come under frequent criticism for his heavy use of unnamed sources. In 2004, for instance, his report that Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld effectively approved abuses against terrorists held at Abu Ghraib prison was dismissed by a Pentagon spokesperson as "the most hysterical piece of journalist malpractice I have ever observed."

**White House, Pentagon reject report claiming gov’t lied about bin Laden raid**

<http://www.foxnews.com/politics/2015/05/11/white-house-pentagon-reject-report-claiming-govt-lied-about-bin-laden-raid/>

Published May 11, 2015FoxNews.com

The White House and Pentagon on Monday adamantly rejected a report claiming the Obama administration lied about multiple aspects of the Usama bin Laden raid.

Journalist Seymour Hersh made the allegations in a lengthy article for the London Review of Books. Among other charges, Hersh wrote that top Pakistani military leaders were informed of the U.S. mission in advance and helped facilitate it, despite repeated claims to the contrary.

Pentagon spokesman Col. Steve Warren pushed back on the story, in a briefing with reporters.

"This article appears to be largely a fabrication," Warren said.

Of the claim that Pakistan was involved in advance of the raid, Warren said: "It was a unilateral action."

White House Press Secretary Josh Earnest also said he's not aware of any facts being withheld.

"The Obama White House is not the only one to observe that the story is riddled with inaccuracies and outright falsehoods," Earnest said, citing recent criticism from other observers. "No one here is particularly concerned about it."

Hersh, an investigative journalist who helped break the story about abuses at the U.S.-run Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq, contradicted several parts of the Obama administration narrative about the bin Laden mission in his latest report, citing unnamed sources.

The article asserted that Pakistan's army chief of staff and director-general of the Inter-Services Intelligence agency knew about the 2011 raid in advance and even helped ensure safe passage for the U.S. helicopters carrying Navy SEALs. The article also claimed bin Laden was effectively an ISI prisoner in Abbottabad -- according to one source, used as leverage against the Taliban and Al Qaeda -- but that an ex-Pakistani intelligence officer spilled the secret in exchange for U.S. reward money.

These details would contradict U.S. government claims that Pakistan was not involved, and the U.S. learned about bin Laden's location by tracking couriers.

**White House: Hersh’s bin Laden Piece ‘Riddled with Outright Falsehoods’**

<http://www.mediaite.com/online/white-house-hershs-bin-laden-piece-riddled-with-outright-falsehoods/>

by Evan McMurry | 2:50 pm, May 11th, 2015

The White House declined to comment for Seymour Hersh’s piece in the London Review of Books calling the killing of Osama bin Laden an Obama administration fiction, but it has dismissed Hersh’s revisionist account twice in the 24 hours since publication.

“There are too many inaccuracies and baseless assertions in this piece to fact check each one,” a White House spokesperson said Monday. “As we said at the time, knowledge of this operation was confined to a very small circle of senior U.S. officials. The President decided early on not to inform any other government, including the Pakistani Government, which was not notified until after the raid had occurred.”

White House Press Secretary Josh Earnest reiterated this in his daily press briefing:

Of Seymour Hersh article on bin-Laden raid, @PressSec says "the story is riddled with inaccuracies and outright falsehoods."

Hersh’s piece, based largely on an anonymous source, alleges that the Obama administration partnered with Pakistani officials to obtain bin Laden, who was in fact kept captive by Pakistan. This runs counter to the White House’s official version, in which the U.S. actually angered Pakistan by conducting a unilateral raid behind its borders.

**White House bashes GOP effort to delay regs on predatory loans to troops**

<http://thehill.com/policy/defense/241654-white-house-bashes-gop-effort-to-delay-payday-loan-protections-for-troops>

By Kristina Wong - 05/11/15 04:28 PM EDT

The White House on Monday bashed a House Republican attempt to reinstate language in the defense policy bill that would delay Pentagon regulations meant to make it more difficult for payday loan lenders to target troops with predatory lending practices.

Rep. Steve Stivers (R-Ohio) is planning to propose a floor amendment to the annual defense policy bill this week to stall the new Pentagon regulations.

“It’s almost too difficult to believe you would have a member of Congress looking to carry water for the payday loan industry and allow them to target in a predatory fashion military families who in many cases are already in a vulnerable financial state," White House press secretary Josh Earnest said.

White House principal deputy press secretary Eric Schultz also tweeted during the briefing, "odd that a Congressman would do their bidding."

Stivers' amendment would undo a successful effort by Rep. Tammy Duckworth (D-Ill.) to strike language appearing in the House Armed Services Committee's draft of the bill that delayed the Pentagon regulations.

Republicans argue the Duckworth language could punish legitimate businesses.

"The concern is that there are legitimate products out there that may inadvertently get caught up in this expanded rule," said Rep. Joe Heck (R-Nev.). "And all this language does is request further information based on the study that's already been completed that was not included in the report," he said.

Rep. Mike Conaway (R-Texas) added, "I would quickly point that there are always unintended consequences," citing concerns of "drying up sources of credit for folks at the bottom end of the economic scale."

Stivers has been one of the payday lending industry's favorite members, according to a Huffington Post article.

Payday loan companies have contributed $69,625 to Stivers' reelection campaigns in 2012 and 2014, according to the Huffington Post report.

"The fact that payday lenders aggressively and shamelessly market to military families is well documented," Duckworth said during the April 29 markup session. "The Defense Department identified predatory lending as the single biggest financial challenge facing service members and their families."

**House GOP lending amendment draws White House ire**

<http://www.militarytimes.com/story/military/capitol-hill/2015/05/11/ndaa-wh-lending-amendment/27131013/>

By Leo Shane III, Staff writer 4:50 p.m. EDT May 11, 2015

The White House is accusing some House Republicans of looking out for payday lenders instead of military families with new rules restrictions under consideration in this week's defense authorization bill debate.

At issue is an amendment proposed by Ohio Republican Rep. Steve Stivers that would require the secretary of defense to certify that the Defense Department's internal lenders database meets "prevailing industry standards for the availability and accuracy of commercial databases" and allows real-time updates before new regulations regarding lending rules for service members are finalized.

Supporters have called the move a final check to ensure that lending companies are not unfairly blacklisted from serving troops and their families.

But critics say the amendment is a transparent attempt to slow new expanded rules designed to crack down on predatory lending that targets service members and their families.

On Monday, in response to reporters' questions, White House spokesman Josh Earnest called the potential addition to the annual authorization bill a significant concern for President Obama.

"It's almost too difficult to believe that you'd have a member of Congress looking to carry water for the payday loan industry, and allow them to continue to target in a predatory fashion military families who in many case are already in a vulnerable financial state," he said.

Earnest said he "can't imagine (the amendment) earning the majority support in the United States Congress."

A bipartisan group of lawmakers on the House Armed Services Committee narrowly stripped similar language from their authorization bill draft last month, during an all-night debate over defense policy.

That provision would have required a new report from the Defense Department before the expanded Military Lending Act provisions could be put into effect, likely delaying the process for at least another year.

Republican leaders on the armed services committee defended the move as one of basic business fairness, but lost the legislative fight by a 32-30 vote.

The 2006 lending law was passed by Congress after reports of payday lenders charging unusually high interest rates to troops -- 400 percent or more, in some cases — and misleading borrowers about the long-term debt they could incur.

The Pentagon's initial implementation rules were confined to payday loans, vehicle title loans and tax refund anticipation loans. But last September, defense officials proposed new rules that would expand the types of credit covered by the maximum 36-percent interest rate that can be charged to service members and their dependents.

The full House will consider whether to insert the Stivers amendment into the defense bill during floor debate this week.

The White House has threatened to veto the authorization bill over a number of provisions, including language that would keep open the detention facility at Guantanamo Bay Naval Station in Cuba and would use temporary war funding to get around military spending caps for fiscal 2016.

**Republicans Try To Strip Predatory Lending Protections For American Troops, Again**

<http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/05/11/predatory-lending-soldiers_n_7258800.html?utm_hp_ref=politics>

Posted: 05/11/2015 2:38 pm EDT Updated: 3 minutes ago

WASHINGTON -- House Republicans are again attacking measures aimed at protecting U.S. troops from predatory lending practices, two weeks after a similar GOP effort failed.

The military has been grappling with the financial impact of predatory lending on service members for years. In 2006, Congress passed legislation cracking down on some forms of high-interest credit, particularly payday lending. Lenders responded by exploiting loopholes in the law, and late last year, the Department of Defense proposed a new set of regulations designed to curb these creative workarounds that target troops.

Republicans have been working to kill those regulations before they can take effect. This week, Rep. Steve Stivers (R-Ohio) will offer legislation that would block DOD from finalizing its rules until a host of unrealistic technical certifications could be made for a database of active-duty military members. The House will vote on Stivers' plan as an amendment to the National Defense Authorization Act, a major bill that establishes military funding.

Thousands of service members receive short-term, high-interest loans each year, according to a 2014 report by the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, which has documented a raft of abusive tactics targeting soldiers and their families. One family that took out a $2,600 loan ended up paying back $3,966.84 over the course of a year. Another borrower spent $1,428.28 to pay off a $485 loan in just six months.

Stivers has been one of the payday lending industry's favorite members of Congress since he took office in 2011. Over the 2012 and 2014 election cycles, payday loan companies contributed $69,625 to his campaign, according to data from the Center for Responsive Politics.

Traditional banks have joined with smaller payday loan companies in lobbying against the Defense Department rules, since the new standards would curb profits for so-called "deposit advance products" -- small, expensive loans that banks issue to compete with payday lenders.

In late April, Republicans on the House Armed Services Committee attempted to delay the new DOD rules, but an amendment from Rep. Tammy Duckworth (D-Ill.) -- herself a veteran of the Iraq War -- stripped out the GOP language, after winning over five Republicans. Democratic support for Duckworth's amendment was unanimous.

“The House Armed Services Committee acted in a bipartisan fashion to move forward with urgent protections for our Service Members from predatory lenders," Duckworth (D-Ill.) told HuffPost in an emailed statement Monday. "It is disappointing that there is yet another push for delay, but I remain steadfast in my commitment to enacting these reforms and standing up for our Service Members. Now is the time to act.”

The White House also blasted the Stivers provision on Monday, but stopped short of threatening to veto the broader NDAA bill over it.

"It's almost too difficult to believe that you'd have a member of Congress looking to carry water for the payday loan industry, and allow them to continue to target in a predatory fashion military families who in many cases are already in a vulnerable financial state," said White House press secretary Josh Earnest.

"In some cases, we're talking about military families who have a loved one that's deployed overseas," Earnest continued. "And as they're trying to makes ends meet, to allow predatory lenders to target them is something that I can't imagine earning the majority support in the United States Congress."

Stivers' office did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

**White House escalates Warren feud**

<http://thehill.com/policy/finance/241653-white-house-escalates-warren-feud>

By Jordan Fabian - 05/11/15 04:23 PM EDT

The White House on Monday amplified its criticism of Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.), accusing her of spreading false information about President Obama’s trade agenda.

“There is no need for this false criticism that members of Congress aren’t aware of what’s being negotiated,” press secretary Josh Earnest said Monday.

The president has singled out Warren, an outspoken critic of his trade push, ahead of an important test vote in the Senate on a bill to give Obama fast-track authority to finalize a sweeping trade deal with 11 Asia-Pacific nations.

Obama over the weekend suggested Warren was attacking the trade deal for political reasons.

“The truth of the matter is that Elizabeth is, you know, a politician like everybody else. And, you know, she’s got a voice that she wants to get out there. And I understand that,” Obama said, according to Yahoo. News.

“On most issues, she and I deeply agree. On this one, though, her arguments don’t stand the test of fact and scrutiny.”

Warren fired back that he should make the trade agreement public, and accused him of hiding unsavory provisions in the deal.

“If the president is so confident it’s a good deal, he should declassify the text and let people see it before asking Congress to tie its hands on fixing it,” she said.

Earnest said Warren and other lawmakers are able to read the current text of the trade agreement in a secure viewing area in the Capitol building.

“If they are not aware of what’s being negotiated, it’s because they have failed to take responsibility for reading the document that we provided to them,” he said.

The White House is seeking to counter Warren’s influence as it works to build Democratic support for a trade promotion authority bill (TPA) that would allow the administration to negotiate trade deals without Congress making amendments.

The White House says the fast-track power is necessary for the president to have a free hand in negotiating the trade pact with other nations.

Liberal Democrats and labor unions are fighting hard against the legislation out of concern that the trade deals could ship American jobs overseas.

The TPA bill faces a major procedural vote in the Senate on Tuesday. Most Senate Republicans are expected to back the measure, but they will need help from Democrats to get the 60 votes necessary to move forward.

Obama and top administration officials have been lobbying Democratic lawmakers to support the trade powers.

Earnest said Obama’s conversations with lawmakers, mostly with Democrats but some Republicans, have “yielded us some votes,” but declined to say how many.

He also put the onus on Republicans to maximize the number of votes from their side of the aisle.

“What’s important is for Democrats and Republicans to have the votes,” he said. “This is something that’s not going to pass on party lines.”

Earnest dismissed the notion that Obama’s blunt criticism of Warren may have alienated potential Democratic supporters on trade.

He said the White House would continue to make its case to members of Congress “right up until the vote, and we’re not going to take any of those votes for granted.”

While Obama has been in "frequent" contact with lawmakers on the trade deal, Earnest was not aware of any conversation he had with Warren in recent weeks, though he added "I wouldn't rule it out."

**'Fast track' trade bill faces first Senate test**

<http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2015/05/11/fast-track-test-vote-senate/27134255/>

Susan Davis, USA TODAY 5:50 p.m. EDT May 11, 2015

WASHINGTON — President Obama's trade agenda faces its first test in the GOP-controlled Senate on Tuesday, with a vote on whether to move forward on legislation giving the president "fast track" trade authority.

The administration is pressing lawmakers to approve the bill so that it can conclude the proposed Trans-Pacific Partnership, a multilateral trade pact with 11 Asia-Pacific nations,

"It's incredibly important for American workers that we pass this bill," said Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., on Monday. "We need strong and fair trade legislation that expands Congress' oversight over the administration and sets clear rules and standards for its trade negotiators."

Senate rules require a 60-vote supermajority to begin debate on the legislation that would give Obama the authority to send to Congress a trade pact that can be approved or rejected, but not amended.

The trade debate has blurred traditional political battle lines on Capitol Hill, with the strength of Obama's support coming from GOP lawmakers. Obama's Democratic allies, such as Senate Minority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev., are skeptical, if not outright opposed, to a trade deal they say will hurt American workers.

The president has taken on the liberal wing of the Democratic Party in recent days, sparring publicly with fast-track opponents such as Sen. Elizabeth Warren, D-Mass., who is a leading voice of opposition in the Senate.

White House spokesman Josh Earnest downplayed questions Monday about whether Obama's disputes with his party could alienate some of the Democrats he needs to advance his agenda through Congress.

"I'm not worried about that at all, and I don't think the president is either," Earnest said. "I think that's why he's been blunt about his views on this topic and why he believes that Democrats should be supportive of a trade agreement that, if reached, would clearly be in the best interests of our economy."

Union leaders will hold a rally on Capitol Hill ahead of Tuesday's vote calling on senators to vote against the legislation.

Democrats are seeking assurances from Republicans that they will also hold votes on legislation to assist sub-Saharan African nations, Trade Adjustment Assistance to help American workers hurt by trade deals and a customs enforcement bill that includes language aimed at cracking down on countries that manipulate their currency.

The currency manipulation language is opposed by the White House and remains a hurdle for Obama in advancing his trade agenda. However, assuring votes on those measures may be necessary to begin debate on fast-track legislation.

Reid has threatened to use his powers to delay action on trade in order to address laws that fund highway projects and authorize U.S. intelligence programs. With both expiring at the end of the month, Reid questioned GOP priorities.

"What do we as senators value the most?" Reid said. "With only a few days before the Memorial Day recess, I'm disturbed and distressed by Republicans' priorities."

If successful on Tuesday, Senate leaders will have to navigate an expected barrage of amendments from lawmakers in both parties who want to add certain requirements to the administration's negotiating authority.

**White House Hits Back at Elizabeth Warren: ‘There’s No Need For This False Criticism’**

<http://www.nationaljournal.com/white-house/white-house-hits-back-at-elizabeth-warren-there-s-no-need-for-this-false-criticism-20150511>

BY PRISCILLA ALVAREZ

May 11, 2015 A heated dispute between President Obama and Sen. Elizabeth Warren over a proposed trade deal spilled into Monday's daily White House press briefing, with the press secretary inviting Warren to "walk over" to read the negotiated document.

"There's no need for this false criticism that members of Congress aren't aware of what's being negotiated," Earnest said at the briefing.

President Obama has been pushing for his proposed Trans-Pacific Partnership ahead of a Senate vote on whether to approve "fast track" authority. "I spent years trying to rescue this economy," Obama said during a visit to Nike's world headquarters Friday. "I would not risk any of that if I thought the trade deal would undermine it."

In an interview with Yahoo! Politics, Obama singled out Warren, who's been a strong critic of the trade deal. "The truth of the matter is that Elizabeth is, you know, a politician like everybody else," he said. "And you know, she's got a voice that she wants to get out there. And I understand that. And on most issues, she and I deeply agree. On this one, though, her arguments don't stand the test of fact and scrutiny."

Earnest fielded questions on the president's response, saying, in reference to Warren being "a politician," that "she's making a political debate."

Warren has said the agreement could threaten the Dodd-Frank financial reform law in the future. The Massachusetts Democrat has also argued that there's been a lack of transparency on the agreement. "If the president is so confident it's a good deal, he should declassify the text and let people see it before asking Congress to tie its hands on fixing it," Warren said in an interview with the Washington Post released Monday.

While Earnest confirmed that the president has been speaking with members of Congress about the TPP, he said he was "not aware of" any conversations with Warren but he wouldn't "rule it out."

**White House escalates war with Elizabeth Warren on trade**

<http://www.washingtonexaminer.com/white-house-escalates-trade-war-with-elizabeth-warren/article/2564311>

BY BRIAN HUGHES | MAY 11, 2015 | 2:29 PM

The war of words between President Obama and Democratic Sen. Elizabeth Warren escalated Monday, with the White House accusing the progressive lawmaker of leveling "false criticism" against its trade push.

After Obama over the weekend accused Warren of distorting legislation that would grant him so-called Fast Track authority, the senator on Monday called on him to make the bill public.

The White House countered that Warren already has the ability to read the bill in its current form, saying the administration has set up a private viewing room on Capitol Hill for lawmakers.

"There is no need for this false criticism that the members of Congress aren't aware of what is being negotiated," said White House press secretary Josh Earnest.

"If they're not aware of what is being negotiated, it's because they have failed to take the responsibility to read the document."

Jeffrey Sterling was sentenced to 42 months in prison for leaking classified information to a reporter.

The White House is trying to tame a revolt from the Left on legislation that would ease Obama's efforts to finalize the Trans-Pacific Partnership, a 12-nation pact. Trade Promote Authority would allow the deal to go through Congress without amendments.

Progressives argue that TPP would harm American workers by essentially outsourcing jobs. In a rare sign of bipartisanship between the White House and Republicans, Obama and most conservative lawmakers say the deal would open up untapped markets and grow U.S. exports.

Warren has also argued that Fast Track authority could undo banking reforms, a claim the White House has also dismissed as false.

**Texas, Arkansas tornadoes kill at least 4, shatter homes**

<http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/05/11/us-usa-weather-tornadoes-idUSKBN0NW19T20150511>

BY LISA MARIA GARZA AND STEVE BARNES

Emergency crews were cleaning up on Monday from tornadoes that killed at least four people and injured 50 others in Texas and Arkansas that were part of a twister series to hit central states overnight, flattening buildings and snapping power lines.

A husband and wife were killed near a trailer park in Van, Texas, about 70 miles (115 km) southeast of Dallas, a town of about 2,500 people where scores of homes were reduced to splinters. The National Weather Service said an EF3 tornado packing winds of around 140 mph (225 kph) hit the town.

Near the west Arkansas town of Nashville, a baby girl about 18 months old was pulled from the wreckage of a mobile home where her parents died in a tornado there. About 10 people were injured in the state.

“She barely had a scratch on her. It’s absolutely a miracle. The trailer was completely demolished," Howard County coroner John Gray said

In Van, workers with search dogs have been going over the wreckage looking for three adults who are unaccounted for, raising the possibility the death toll will rise. Five people thought to be missing were found in evacuation shelters.

"This storm spun up real fast and the warning time was extremely limited," Van Zandt County Fire Marshal Chuck Allen said.

After what was probably the strongest tornado to hit the town in more than 70 years, neighbors sought comfort in front of destroyed houses and residents packed up whatever belongings they could find as they walked to evacuation shelters.

Van resident Brandi Preston, her husband and two sons pushed a wheel barrel and collected debris from their yard. Rain-soaked pink insulation from nearby damaged houses littered the ground like soggy pieces of cotton candy.

"We were in our hallway and we were holding our hands praying. I know that’s the only reason we’re OK," said Preston, 35.

Authorities said 43 people in Texas were taken by ambulance

to hospitals with injuries and several more arrived on their own.

"We will rebuild," Van Zandt County Judge Don Kirkpatrick told reporters.

More severe weather was on tap for some central states on Monday. The National Weather Service has issued a tornado watch for parts of Indiana, Ohio, Kentucky and Michigan.

White House spokesman Josh Earnest told a press briefing that President Barack Obama is receiving updates on the storm situation.

**Kerry heads to Russia in first visit since Ukraine crisis**

<http://hosted.ap.org/dynamic/stories/U/US_UNITED_STATES_RUSSIA?SITE=AP&SECTION=HOME&TEMPLATE=DEFAULT>

BY MATTHEW LEE May 11, 3:50 PM EDT

WASHINGTON (AP) -- Secretary of State John Kerry departed Monday for Russia to meet with President Vladimir Putin, on his first visit to the country since relations between Washington and Moscow plummeted to post-Cold War lows amid disagreements over Ukraine and Syria.

The State Department said Kerry would meet Putin and Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov on Tuesday at the Black Sea resort of Sochi. But in a sign of the considerable strains, the Kremlin said Putin's attendance had yet to be confirmed and the Russian Foreign Ministry previewed the talks by blaming Washington for the breakdown in relations.

"The Obama administration chose the path of scaling back bilateral relations, proclaimed a course of isolating Russia on the international arena and demanded that those states that traditionally follow the lead of Washington support its confrontational steps," it said in a statement.

Ukraine's crisis, it said, "was largely provoked by the United States itself."

The rhetoric hardly augured well for a breakthrough on any of the many issues dividing the U.S. and Russia. Nevertheless, both sides stressed the importance of trying to work through some of the rancor that buried President Barack Obama's first-term effort to "reset" ties with Moscow.

"This just was a time that made sense," State Department spokeswoman Marie Harf said of Kerry's scheduled meeting with Putin. She said talks would cover the civil wars in Ukraine and Syria, and ongoing nuclear negotiations between world powers and Iran.

The short trip to Sochi will be only Kerry's second to Russia since taking office. He visited Moscow in May 2013, meeting with Putin and Lavrov before the Ukraine crisis erupted and Russia annexed the Ukrainian territory of Crimea.

White House spokesman Josh Earnest acknowledged the "complicated" relationship between the former foes, but insisted they could cooperate on "interests that benefit the citizens of both our countries."

Much hinges on violence decreasing in Ukraine, however.

The Western-backed government in Kiev continues to be embroiled in a sporadic conflict between government and separatist rebel forces in its eastern regions of Donetsk and Luhansk despite a cease-fire agreement sealed in mid-February. Russia was party to that deal.

Western nations say Russia supports the separatists with arms and manpower, and even directs some battlefield operations - all claims Moscow denies. In return, the Russians bristle at Washington's provisions to Ukraine of military assistance in the form of hardware and training.

In late April, troops from the United States and Ukraine kicked off joint training exercises intended to help bolster Ukraine's defenses. The exercises, dubbed "Fearless Guardian-2015," sparked outrage from Russia, which described them as a potential cause of destabilization.

During a visit to Moscow on Sunday, German Chancellor Angela Merkel urged Russia to use its influence to persuade separatists in Ukraine to abide by the oft-violated cease-fire.

Ukraine says more than 8,000 people have died in the conflict that began in April 2014.

Russia has stuck firmly to the line that the Ukrainian government retains the bulk of responsibility for bringing about a settlement.

"We will use all the influence we have on the leadership in Donetsk and Luhansk to ensure the process proceeds at the required pace and attains the necessary level," Putin told Merkel on Sunday.

Diplomats in Moscow and Washington are at odds over a range of other issues.

Russia last month announced it would lift a five-year ban on delivery of the S-300 air defense missile system to Iran, drawing a hasty rebuke from the United States.

The White House said the missile system would give the Islamic republic's military a strong deterrent against any air attack. The Kremlin argues that the S-300 is a purely defensive system that will not jeopardize the security of Israel or any other countries in the Middle East.

On Syria, Russia has defied a chorus of international condemnation to remain fast to the embattled government of President Bashar Assad.

Following his stop in Sochi, Kerry will travel on to Antalya, Turkey, where he will attend a meeting of NATO foreign ministers on Wednesday. Kerry will return to Washington that same day to attend meetings between Obama and top officials of the Gulf Arab states, who are concerned by the possibility of a nuclear deal with Iran.