

Press Releases: Trinidad and Tobago Independence Day

Press Statement
Michael R. Pompeo

Secretary of State

Washington, DC
August 30, 2018

On behalf of the people of the United States of America, my warmest congratulations to the people of Trinidad and Tobago as you celebrate 56 years of independence on August 31.

The people of the United States and Trinidad and Tobago have always enjoyed rich cross-cultural exchange, friendship, and the shared goal of building a more safe and secure region as underscored in the Caribbean 2020 strategy. We thank Trinidad and Tobago for hosting the joint Fused Response exercise this year, which demonstrated the importance of our cooperation in security and emergency preparedness.

We are grateful for the continued strong partnership as our countries work to deepen cooperation on trade, energy, and opportunity for all.

Today, we wish Trinbagonians from both beautiful islands a happy Independence Day with peace and prosperity throughout the year to come.

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Press Releases: Department Press Briefing – August 29, 2018

Heather Nauert
Spokesperson

Department Press Briefing
Washington, DC
August 29, 2018

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TRANSCRIPT:

2:54 p.m. EDT

MS NAUERT: Good afternoon. You're probably wondering why we are briefing on a Wednesday. Why not? I thought some of you might enjoy an extra-long weekend; if anyone wants to feel free to take off tomorrow we'll certainly write you a slip to go.

I wanted to mention yesterday I was at the Department of Defense, and saw your digs over there, or your colleagues' digs. I saw your colleague, Jennifer Griffin, Rich, and saw some CNN folks as well. If you've not been over there – boy, that's nice. I mean, they really have a great setup over there. So your colleagues said don't tell that to our State Department colleagues.

QUESTION: Is it better than ours?

MS NAUERT: Yes, they have nice big offices.

QUESTION: Do they have rats? (Laughter.)

MS NAUERT: I did not ask about rats, but it was very, very nice, and I want to thank my colleague Dana White for having me over there.

QUESTION: They have WiFi, right?

MS NAUERT: I don't know if they have WiFi.

QUESTION: I think they do, yes.

MS NAUERT: Yes, yes. (Laughter.) But we were actually over there talking about the India 2+2 meeting that is coming up, which I wanted to make a little announcement about that today, and mention that Secretary Pompeo looks forward to traveling to New Delhi with Secretary Mattis for the inaugural India 2+2 ministerial dialogue that takes place starting on September the 6th. They'll meet with their Indian counterparts, External

Affairs Minister Swaraj and Defense Minister Sitharaman, to discuss enhancing our engagement with India on critical diplomatic and security priorities. The dialogue is an indication of the deepening strategic partnership between our two countries, and India's emergence as a net security provider in the region.

The importance of the U.S.-India strategic partnership is highlighted in the President's National Security Strategy as well as the administration's South Asia and Indo-Pacific strategies. So we look forward to that and look forward to having some of you travel along with us.

Next, I'd like to recognize a colleague of mine who is moving on to his next posting and will be preparing to head to Moldova. Some of you may know Joe Geraghty, who's worked in the European Affairs bureau, and I just wanted to recognize Joe for truly being one of the best press officers here in the building. My first day, about 16 months ago, he helped get me prepped up to start briefing all of you, and he's really been fantastic. So I just wanted to wish him and his family well as he moves on to his new post.

Last thing I'd like to highlight, and that is something we're really proud of that's taking place in Uzbekistan right now. Earlier today, our U.S. ambassador to Uzbekistan, Pamela Spratlen, joined the deputy justice minister of Uzbekistan to welcome the American Councils for International Education to Uzbekistan. That group is based here in Washington, D.C. The American Councils implements U.S. educational programs and exchanges worldwide. It will be the first U.S. Government – excuse me, the first U.S. NGO organization registered in Uzbekistan for more than 15 years. It demonstrates our growing strategic partnership between the United States and Uzbekistan, and the Government of Uzbekistan's commitment to meaningful reform and international engagement. The welcome news represents our two countries' strengthening of people-to-people ties as American Councils will open up many opportunities for academic and cultural exchanges between the United States and Uzbekistan.

And as you may recall, we invited that country to attend our religious freedom ministerial here at the State Department back in July in recognition of the recent steps that the Government of Uzbekistan has taken to improve religious freedom. We commend the government for its significant progress that it's made in implementing the president's reform agenda.

And with that, I'd be happy to take your questions. Go ahead, Suzanne.

QUESTION: Yeah, I'd like to ask about something that we didn't really get a chance to talk about too much yesterday.

MS NAUERT: Okay.

QUESTION: Yemen and the UN report that was out this week that detailed

possible war crimes there. I'd just like to get your view on this report, and the Secretary's view. And I was interested if this is something that you expect will inform U.S. policy moving forward.

MS NAUERT: Yeah. Give me one second. I've got Yemen back here, and it takes a bit to get to.

Okay. First, let me start by saying that Secretary Mattis and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General – Chairman Dunford addressed this to great extent yesterday in their press briefing, so I would just add on to their comments that they made yesterday. In terms of the UNHCR report that you ask about, we've seen that report to the Human Rights Council. The possible violations of international law as outlined in that report are very concerning to the United States Government. We believe that if such crimes have taken place, that there is simply no justification for those types of crimes. We take the report seriously. We're certainly taking a look at the report and urge all parties to the conflict to do the same.

This serves as a good reminder that all parties to the conflict need to comply with their obligations under the Law of Armed Conflict to thoroughly investigate alleged violations of the Law of Armed Conflict and take necessary measures to prevent such violations. And that report I think gets us back to something that we have long supported, and that is a political solution to take place in Yemen. Martin Griffiths, who represents the United Nations as its special envoy, has a meeting coming up – I believe it's within the next week or so. So we're hoping to have some additional information and possibly some progress coming out of those meetings. And I'd be happy to bring you more when we do have it on that.

QUESTION: Yeah, but do you expect that this could maybe cause the U.S. to reevaluate support for the Saudi-led coalition?

MS NAUERT: Yeah, I'm not going to get ahead of that. I think that Secretary Mattis addressed that yesterday. And so I would just urge you to go back and read his comments. Saudi Arabia is obviously a strong strategic partner of the United States and we work with Saudi Arabia on a host of issues because we have a very broad relationship with that government. As we have discussed for the past several weeks, they are conducting an investigation; that's something that the U.S. Government has encouraged them to do so, and they have accepted that and they have given us assurances that they will conduct that investigation fully.

Okay. Hey, Lesley.

QUESTION: Yeah, I do have a follow-up on that one. Does that mean – you said you were reviewing the report. Does that mean that aid or any kind of assistance could be implicated depending on whatever your finding is? Or, I mean, I'm trying to find out what the – what the endpoint could be on that.

MS NAUERT: Yeah, I'm not going to get ahead of any of the decisions that may or may not be made in the future with regard to that, but just want to say that we take those findings seriously and we're urging parties to the conflict to do the same thing.

QUESTION: And then how long will your review take? Or you don't have a deadline for that?

MS NAUERT: I don't. I don't know if there is a deadline on that or how long that that will necessarily take, but I think we will spend the time necessary to review it as appropriate.

Okay. Okay. Hey.

QUESTION: Just a quick follow-up on that?

QUESTION: I have a question on Palestinian aid.

MS NAUERT: Okay.

QUESTION: Can you confirm reports that a decision was made to cut the whole U.S. funding to the UN Agency for Palestinian Refugees?

MS NAUERT: No, and we have covered this extensively here in this briefing room. That issue is – the funding is still under review and we have no announcements to make at this time.

Said.

QUESTION: Can I follow up on the aid?

MS NAUERT: Sure.

QUESTION: The question that I asked about yesterday. There was a report yesterday afternoon that Congress actually rejected the aid cuts, the international aid cuts, as it was submitted. Does that include the Palestinian aid package? Are you aware of that?

MS NAUERT: I'm sorry, I don't have any information on that. I'm just not aware of Congress's position on that.

QUESTION: Well, congressional staffers said that. Some – there was some – some of this information was attributed to high officials in the administration. So you cannot confirm?

MS NAUERT: I'm sorry, I just don't have anything for you on that.

QUESTION: If I could stay with the Palestinian issue for a –

MS NAUERT: Sure.

QUESTION: – minute. Also, the – an Israeli court ruled yesterday that settlements that are deemed illegal by the United States on private Palestinian land, which you have complained about in the past and in

fact protested with the Israelis, that now they are legal depending on good faith. I don't know what that means, if the land was taken from Palestinians in good faith then they can build settlements. Do you have any reaction to that? Do you plan on protesting, as you have done in the past, on these particular settlements?

MS NAUERT: The only thing I can tell you is that the President has made his position on settlements very clear, and I'll state that position once again, and that is that the Israeli Government has made it clear to the U.S. Government that its – intends to adopt a policy regarding settlement activity that is in line with the President's overall concerns, and that the Israelis will take that into consideration, and that's something that we certainly welcome. What we want to get to is a comprehensive peace deal between the Israelis and the Palestinians, and we'll keep pushing ahead for that.

QUESTION: But on the issue of this privately owned Palestinian – you have taken a very strong stance in the past every time it happened that you object to this. What – do you plan on doing the same for this particular –

MS NAUERT: Well, we have said in the past –

QUESTION: Okay.

MS NAUERT: – about unrestrained settlement activity, and we have made our position very clear with the Israeli Government. We've spoken about that. They have made it clear that they intend to adopt a policy concerning settlement activity that is in line with the President's concerns and that they will take that into consideration. Okay.

QUESTION: And lastly – I promise lastly on this issue – the Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas told Israeli academics yesterday that the Palestinians want an unarmed or disarmed Palestinian state. Is that a good step? Is that something that you would encourage? What is –

MS NAUERT: I'm not – I'm sorry, Said, I'm just not familiar with his comment so I wouldn't want to comment on anything that I have not seen myself, but thank you.

Hi, Elise.

QUESTION: Hi. On Syria.

MS NAUERT: Yes.

QUESTION: There's a report out there that a U.S. delegation met with members of the Assad regime in Damascus recently. I was told you might have something.

MS NAUERT: Yeah. So we have seen that report. When I say "yeah," that's a figure of speech. That is not a yes. We've seen that report. It doesn't reflect any reality that we are certainly aware of, so that is

all I have on that. We've seen that report; it doesn't reflect anything that the U.S. Government is tracking at this point.

QUESTION: Well, are you saying that you don't know of a meeting between U.S. Government officials and Assad regime officials?

MS NAUERT: I am not aware of any meeting to that effect.

QUESTION: Okay.

MS NAUERT: If we – if we have anything more on that for you, I'll let you know. Okay.

QUESTION: Heather?

QUESTION: A follow-up on Syria, if you don't mind.

MS NAUERT: Yes.

QUESTION: Yesterday you mentioned – you warned against any possible chemical weapons attack in – by the Russians or the Syrian Government, and in – afterwards I had in my mind – I was like, where did this come from? And do you – is it that the U.S. believes that there is an offensive about to happen in Idlib or –

MS NAUERT: I think what we are concerned about is not just a potential chemical weapons attack, but we're concerned about the threat, any kind of escalation of violence in Idlib. That would put civilians and civilian infrastructure in Idlib at risk. We have shared the concerns that we have about any potential offensive taking place. We've shared those concerns with the Russian Government at many levels, from Secretary Pompeo to his counterpart, to Chairman Dunford, also to Secretary Mattis, National Security Advisor Bolton and others. So we've made our position on that very clear. In addition to that, our new Syrian envoy, Ambassador Jim Jeffrey, has discussed that as well with some of his counterparts.

QUESTION: But you – it's not that you have evidence of chemical weapons or of them assembling chemical weapons, just a warning?

MS NAUERT: Nothing that I can – nothing I can share with you at this point, so I wouldn't want you to jump too far ahead and jump to any kind of conclusions on that. That of course is a concern of ours. We know those types of things have been used in Syria in the past.

QUESTION: Heather, conversely –

QUESTION: Two things on – wait –

MS NAUERT: Hold on. Hold on.

QUESTION: Two things on that. First of all, when you say that Ambassador Jeffrey has been discussing it with his counterparts, do you mean his

Russian counterparts or is he in – is he empowered with kind of sending message directly to the Syrian regime?

MS NAUERT: I – no, I’m talking about Russia here.

QUESTION: Okay.

MS NAUERT: Ambassador Jeffrey and Ambassador David Satterfield met earlier this week with the Russian ambassador to the United States, in part to raise concerns about what could happen in Idlib.

QUESTION: Okay, just – and on that, I mean, obviously if they’re kind of – mention these warnings about what can happen, are you looking at the situation on the ground and you’re – and you see some indications that there’s going to be an offensive underway?

MS NAUERT: We’re concerned about it. I mean, you’ve seen the – you’ve read the Russian reports, you’ve heard their rhetoric, and so we’re concerned about what could potentially happen.

QUESTION: Well, it’s not just rhetoric. I mean, aren’t there indications that the Syrians are moving some equipment around?

MS NAUERT: Yeah, I can’t comment on that in particular. That would be more of an intelligence matter or a Department of Defense matter, but we’ve seen the reports about that and of course we’re concerned, concerned about the potential impact on civilians and also infrastructure as well, in a country that has been through so much.

QUESTION: When you say that Ambassador Jeffrey talked to his – and Ambassador Satterfield talked to their Russian counterparts, was this about – in general about an escalation in Idlib or specifically about the use of chemical weapons?

MS NAUERT: Well, it talked about the situation in Syria. They covered that, with a particular focus on U.S. indications of an impending Syrian regime offensive. So that’s obviously supported by Russian forces and Iranian forces, and that is something that is of concern to them and to us.

QUESTION: So you do say that there are indications of an offensive. Does that mean including the use of chemical weapons?

MS NAUERT: Elise, I don’t have anything more for you on that. If I do, I will certainly let you know, but that is a concern of ours. We have all seen what the Syrian regime, backed by the Russian Government, has done in the past. That should not be a surprise to anyone that that would be a concern of ours once again.

QUESTION: Heather.

QUESTION: Heather, on –

MS NAUERT: Hi, Janne.

QUESTION: Thank you very much. On North Korea (inaudible).

QUESTION: On the – on this chemical weapons issue, the Russian – just a quick follow-up.

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

QUESTION: Just a quick follow-up on Elise's –

MS NAUERT: Okay, just briefly, go ahead.

QUESTION: Really very briefly. The Russians are claiming that al-Nusra and other groups are stockpiling chemical weapons and planning an attack. So you dismiss that out of hand?

MS NAUERT: I think that's more false flag type reporting.

QUESTION: They've been talking about this for a while.

MS NAUERT: We've seen that before –

QUESTION: So you dismiss it?

MS NAUERT: – where they try to put the blame, they try to put the onus on other groups, and we don't buy into that. Go ahead, Janne.

QUESTION: Thank you, Heather. On North Korea, U.S. Ambassador to United Nations Nikki Haley mentioned that North Korea is threatening to nullify the denuclearization talks. What is your comment that –

MS NAUERT: That they're threatening to what?

QUESTION: Nullify the denuclearization –

MS NAUERT: I have not read that quote from Ambassador Haley. I've read most of her quotes. I don't recall having seen that one. I can just say diplomacy is something that we will be pushing ahead with, and that has not changed.

QUESTION: One more: The North Korea travel ban is lifted or is it extended?

MS NAUERT: As far as I know, that is – our policy has not changed on that. If and when we have some change to let you know about, I'll let you know.

QUESTION: But expires at the end of this month.

MS NAUERT: Okay, well then that's the end of this month. I will take a look at it and see if we –

QUESTION: Two days left.

MS NAUERT: I'll see if we have any updates for you on that.

QUESTION: All right, thank you.

MS NAUERT: Hey, Ben.

QUESTION: Yeah, thanks, Heather. Two questions on North Korea. First, yesterday you took a question whether Secretary Pompeo had spoken with his North Korean counterpart after the cancellation of the trip. Have you gotten an answer yet?

MS NAUERT: I did not ask for an answer on that. My apologies, it just slipped my mind.

QUESTION: Okay. If you can ask that, and then maybe not the Secretary but –

MS NAUERT: I'll see what I can find out for you. You know we often don't talk about our private diplomatic conversations. If there is something I can share with you, I will. I may not be able to, however.

QUESTION: Okay, and the second question is: You said diplomatic efforts are ongoing as far as denuclearization, but it seems the cancellation of this trip is sort of a setback. And then in the statement you read, you said that America stands ready to engage when it's clear Chairman Kim stands ready to deliver on his commitments he made. Does that mean the U.S. is waiting to see what North Korea does, or are you guys going to do anything to try and maybe add any more pressure to get North Korea to sort of deliver on their promises?

MS NAUERT: I think I would say we always stand ready to engage. Those – some of these things are diplomatic conversations that we're not going to read out. I know it's frustrating to a lot of reporters because we're not giving you the tick-tock on everything. The President decided to postpone this trip because he felt like it was not the time to go on this trip, and when we have something more for you on that, we'll let you know, okay?

QUESTION: Can I follow up on that?

MS NAUERT: Okay, hold on. Go ahead.

QUESTION: Just – is Steve Biegun – are there plans that he goes on his own to North Korea without Secretary Pompeo or –

MS NAUERT: I don't have any travel on Steve Biegun to read out at this point or to announce at this point, but I know he will be traveling in the region sometime probably within the next several weeks or so to meet some of his counterparts in other countries. Whether – whether or not he ends up going to North Korea at some point, I'm not going to forecast that. We have no travel to announce, but at some point he will be going to the region to meet some of his counterparts.

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

MS NAUERT: Hey. Hold on.

QUESTION: I have two questions, one regarding when President Trump announced to cancel Secretary Pompeo's trip. One of his tweets, he also – he blamed China not putting enough pressure on North Korea. I'm wondering if Secretary Pompeo has talked to his Chinese counterparts and is the United States considering any more sanctions on Chinese companies.

MS NAUERT: Well, you know we never forecast sanctions, so that's just something I will not address. But I can tell you that – and we say this about many other countries around the world – that certain countries – all countries can do more to adhere to sanctions. We would expect China, just like other countries, to adhere to the UN Security Council resolutions that it too voted for. So we'd just remind folks of that, but certainly we would expect other countries to continue to live up to its expectations with regard to imposing sanctions and seeing those sanctions through.

QUESTION: And I'm sure you have seen the report about a secret meeting between Japan and North Korea in Vietnam in July, and it was reported that United States was irritated by this meeting. I'm wondering if you have any comment on this report.

MS NAUERT: Yeah, I can't confirm any kind of meeting of that sort. I can tell you, though, that the U.S. and Japan, just like the U.S. and South Korea, are very closely coordinated. They talk, we talk, I would say virtually every single day. I've sat in on some of those meetings with the South Koreans and the Japanese, and we are all in coordination, singing out of the same hymn book, as some of us here in the United States would certainly say, and that is something that has not changed. We still remain in close coordination on many things.

QUESTION: Heather, on that note, there's, I don't know, a big report out from South Korea that Secretary Pompeo sent a letter to his South Korean counterpart kind of explaining why he didn't travel to North Korea, that the time wasn't right –

MS NAUERT: Yeah, I saw that report earlier. I'm not sure why that – I can't confirm that. He spoke with his South Korean counterpart. That I can confirm. We put out a readout of that call, but any supposed letter, I'm not familiar with that in any way, shape, or form.

QUESTION: Okay. Thanks.

QUESTION: I just have a quick follow-up on South Korea. While Pompeo canceled his trip, South Korea has announced that they're going to continue with talks with North Korea, and I'm just wondering is there concern that that could undercut U.S.-North Korea talks or that South Korea and the U.S. are out of sync on this issue –

MS NAUERT: And I've started to see some reporting about that, claiming that there is a rift between South Korea and the United States, and I can just say that that notion is simply overblown. There is no reality to that. I was just talking about how we closely coordinate with Japan. We closely coordinate with South Korea. We couldn't have gotten to this point where we have been having conversations with North Korea without the assistance of South Korea and without the assistance of Japan, and without a lot of other countries for that matter, but those two key allies helped get us to that position. So while we may have minor disagreements here and there on different kinds of policy issues, all of this narrative is simply overblown. We closely coordinate and have an excellent relationship with these countries and share information all the time.

Okay. Hey, Conor.

QUESTION: Can I ask one last question on this?

MS NAUERT: Yeah.

QUESTION: President Trump talked about a couple of different verbal agreements between him and Kim Jong-un during their meeting in Singapore. Can you say whether or not a declaration, a joint declaration to end the war, was one of those agreements?

MS NAUERT: I'm not familiar with that being a part of the overall agreement, but I can tell you that we believe that denuclearization has to take place before we get to other parts, and that's been a part of our policy.

QUESTION: Including a joint declaration?

MS NAUERT: Pardon me?

QUESTION: Including a joint declaration?

MS NAUERT: Yes. Yeah.

Okay, I've got to wrap it up, then.

QUESTION: On next week's 2+2.

MS NAUERT: Hey. Yeah.

QUESTION: So on next week's 2+2, earlier this summer, over 4 million individuals in Assam were left off the citizenship rolls. There was some controversy, there were fears about deportations. Will Secretary –

MS NAUERT: I'm sorry, they were left off of what?

QUESTION: Citizenship rolls. They were left off lists of citizens.

MS NAUERT: In India?

QUESTION: Mm-hmm.

MS NAUERT: Okay.

QUESTION: And I was wondering if Secretary Pompeo planned to raise that issue or minority rights more generally in his meetings next week.

MS NAUERT: Well, we talk about a whole host of things with other governments. That particular issue I'm not aware of. Doesn't mean that he's not aware of it, I'm just simply not aware of that. We are going there, of course, with our Department of Defense counterparts. We'll be having some breakaway meetings of our own as will our DOD counterparts be having their own meetings. When we have an agenda and a particular list of topics that I can share with you I certainly will, but I'm just not aware of that one in particular.

QUESTION: Thank you.

QUESTION: On North Korea.

MS NAUERT: Okay, last question. Let me just call on somebody who –

QUESTION: Also on North Korea.

MS NAUERT: Hey, there. How are you doing?

QUESTION: Hi. Good, how are you? Just a quick clarification question on North Korea. You had said yesterday from the President's tweet about there wasn't quite enough progress on denuclearization. I wondered what you consider to be enough progress for a trip to be justified in the future.

MS NAUERT: If – the last part of the question was what again?

QUESTION: What would be considered enough progress on denuclearization for a trip for Secretary Pompeo and Steve Biegun to be justified to North Korea?

MS NAUERT: So the President said we were not making sufficient progress with respect to the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.

QUESTION: So what –

MS NAUERT: That was the President's position, that's the Secretary's position, and that's the position of the President's national security team. And so they made the decision to postpone that trip. I think it's one of those things that we'll know it when we see it. We stand ready. We're watching closely. We stand ready to have meetings, and we will wait and see what happens. But I'll let you know when we have something more for that, okay?

QUESTION: Can I ask you one more question on China?

MS NAUERT: Yeah, and then I got to go.

QUESTION: There was a letter today from a bipartisan group of lawmakers urging the administration to use Global Magnitsky Act to sanction China over the crackdown in western China and Xinjiang province. Do you guys have any response to that? Is that something that you're considering?

MS NAUERT: I've not seen that letter. Sometimes when a letter comes to the State Department, reporters tend to hear about it from members of Congress faster than we do. So I just can't confirm receipt of that letter just yet, but I'll take a look and see if we have anything for you on that.

QUESTION: I just want to –

QUESTION: If I could just broadly on – is that something that you would consider, sanctioning China?

MS NAUERT: I'm just not going to comment on that in general terms without having seen the letter, who it's from, what it includes. It's certainly something that we would – we would take a look at and consider, however.

QUESTION: I just want to ask (inaudible) letter –

MS NAUERT: Okay. Lesley, go ahead.

QUESTION: – because it happened last week, but I don't think we've had a chance to raise it, is that's the letter from Menendez and Shaheen requesting the notes of the interpreter from the Helsinki summit between Trump and –

MS NAUERT: I don't have any updates for you on that. I know that those interpreters take an oath of privacy, and that's something that they hold very dear. It's one of the ethics that they adhere to and agree to when they take on those positions. If I have anything more for you, I'll let you know.

Okay. Thanks, everybody. And have a good Memorial weekend.

QUESTION: Labor Day.

QUESTION: Labor Day.

MS NAUERT: Labor Day weekend, yes. Thank you.

(The briefing was concluded at 3:18 p.m.)

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Press Releases: Department Press Briefing – August 28, 2018

Heather Nauert
Spokesperson

Department Press Briefing
Washington, DC
August 28, 2018

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TRANSCRIPT:

2:53 p.m. EDT

MS NAUERT: All right. Good afternoon, everybody. Great to see you.

I'd like to start with one quick announcement today, and this is a continuation of a story we've talked about for quite some time about Greece. And once again, we would like to strongly condemn the release of a convicted terrorist named Dimitris Koufodinas on a five-day reprieve from his imprisonment in Greece. It is his fourth and longest furlough in the past year. Koufodinas is a terrorist who has been convicted of multiple murders, including those of our embassy defense attache William Nordeen, and United States Air Force Sgt. Ronald Stewart. These furloughs are a shameful injustice to his many victims' families and serve as further incentive for his anarchist followers to commit further violence and destructive acts in his name. Our embassy in Athens has conveyed our serious concerns about this decision to the Greek Government.

Just to put things into perspective, over the past year, he has been granted more than 11 days – actually, 11 days of furlough. We do not believe that a convicted terrorist who has murdered not just our personnel, U.S. personnel, but other – from other governments as well, including innocent civilians in Greece – we do not believe that that kind of person should be given a vacation from prison.

With that, I'd be happy to take your questions. AP usually starts, so – good to see you.

QUESTION: Yes. Good to be here. Thanks for this. I wanted to start off asking about North Korea.

MS NAUERT: Okay.

QUESTION: After the cancellation of Pompeo's trip, is the diplomatic effort there in trouble? And then I was also wondering if you could give

us some further details about why the trip was canceled. There were reports that it was canceled following the receiving of a letter from Kim Yong-chol, and I was just wondering if you could confirm that.

MS NAUERT: Sure. So let me take your second question first. You know we often don't get into the detail about our private diplomatic conversations, but I can tell you that the President and his national security team, which obviously included Secretary Pompeo – and I want to make this clear, too, that Ambassador Bolton, the national security advisor, was a part of these conversations; there were some inaccurate reports that he was not; he happened to be on the phone on a secure call participating in this conversation as well. The entire national security team discussed this. In their judgment, they made the judgment that now is not the right time to travel. The President agreed with that, and that is when the President made the decision to send out some tweets announcing that decision.

QUESTION: All right. And the diplomatic effort?

MS NAUERT: Yeah. So the diplomatic effort is still ongoing. I know a lot of people are interested in sort of where this stands. The President overall remains very clear-eyed about the challenges and difficulties ahead of us. We have long said, the Secretary has long said, that this wouldn't be easy from the start, and it would be – could be a somewhat lengthy process. Overall, sometimes we move forward; sometimes we stand right where we are. We look forward to future negotiations when the time is right.

Hey, Lesley.

QUESTION: Has the Secretary spoken to his North Korean counterparts in recent days to explain it? And there's reporting that this letter was rather – it had a belligerent tone, quite aggressive. Can you confirm any of that? I mean, is that the reason why?

MS NAUERT: I can't confirm that. The Secretary, the President, the national security team made the decision that now is not the right time to travel.

QUESTION: So have you been in touch with –

MS NAUERT: That's a good question; I don't know the answer to that. I can go back and ask that question.

Hi.

QUESTION: I guess the decision to go was announced on Thursday, was taken also with a green light or in accordance to what was decided within the NSC and with the President. So what happened between Thursday and Friday that made them change their mind? Because it was the same people deciding to go, and then decided not to go.

MS NAUERT: And some of these would just fall under – and I know it's not

fun for all of you to not get what you see as a sufficient answer, but some of these are just private diplomatic conversations, and they made the decision that now – then was not the right time to travel.

QUESTION: Just another question.

MS NAUERT: Yeah.

QUESTION: Secretary Mattis this morning said or warned that he wasn't planning to suspend other drills in the region anymore. But he said I will have to discuss with State Department to see how the negotiations are going and so on. Would you – would the State Department advise Secretary Mattis to keep on suspending the drills, or he can resume them?

MS NAUERT: Well, I think we would hew very closely to what the President and also what the Department of Defense wanted to do. Secretary Pompeo and Secretary Mattis speak a lot about these things; we're very closely coordinated. Also, part of this is having conversations with the South Koreans and our allies as well. So if we have any changes to that posture, we'll certainly let you know. But I think DOD did a very fulsome briefing today, so I'd refer you back to some of what they said.

QUESTION: Heather –

QUESTION: Hi, Heather.

MS NAUERT: Hey, Rich.

QUESTION: Have there been any communications between the State Department and North Korea since those tweets came out?

MS NAUERT: That's a question that Lesley just asked. I don't have the answer to that, but I'll see if I can get it for you.

QUESTION: Okay. Thank you. And in the end of the President's tweet messages canceling this trip from the Secretary, he said he looked forward to seeing Kim Jong-un soon. Prior to this, were there discussions about the potential for another meeting between the two?

MS NAUERT: I don't have anything for you on that. That would be more of a White House question at this point.

QUESTION: And just making clear, people were asking about the content of the letter. Can you comment on the existence of that letter?

MS NAUERT: I cannot confirm a letter, and I certainly can't confirm the content of any diplomatic conversations. And when I say conversations, that also encompasses any kind of talks that we would have about those types of things, okay. Hi, Janne.

QUESTION: Hi. Thanks, Heather. Usually on North Korea immediately response about these issues. But this time, they not talking anything or

have you heard from any mentions about cancelations or –

MS NAUERT: Have – I’m sorry. Start – have I heard any mentions about –

QUESTION: Yeah. The Secretary’s visit North Korea cancelations, about how did you expect North Korea going to be response about the cancelation? Did you ever contact UN North Korean delegations?

MS NAUERT: Well, we – I mean, we certainly expect the North Korean Government to adhere and to go along with the pledges and promises that they made at the Singapore summit, in accordance to what they agreed to with the President.

I have a statement from the Secretary that he provided me earlier today, which I’d be happy to give to you, his take on the situation there. He says: Despite the decision to delay my trip to Pyongyang, America stands ready to engage when it is clear that Chairman Kim stands ready to deliver on the commitments that he made at the Singapore summit to President Trump to completely denuclearize North Korea. The world is united behind the need for Chairman Kim to fulfill that commitment. Every member of the United Nations Security Council voted to call upon North Korea to abandon all nuclear weapons, existing nuclear programs, and other weapons of mass destruction. The goal of final, fully verified denuclearization of North Korea, as agreed to by Chairman Kim, is the world’s goal. The United States, like the rest of the world, is looking forward to North Korea’s compliance with these resolutions, which will enable Chairman Kim to provide a brighter future for his own people.

And for folks who need a little nighttime reading, those UN Security Council Resolutions 2371, 2375, and 2397 – they lay them out very clearly. So when you hear other governments or other individuals criticizing the United States, that the United States is perhaps upending these negotiations, I would point you back to these unanimous UN Security Council resolutions, which clearly lay out the world’s unanimous expectations of the North Korean Government to denuclearize and all the other things we just mentioned. I can read for you those resolutions if you like.

QUESTION: No thanks. (Laughter.)

MS NAUERT: No? Not today. Okay. Another time. All right.

QUESTION: The letter –

MS NAUERT: Hey, Kylie.

QUESTION: Hi. So you said now is not the time for the trip. Is the State Department and Pompeo still committed to making a trip to North Korea at some point in the near future or potentially never again?

MS NAUERT: I think that’s entirely a hypothetical. We stand ready to talk when the North Koreans stand ready to do so and we think it can be productive.

QUESTION: How else –

QUESTION: And –

QUESTION: How else could it be done that – sorry.

QUESTION: Well, and you also spoke specifically about the President's tweet, which cited no progress on denuclearization, so –

MS NAUERT: No. Actually, he said we feel that they are not making sufficient progress. There's a big difference there.

QUESTION: So they are making –

MS NAUERT: We feel that they're not making sufficient progress. There is progress being made.

QUESTION: On denuclearization?

MS NAUERT: The Secretary is not just hopping on a plane and flying to North Korea for his health. He is going there to have serious, substantive talks. Those talks have, obviously, occurred. Many of you have been on those trips with us. But in the President's view and in the national security team's view, sufficient progress with respect to denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula was not being made.

QUESTION: And one last question.

MS NAUERT: Yeah.

QUESTION: Ambassador Sung Kim was also at the White House on Friday. And I'm just curious, why was he here in Washington? Was he here to meet Mr. Biegun? What was the genesis of that trip?

MS NAUERT: I actually can't confirm that Sung Kim was here, if Ambassador –

QUESTION: There was a photo at the White House.

MS NAUERT: Okay. I did not – I have not seen that picture.

QUESTION: Okay.

MS NAUERT: I don't know why he was here, other than that he's an important part of the team and has advised the Secretary and the overall team on the effort regarding North Korea. And in terms of our Special Representative Steve Biegun, we're thrilled to have him on board.

Okay. Hi, Conor.

QUESTION: Just a couple follow-ups on this.

MS NAUERT: Yeah.

QUESTION: Ambassador Haley said today that it's possible North Korea has changed its mind on its commitment to denuclearization. Is that a view that the Secretary shares as well?

MS NAUERT: I haven't asked the Secretary that question. All we know is that Chairman Kim has made certain commitments to the President at the Singapore summit.

QUESTION: And then just one more.

MS NAUERT: Yeah, sure.

QUESTION: A close ally of the Secretary, Senator Marco Rubio, also said today – he tweeted that talks have failed. Just get your reaction to that? Obviously, this is someone that the Secretary is –

MS NAUERT: Yeah, you know I tend not to comment on things that other world leaders or even U.S. politicians would say. I would certainly say that when you look at some of the things that have taken place in the last year: One, we're in a very different spot today than we were one year ago, where there were ballistic missile launches, where there were nuclear tests. We all remember very well what last summer looked like and the fear that many Americans felt at that time. Today, we are in a very different place.

Two, we are in conversations and have been in negotiations with this government that we have not had any kind of real relationship with for just about a decade. Now, the fact that we're having conversations, I would call that progress, and I would call that diplomatic progress, and that's exactly what we do out of this building.

The maximum pressure campaign – the world came together to impose sanctions against North Korea. When we were just at ASEAN, we heard so many of those ASEAN nations thanking the United States and thanking President Trump for his leadership on this issue. Were it not for the UN Security Council resolutions and for the maximum pressure campaign, Chairman Kim would not have gotten to this point where he is willing and open to having conversations with the United States Government.

You recall when President Moon of South Korea first came here, I think it was back in March or perhaps it was early April, and he stood just outside the door of the White House and he thanked this administration for its efforts with that economic pressure campaign.

So those are just a few ways – I can go on and on – about the repatriation of remains, I can remind folks of the three Americans that we brought home just a few months ago. Secretary Pompeo's – I think it was his tenth day on the job – I would call that tremendous progress and would take issue with anyone who would claim that we have not made progress on this front.

I've got to move on to some other issues, and I have to – I have to cut the briefing short today. Yeah.

QUESTION: South Asia?

QUESTION: President Moon is supposed to meet with Kim Jong-un next month in North Korea. Given your past comments saying that – pointing to his comments that there can be no progress on inter-Korean relations without progress on denuclearization, would you call on him to cancel that meeting?

MS NAUERT: No, I think I would just go back to what President Moon has said in the past, that those things have to take place, that has to take place. The denuclearization has to take place. He's been very clear about that. We continue to have good, frank discussions with our allies, both the Republic of Korea and Japan.

QUESTION: So he shouldn't cancel until there's been more progress?

MS NAUERT: Look, I would just go back to what he has said in the past, the importance of denuclearization.

Said, go right ahead.

QUESTION: Thank you.

QUESTION: Has there been any progress on –

QUESTION: Thank you, Heather.

QUESTION: Can you just make it clear if there's been progress on –

MS NAUERT: I've got to move on to other things. I think I just announced that, I discussed that, about denuclearization.

Said.

QUESTION: There's been progress on denuclearizing or –

MS NAUERT: We are having those conversations. The conversations have continued. As you know, we decided not to take this trip because we felt sufficient progress has not been made. But I think I've addressed your question already.

Said, go right ahead.

QUESTION: Thank you, Heather. I wanted to ask you about the – the State Department last Friday informed Congress that – of aid cutoff to the Palestinians in the amount of \$200 million. Can you share with us why it was finally decided for this aid to be cut off, considering that this goes directly to help the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza? It doesn't go through the Authority. It goes – it is implemented by USAID and other American-affiliated NGOs and so on. And it goes to aid the youth and the women. Why was it decided to cut off the aid?

MS NAUERT: Earlier this year, and you all recall this – I know we

received a lot of questions about this issue – the President directed an overall review of U.S. assistance to the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank and also in Gaza to ensure that U.S. taxpayer dollars were being spent in accordance with U.S. national interests and then also providing value to the U.S. taxpayer.

The decision was then made, and we sent out a statement to this effect, that that money at this time is not in the best interests of the U.S. national interest and also at this time does not provide value to the U.S. taxpayer. When we talk about the issue of Gaza, we have long said – bless you – Gaza is the primary entity – excuse me, the Palestinian Authority, the Palestinians and Hamas – the primary reason why the security situation and the situation in Gaza is so terrible, why electricity has become an issue, why clean water has become an issue, all of those things. And Hamas needs to take care of its people. It has refused to do so. Instead, it has spent money on other types of projects, and you know exactly what I'm talking about.

Yeah.

QUESTION: Two quick follow-ups. But in fact, your allies disagree with you. They think that cutting off aid will exacerbate an already volatile – volatile –

MS NAUERT: I am sure they do, and that is because the United States Government –

QUESTION: Including the Israelis, including the Israelis.

MS NAUERT: That is because the United States Government has provided far more money –

QUESTION: I understand.

MS NAUERT: – than many other countries in the region have. And I think Ambassador Haley spoke to that today –

QUESTION: I understand.

MS NAUERT: – when she talked about the importance of burden sharing. And that is we believe that the United States alone does not have to shoulder a disproportionate share of financing programs overseas. The United States is the most generous country in the world, and we continue by and large to be the most significant donor to many programs around the world. But we also feel that other countries should step up and take responsibility, and that's a key point of what the President has discussed.

QUESTION: Okay, I understand. But what is the logic, when you say that it was not in the interest of the national security of the United States of America while, in fact, the Israelis, including Israeli generals and intelligence and so on, the British, the French, everybody says it is actually – it can exacerbate this horrible situation? So why is that not

in the interest of the national security of the United States?

MS NAUERT: I think we believe at this time that it is not providing value to the U.S. taxpayer. If I have anything more for you on that, I will let you know.

QUESTION: Right. One last issue on the – there's been a great deal of talk about that this administration is going to be pushing – sometime soon, maybe next week, maybe the following week – to cut off all aid to UNRWA and in fact, dismantle UNRWA and to have whatever programs UNRWA is doing now to have it conducted under UNHCR. Could you share with us or could you enlighten us on this effort, if there is such an effort, if that is the thinking of this building? Because this building historically has been supportive of UNRWA.

MS NAUERT: Yeah. I can just tell you we have no decisions to announce today. No decisions have been made.

Hi, Laurie.

QUESTION: Hi.

MS NAUERT: I saw you at the Pentagon today.

QUESTION: So I'm following up with an issue that came – was raised at the Pentagon.

MS NAUERT: Okay.

QUESTION: It has to do with Syria's use of chemical weapons in Idlib, possible use. And specifically, Secretary Mattis said this morning that you were in regular contact with Russia on this issue. Can you explain both your concerns and what the situation is, particularly with the Russians?

MS NAUERT: Mm-hmm. And I think DOD did a terrific job of laying out a lot of the issues there, so I would largely echo what the Department of Defense said and encourage anyone who's not taken a look at that transcript to please take a look at that.

I can tell you that the Secretary spoke with Foreign Minister Lavrov last week. We made it very clear, the Secretary made it clear, that any Russian regime offensive on Idlib and an escalation –

QUESTION: You mean a Syrian regime offensive?

MS NAUERT: I'm sorry. Yes, thank you. Any Russian and/or Syrian regime offense – offensive on Idlib and any kind of escalation in that area, we would hold them responsible and we would hold them accountable for that, especially – most especially, for the use of chemical weapons. The United States has taken a very strong stance in the past when chemical weapons have been used. You all know that very well.

We have engaged the Russian Government and also the military at the most senior level. Ambassador Bolton has spoken to his Russian counterparts. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Chairman Dunford, has as well spoken with his Russian counterparts to make it very clear that the United States Government and its partners would respond to any verified chemical weapons use in Idlib, or elsewhere in Syria for that matter, in a swift and appropriate manner.

So we would encourage Russia to make this point very clear to Damascus that that will not be tolerated.

QUESTION: Thank you. And a follow-up: The Syrian and Iranian defense ministers just signed a new defense cooperation agreement. How do you view that?

MS NAUERT: Yeah, we saw that, certainly. Iran has continued its destabilizing activities around the globe, and I think would be a primary example of that.

Okay? Okay.

QUESTION: On Idlib very quickly –

QUESTION: South Asia?

QUESTION: Just to follow-up on Idlib, because all reports say that it is – it has a concentration of al-Nusrah forces, the bad guys that you have listed as terrorists and so on. They are concentrated there. Their allies, who are from the same political and kind of militant orientation, are also there. You certainly don't want to provide another safe haven in Idlib, do you?

MS NAUERT: Said, I don't have anything additional for you on that, but I think Department of Defense addressed that today earlier. I can tell you something in addition on the Geneva talks. That is something that has been a real priority of ours and a priority of our Special Representative Jim Jeffrey as well, to reinvigorate the Geneva process.

I can tell you that we have accepted an invitation by Staffan de Mistura. He is the UN special envoy handling Syria. We will be participating in talks in Geneva on September 14th. It's a bit of a ways off, certainly, but I can tell you that Ambassador Jeffrey will be there and looks forward to representing the United States along with our Deputy Assistant Secretary Joel Rayburn.

I want to make it clear that we fully support the Geneva process. We fully support the efforts on the part of Staffan de Mistura to broker a political settlement. We recognize that a military solution is not going to resolve the problem long term in Syria that it has to be a political solution, so I expect that we'll have more announcements and details for you on the days and weeks to come. But we think we're at a good spot right now in getting back to the Geneva process.

And I can take one more question.

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

QUESTION: Yeah. Heather.

MS NAUERT: I can take more one question and then I have to go. Hi.

QUESTION: Thank you so much.

MS NAUERT: Where you been?

QUESTION: (Laughter.) I've been enjoying the summer.

MS NAUERT: Oh, good for you. Glad to hear it.

QUESTION: Thank you. Good to be back. Do you have any update on the Rohingya report? When should we expect the State Department to release such a report? And I have one follow-up.

MS NAUERT: Sure. So let me first start with the UN fact-finding mission, and UN just released its report within the last day or so. And I just want to make clear that that is something that – we are reviewing that report's recommendations. So there is that piece of things. The findings in that report, if you've not reviewed it just yet, overall add to a growing body of information indicating widespread human rights abuses by the Burmese military and other security forces in Burma. The United States Government has held individuals – high-level military individuals responsible. We have through different rounds of sanctions in the past and I will certainly let you know if we have any additional announcements on that.

There's a second piece of information and that is the State Department's own documentation project that – it started – actually, let me back up for one second and mention something about the UN fact-finding mission. We were very troubled by the fact that those participating in the UN fact-finding mission were not granted access to the Rakhine State, and that's the key area where this crisis has taken place and so many people were run out of their homes and killed, and you know the rest of that. They have not been able to gather adequate information and that has long been a concern of ours. Humanitarian workers have not been able to get in and provide the important and necessary aid and support that they need to. Media, that has been an issue as well. So I just wanted to highlight that disappointment that we have had that various groups have not been able to get in.

With regard to our documentation project, the State Department undertook one in which refugees located at Cox's Bazar, which is in Bangladesh – many of them were interviewed for their experiences. That has been pulled together into a report which the Secretary will review and has taken a look at it from my understanding, and we will decide whether and to what extent to publicize that final report.

As you well know, we considered this, we designated this as ethnic cleansing last year. It's a very complicated and complex process that involves a whole lot of lawyers, and when we have something ready to announce, we'll certainly let you know. Okay?

QUESTION: Do you share the –

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

MS NAUERT: Yeah. I've got to do last question. I've got to go.

QUESTION: Can I just follow up on that one (inaudible)?

MS NAUERT: Yeah.

QUESTION: So the – so do you agree or – that – with the UN report that there was genocidal intent in those attacks against the Rohingya?

MS NAUERT: We have not made a determination on that, and I'll go back to what I just said, and that is it is a very specific legal designation. It's not one that is easily made. To the average person, of course these things are incredibly horrific and it seems like we should just slap a label on something. Well, there are complex legal designations that have legal meaning and weight in courts around the world. So that is why the Secretary reviews this very carefully and makes the best determination possible.

QUESTION: But does the UN policy affect at all what the U.S. does going forward? Does the UN report in any way change –

MS NAUERT: Does the UN fact-finding mission change –

QUESTION: – anything to do with how the U.S. policy is?

MS NAUERT: We support that process and we are taking a look at the recommendations. And I've got to go unfortunately, but thanks, everybody. We'll see you real soon.

(The briefing was concluded at 3:18 p.m.)

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Press Releases: Zimbabwe's Constitutional Court Ruling on the Presidential Election

Press Statement
Heather Nauert

Department Spokesperson

Washington, DC
August 24, 2018

Today, Zimbabwe's Constitutional Court declared Emmerson D. Mnangagwa the winner of the election and Zimbabwe's next President and dismissed MDC Alliance's challenge of the July 30 presidential election results. The United States urges all parties to respect the Zimbabwean constitution and the rule of law.

The IRI-NDI Zimbabwe International Electoral Observation Mission reported "several improvements to the electoral process compared to Zimbabwe's past elections, though equally important problems gave rise to deep concerns that the process thus far has not made the mark." Further reforms are necessary to meet standards Zimbabweans expect and deserve and which reflect regional and international best practices for democratic elections.

The United States remains concerned over politically motivated human rights violations and abuses, and acts of post-electoral retribution in Zimbabwe. Violence and unlawful activity should not be part of the political process, and those responsible for such transgressions must be held accountable. Human rights and fundamental freedoms, such as freedom of expression and association, must be respected, and victims and witnesses of human rights violations and abuses deserve protection under the law.

The United States encourages the Government of Zimbabwe to hold substantive discussions with all stakeholders and implement electoral and broader political and economic reforms. We stand ready to continue our dialogue with Zimbabwe's political, economic, and civil society leaders to foster inclusive democratic governance for the betterment of all citizens.

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[Press Releases: U.S. Permanent Mission to the Organization of American States \(OAS\) Announces Visit by White House Advisor Ivanka Trump and OPIC President Ray W. Washburne To Highlight Women's Empowerment in the Americas](#)

Notice to the Press
Office of the Spokesperson

Washington, DC
August 24, 2018

Today, the U.S. Permanent Mission to the Organization of American States (OAS) announced the scheduled visit by White House Advisor Ivanka Trump and Ray W. Washburne, President and CEO of the Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC), to address the organization's member states on Administration efforts to advance women's empowerment in the Americas. The event will take place August 27, at OAS headquarters in Washington, DC, at 2:00 p.m.

Ms. Trump and Mr. Washburne will speak before a special session of the OAS Inter-American Council for Integral Development, chaired by Ambassador Carlos Trujillo, U.S. Permanent Representative to the OAS. The presentation will bring focus to women's economic empowerment in the Americas and advance OPIC's 2x Americas Women's Initiative launched at the Summit of the Americas in Lima, Peru on April 13.

The OPIC initiative will mobilize \$500 million in private capital to invest

in projects that empower women in the region by addressing economic barriers that limit women's full participation in the economy, and reaffirms the Administration's strong commitment to empowering women in the Americas and throughout the world through public-private partnership.

For more information on press coverage of the event, please contact the Organization of American States press office at: (202) 370-5437 or OASPress@oas.org. The event will be open to the press. The Organization of American States headquarters are located at 17th Street and Constitution Ave., NW, Washington, DC.

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