

Press Releases: The United States Urges Russia To Respect Georgia's Sovereignty and Territorial Integrity

Press Statement
Heather Nauert

Department Spokesperson

Washington, DC
August 9, 2017

The United States views the visit of President Putin to the Russian occupied Georgian territory of Abkhazia as inappropriate and inconsistent with the principles underlying the Geneva International Discussions, to which Russia is a party. The United States fully supports Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders and rejects Russia's recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The United States urges Russia to withdraw its forces to pre-war positions per the 2008 ceasefire agreement and reverse its recognition of the Georgian regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

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Press Releases: Remarks to the Staff and Families of U.S. Embassy Malaysia

Remarks
Rex W. Tillerson

Secretary of State

Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
August 9, 2017

AMBASSADOR LAKHDIR: (In progress) – all of you for coming and thank you for welcoming our Secretary. We've had a very productive visit and I've described for him how all of you are the goldmine of this embassy, our crack team, and how we're so happy that he would come and visit us, and I thank him very much.

So I would like to introduce Secretary Tillerson, and please welcome him. (Applause.)

SECRETARY TILLERSON: Well, thank you so much, Ambassador Lakhdhir, and thank you particularly for the leadership here with the embassy and the mission here in Malaysia, and we've had a good conversation, first time for us to have a chance to sit face-to-face and talk. And I think she's already won me over because the most important priority to her is you, your safety, your security, your well-being, and that's also my priority as well. So you've got a great leader here that cares a lot about you and that's – I think that's really important.

I also know that anytime the Secretary kind of drops in on somewhat short notice – this was not planned well, well in advance, but while I was in the region for the ASEAN and East Asian Summit meetings in Manila, I wanted to at least drop in on a couple of our missions here in the neighborhood, so I was up in Bangkok yesterday and down here last night and today, and really valuable trips for me. I had good meetings with the prime minister last night, the deputy prime minister this morning, and a lot of time with the foreign minister over in Manila working together on the outcome of that summit, which I think was actually quite positive and quite good in terms of what came out of that summit, so great relationships here in Malaysia in no small measure due to your efforts and the relationships that you have for us.

So our two countries really have a lot in common. It's a really important relationship to the U.S. both from the standpoint of regional security issues, strong mil-to-mil relationships, but obviously very important and significant economic relationships – a lot of U.S. direct investment in this country, a long history of U.S. direct investment in this country, and a large U.S. American population that makes their home here. And you know all of them and where they are and what they do because you have to help take care of them and their needs while they're here in Malaysia as well.

But also, we're working hard to attract more Malaysian investment back home in the U.S., and I know many of you worked in that area in that regard as well to promote opportunities for Malaysian investors and Malaysian business

back in the U.S., and we want to continue to expand and grow that as well.

Now it's our view and I think broadly understood and shared that the more economic relationships we have, there's more interdependencies between the two countries, and there's a greater opportunity from a people-to-people standpoint to know one another better also, so really important and appreciate your efforts in that regard. I know the office here has – also represents – there are a number of agencies that carry out their activities through this office, and so your support of their efforts interagency-wise, but also working collectively and collaboratively with them is very important to our success here.

And the most important thing, obviously, that you do for us is present the American face to the Malaysian people. You are America when you're here. And so it's how you conduct yourself, the integrity with which you conduct yourself, the way in which you represent America is just extraordinarily important to our relationship here. But none of that happens without our locally employed staff and the important way in which you help us be successful here. You're extremely valuable to our success as a mission and we do really appreciate the work you do on our behalf. The support you give our activities here is important to our ability to meet our mission as the State Department here in Malaysia.

I want to say just a quick word about the Department and the redesign that you're hearing a little bit about. First, for those of you who participated in the listening survey back in May, thank you. Thank you for taking the time to do that. We had over 35,000 of our colleagues in the State Department responding to that listening survey. We also have had sit-down, lengthy, face-to-face interviews with over 300 people in the Department, all of this to give us some sense of where some of the opportunities for us to improve things within the Department might be. No one knows better what gets in the way of you being effective than you, and that was really what we're wanting to have some understanding of with that listening tour that we did.

We've taken that information now and we've set up a number of work teams. Now this whole effort is led by the employees of the State Department, your colleagues. We have a steering team that helps guide them that's chaired by Deputy Secretary Sullivan. But we really are wanting this to be an employee-led redesign effort, and it's all about looking at how we get our work done. What do you see that would allow you – if we could do this for you, what would make things better for you? How do we make it easier for you to deliver on the mission? And a lot of that's – sometimes we know we have things that are statutorily required that sometimes make our lives challenging, some of it is local rules that we obviously have to comply with.

But we know a lot of things are internal to the Department, things we put into place that – maybe that got put into place a long time ago in a different era and made a lot of sense then, but things have changed now. So we're really wanting to take a completely – a complete and fulsome re-examination of how the work gets done, let you tell us how to redesign that work to address some of the obstacles. And even if they're statutorily – as I was telling the Ambassador, I have already had conversations with people on

the Hill in the appropriations committees where a lot of these things get written, and they've said to me, "Look, if we're doing something requiring something that's standing in the way of the State Department being able to carry out its mission, we're willing to sit down and talk about those and make changes." And I'm willing to go up there and fight to make those changes on your behalf if you feel that's really important to our ability to deliver on the mission they're wanting us to deliver on – do it more effectively, more efficiently.

So the answers are going to come from all of this work. This is a little bit more of a roll your sleeves up and have to work a little harder at it, at this stage in particular. I know it creates a lot of uncertainty for people, and having done this two or three times now over my lifetime, I do appreciate what is going through a lot of people's minds in terms of what does this mean for me, what does it mean for my career, what is it going to do to the way I conduct my affairs. That's why we wanted to be informed, we wanted to be led by your colleagues. So at the end of it, our objective is that your ability to carry out your work and deliver on your part of our mission is easier for you, it means you can do more, because I know everyone is very dedicated to delivering on the mission. That's the one thing that clearly came out of the listening exercise.

And then how can we give you a more rewarding career? You are the career people. This is what you've chosen to do with your lives. I'm kind of passing through. I had my opportunity to do something for a short period of time. But one of the things I hope I do in the short period of time I have is leave you a State Department that gives you the ability to do what you do more effectively, more efficiently, and with a lot more satisfaction. And then your vision of where you'd like to see your career go in the future is enabled in a way that you can achieve your own expectations and your own aspirations as well.

So it's easy to say, when you just kind of roll it off the tongue that way, hard to do. But we're prepared to undertake the hard work to do that and to support the hard work that your colleagues are doing back at the State Department in Washington. And we really welcome and want people to bring your questions forward, your concerns forward. We will address those. At every step along the way, we're going to try to do as much communication as this thing is progressing as possible so that you have some understanding of where it's going.

I'm kind of with you. I don't know where it's going. We'll see it together and then we'll make some decisions about what we think is actually achievable, what we think we do need to go to the Congress to get some help on, and we'll work this thing together. I'm willing to take the time it takes up front to allow us to get to that answer.

And so that's really what we're about, and I hope to the extent that there are questions – and I know there are a lot of rumors that circulate around out there and there – it's always interesting to me when I hear things and I say, "Holy cow, where did that come from?" And if it causes concern, we hope people will get it elevated so we can answer that question for you.

So the most important thing for me to leave you with, though, is again, what I learned out of that listening exercise is what a dedicated, patriotic organization I have the extreme honor to lead. And it is really an honor for me to be in this position leading you, because your commitment, your dedication to what you're doing came through loud and clear. And that is the most important thing to me is that we have an organization that is committed to doing the right thing, so we want to help you do that during my time that I'm here.

So, thank you. Thank you for being here. Thanks to the local employed staff, really important to us. For those of you that are here for your tour through Malaysia with your families, thank you for being willing to do this. We understand what it means for families to be away from home and to be away from your extended families back in the United States. We know it means missing some things. And at the same time, hopefully you're building some wonderful memories with your families, those of you that are here. You're making memories that'll stay with you a lifetime, and most importantly, you're doing something that you can be very proud of during the time you're here in the mission in Malaysia.

So it's great to see all of you. I wish I could stay longer. I have had many visits to Malaysia over my career, some of you probably know. So I do know Malaysia quite well and I have a great affection for the Malay people. And I'll be back. I'll be back for a longer visit. But again, thank all of you for what you do for us. (Applause.)

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Press Releases: Secretary of State Rex Tillerson With Press

Remarks

Rex W. Tillerson

Secretary of State

En Route Guam

August 9, 2017

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, President Trump said that North Korea's threats against the United States, if they continue, will be met with fire and fury like the world has never seen before. Is this part of a diplomatic strategy or did you find those remarks to be unhelpful?

SECRETARY TILLERSON: Well, I think the U.S. and international community with respect to North Korea has actually had a pretty good week. We had a unanimous UN Security Council resolution strengthening sanctions against North Korea with China and Russia joining us in that vote, and then at ASEAN, a lot of strong statements coming out of ASEAN, and I think also reinforced with a global community that has expressed its view that North Korea really needs to stand down this program.

And so I think in response to that, North Korea's rhetoric has just ratcheted up louder and louder and more threatening. So I think the President – what the President is doing is sending a strong message to North Korea in language that Kim Jong-un can understand, because he doesn't seem to understand diplomatic language. I think the President just wanted to be clear to the North Korean regime on the U.S. unquestionable ability to defend itself, will defend itself and its allies, and I think it was important that he deliver that message to avoid any miscalculation on their part.

QUESTION: Well, one of their – one of North Korea's responses was to say it's going to direct missiles on Guam. That's exactly where you are headed right now. Would you consider re-routing?

SECRETARY TILLERSON: Well, the North Korean missile capability can point in many directions, so Guam is not the only place that would be under threat. No, I never considered re-routing the trip back, and I do not believe that there is any imminent threat, in my own view.

QUESTION: Do you think there's a longer-term threat, specifically about Guam, against the region in general?

SECRETARY TILLERSON: Well, I hope not. Again, what we're hopeful is that this pressure campaign, which the entire world now has joined us in, and with the engagement of China and Russia, two of North Korea's closest neighbors – that they can begin to persuade the regime that they needed to reconsider the current pathway they're on and think about engaging in a dialogue about a different future.

QUESTION: Have China and Russia been helpful at all to you in the last 24 hours? Have you spoken with your counterparts and have they helped in any way?

SECRETARY TILLERSON: Well, I haven't spoken to them since we left Manila, which was, I guess, about a day and a half ago. But we had direct discussions in Manila about the situation. I know that they were having talks as well

with the representative from North Korea. I think that is evidence that they have very good, open channels of communication to be able to talk to the regime of North Korea, and we hope that they will be encouraging them to stand down their program and abide by the UN Security Council resolutions, which both China and Russia have voted for in the past. So I'm hopeful that they can use their influence – and I think they do have influence with the regime – to bring them to a point of dialogue, but with the right expectation of what that dialogue (inaudible).

QUESTION: Has anything happened in the last 24 hours to lead you to believe that we are moving towards a military option perhaps more quickly than anticipated?

SECRETARY TILLERSON: Nothing that I have seen and nothing that I know of would indicate that the situation has dramatically changed in the last 24 hours.

QUESTION: Do you have any immediate diplomatic plans to de-escalate the situation that could have an impact within days instead of months or years?

SECRETARY TILLERSON: Well, we have a very active, ongoing diplomatic effort, most of which is behind the scenes because that's where diplomacy is most effective. We had very open conversations and our telephone lines remain open, certainly, to China and Russia as well as our allies, and I think publicly, we've been pretty clear in our statements directed at the North Koreans as to what we would like to see happen and make clear to them that we do not seek to be a threat to them, but we have to respond to the serious threats that they make towards us.

QUESTION: There have been calls for you to launch a new diplomatic effort. Do you feel that a new strategy may be warranted?

SECRETARY TILLERSON: I do not. I think the strategy we're currently on is working. In fact, again, we have now garnered widespread international support, obviously, not just with the UN Security Council resolution, but globally, countries are speaking out and expressing the same view as to what North Korea should do, which is not be a threat to the stability of the region.

I think, in fact, the pressure is starting to show. I think that's why the rhetoric coming out of Pyongyang is beginning to become louder and more threatening. Whether we've got them backed into a corner or not is difficult to say, but diplomatically, you never like to have someone in a corner without a way for them to get out.

QUESTION: And what is Pyongyang's way out?

SECRETARY TILLERSON: Talks. Talks with the right expectation of what those talks will be – will be about.

QUESTION: Do you have any advice for Americans? Should they be worried?

SECRETARY TILLERSON: I think Americans should sleep well at night, have no

concerns about this particular rhetoric of the last few days. I think that the President, again, as commander-in-chief, I think he felt it necessary to issue a very strong statement directly to North Korea. But I think what the President was just reaffirming is the United States has the capability to fully defend itself with any attack, will defend our allies, and we will do so. So the American people should sleep well at night.

QUESTION: All right. Thank you, sir.

SECRETARY TILLERSON: Thank you.

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[Press Releases: Republic of Singapore National Day](#)

Press Statement
Rex W. Tillerson

Secretary of State

Washington, DC
August 8, 2017

On behalf of the Government United States of America, I extend our warmest regards to the people of Singapore as you celebrate your national day on August 9th.

Singapore is a longstanding, valued partner and friend in one of the most dynamic regions in the world. For more than 50 years, the United States and Singapore have enjoyed a close economic and security relationship based on our shared vision for stability and prosperity. We look forward to further strengthening our partnership to advance mutual interests and to address shared concerns in the years ahead.

Congratulations on your 52nd anniversary and best wishes for a year filled with peace, success, and happiness.

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[Press Releases: Remarks to the Embassy Staff](#)

Remarks

Rex W. Tillerson

Secretary of State

Bangkok, Thailand

August 8, 2017

AMBASSADOR DAVIES: Hello, everybody. (Speaking Thai.) Thank you so much for coming. How cool to see all you kids here. Thank you so much for coming today.

Colleagues, ladies and gentlemen, family members, friends, Jackie and I are so happy to have you in our home, great to have you here. Thanks for coming to welcome Secretary Tillerson, his delegation, and also our special guests, Congressman Frelinghuysen and Representative Cuellar.

Mr. Chairman, Congressmen, welcome. Great to have you here.

Susan Thornton, my immediate boss, is also here somewhere. There she is. Great to see Susan visiting us here in Bangkok.

We are very pleased that Secretary Tillerson is able to come to Bangkok after a very successful weekend in Manila with ASEAN, and all the more so that he is able to find time out of his way-too-tight schedule to visit with all of us, the employees and the families of our Mission community, both Americans

and our treasured Thai colleagues.

It's great, as well, to have somewhere in the house electronically joining us – and I see them up in the window there – American Consulate General Chiang Mai. Thank you for remoting in to us on DVC.

What y'all do every day to advance American interests, security, economic, people-to-people, not just in the Kingdom, but around the hemisphere and around the world, is vital and remarkable. And I am mightily proud to show you all off to the Secretary today.

Mr. Secretary, welcome to Bangkok. Mission Thailand is America's flagship diplomatic mission in Asia. Half of us are here doing regional work. One-fifth of us, twenty percent of us here, work on public health issues, keeping disease in check. We get about a million Americans a year who come to the beautiful Kingdom of Thailand, and our consular colleagues help those folks out. Our military and law enforcement, USAID, State Department, so many other agencies here, are all part of the team.

I want to give a shout-out to our chief operating officer Pete Haymond, who is also in the house. Where is Pete? He is right there, and Dusadee. Great to have them here, as well.

Look, I could go on. I'm going to stop. But diplomacy is a people business, it's about people. And we've got, here in the Kingdom, not just good people, but great people. So, colleagues, ladies and gentlemen, friends, families, allow me to introduce to you the Secretary of State of the United States of America, Rex Tillerson. (Applause.)

SECRETARY TILLERSON: Well, thank you so much, Ambassador Davies, and thanks for your leadership here of the Embassy in Thailand, Mission Bangkok, and good morning to all. (Speaking Thai.)

So I also want to recognize, as well, the two colleagues from the U.S. Congress here on a CODEL making some rounds in the region, extremely important, and we appreciate the support you give to the various CODELs that come through the region. It's critical to the Congress being able to carry out their oversight responsibilities, and also inform the decisions they have to make. And I appreciate Chairman Frelinghuysen, and we've had an opportunity to meet on a number of occasions, had some breakfast discussions together. He's important, obviously, on House Appropriations. And a fellow Texan, Congressman Cuellar, as well. And so welcome to both of you, and good luck. I hope you have a great, successful trip around the region.

I've had the pleasure, obviously, to be to Thailand many, many times in my prior life. So this – been coming here over the last 25 years. But obviously, first time here as Secretary of State. And I really am delighted and honored to be here with you.

It's also great, as well, to have Consul Jill Harhigh and the folks from Chiang Mai. And I'm glad they can be with us, as well. Welcome to all of you, and especially the members of the local staff who have served us both here

and the U.S. Mission to Thailand for many, many decades. And your role is invaluable, just really invaluable to our success.

I know my visit occurs during a year of national mourning in remembrance of His Majesty King Bhumibol. I think all of you know His Majesty was just a wonderful, wonderful friend of America, and really, I think, set the tone for the relationship between the United States and Thailand. And we mourn his death, as well, and already miss him. I will be going to pay my respects to the king after leaving here today.

The U.S.-Thailand relationship, I think as you know, it is a historic one. We want to continue to grow that relationship, even in its ups and downs, which has been the history of this country. We have been treaty partners for over 184 years, and we've been allies for over 60. So next year the U.S., I think most of you know, will mark 200 years of relations with Thailand. And I think that's significant because elections are scheduled here in Thailand next year, as well, to return the country to civilian control. We certainly hope those elections proceed as scheduled. And I think it'll be meaningful that we're celebrating 200 years at a time when the country is returning to civilian control.

I know you manage a wide range of issues here. I want to touch on a few of them, just to recognize your efforts. In particular, public health cooperation has really been a cornerstone in this area. I know a fifth of our Mission staff work on health issues here in this Mission, working with a number of partners. You've really become the second country in the world now to eliminate mother-to-child transmission of HIV, and that is an extraordinary achievement.

I also know of your direct collaborations with other Thai medical researchers to develop some of the world's first Japanese encephalitis and hepatitis A vaccines. And all of those are going to be extremely valuable to other parts of the world, as well. Appreciate the strong support for ongoing research to help address and hopefully eradicate other diseases like malaria, the Zika virus, other tropical diseases. So vital work to our interests, but to our global interests, as well.

I know our people-to-people ties here in Thailand, they've always been strong, and they continue to grow stronger with a very, very healthy exchange of Thai students and American students: American students traveling here to study and Thai students traveling to the United States. And, of course, we have more than 75,000 Americans call Thailand home. So you have a lot of friends and colleagues and fellow citizens to provide services to, and also look out for their safety, as well.

Our security alliance here in Thailand continues to be strong. It dates back to an era of conflict in this region. And we hold – today we'll be holding more than 130 joint mil-to-mil exercises. And again, I think that's just a great testament to how close that security alliance is, how it's valued by us and it's valued by the Thai Government as well, obviously.

So I think our bilateral relationships are strong, they're broad. This

Mission is, I know all of you know, is the largest outside of a war zone, with almost 50 agencies represented in this Mission conducting a broad array of work, carrying out American interests with partners here and elsewhere.

So I think it's – the role you play here, it's invaluable. We appreciate that you're here with your families. I love to see the families here with you, as well. It's a great opportunity, you know, for growth, for you, for your children, for your families. We also recognize any assignment overseas comes with sacrifice because Thailand is a long way from Continental United States. And so we know that means missing some family events back home from time to time, missing opportunities to be with family on special occasions.

That's part of the sacrifice we all make when we agree to work overseas. Hopefully, the rewards that you receive out of the experiences you have here far outweigh those sacrifices. And I think what you're doing, really, is making memories. You're making memories. Partially, you're making memories with your family that you will hold and cherish for years to come. And so I hope that's the way you view your time here, as well.

The most important role that all of you play that are serving here from the United States, though, is you are the face of America. This is what the people of Thailand see when they think about America, they look at you, and this is what they see. And so you need – you do represent – and you know every day you have to represent the very best of the United States of America, because that's what people are looking to as you represent our country so extraordinarily well.

So I thank each and every one of you for your commitment. Your patriotism is clear to all of us. And your commitment to the mission here in Thailand is quite evident, as well, with the string of successes, some of – just a few of which I touched on.

So thank all of you. It's a delight to be here and have the opportunity to spend a few minutes addressing you. And everybody knows how much I love children, and so we have – we got plenty of kids represented here. The Boy Scouts are near and dear to my heart, but so are Girl Scouts and any youth serving organization that brings kids together and gives them the opportunity to achieve things as individuals, achieve things together, working as teams together, building that self-confidence. And these are terrific organizations that do that. So I thank the parents and the leaders who devote their time and take the time to volunteer to do that. I know there is all this extra pay involved for being a Boy Scout leader. (Laughter.) I know how that works.

But I do sincerely want to thank the adults who take this time to provide the leadership so that our young people can have these kinds of experiences while – even when they're away from the United States. So thank you for what you do, and – as well as I know many of you undertake volunteer activities, and we appreciate your commitment, as well.

So it's great to be with you. It's a short stop for me but we're going to try to use every bit of it while we're here in Thailand and make some important contacts with the leadership here. And I will be back. I will be back for a

longer visit. I love Thailand, have great memories over the years of coming here, and a real affection for the Thai people. And thank all of you again. (Applause.)

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