

Press Releases: Secretary of State Michael R. Pompeo At the International Women of Courage (IWOC) Awards Ceremony

Remarks

Michael R. Pompeo

Secretary of State

Dean Acheson Auditorium

Washington, DC

March 7, 2019

MS PRYOR: Good morning. Welcome to the Department of State. We are honored and delighted that you have joined us today for the 13th annual Secretary of State's International Women of Courage Awards. This award has recognized more than 120 remarkable women from 65 countries since its first inception. And I

would like to extend a special welcome to the members of the diplomatic corps in the audience, ambassadors, and distinguished guests. The United States is proud to honor these leaders as part of our commitment to advancing the status of women and children around the world.

Each awardee's story is an inspiring – inspiring – reminder of how individuals can and do make a difference. Taken together, they provide a powerful message of courage and leadership. Your excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, cherished friends and colleagues, it is my distinct pleasure now to welcome the 2019 International Women of Courage Award recipients. (Applause.)

And now, please welcome the Secretary of State of the United States of America, Michael Pompeo, accompanied by the First Lady of the United States, Melania Trump. (Applause.)

SECRETARY POMPEO: Thank you. Thank you, Pam. And good morning, everyone. It's truly my honor to host this International Women of Courage Awards for the first time, and I'm glad you're all here to celebrate this incredible group of honorees.

Last year, right around this time, dozens of women across Iran took to city streets to protest the law requiring them to wear the hijab in public at all times. In an exercise of their freedom, these courageous women removed their hijabs in front of cameras, their faces clearly visible. They did so knowing the brutality of their leaders. And sure enough, a year ago tomorrow, on International Women's Day, state police swarmed their protest. Many women were arrested. Some faced torture and beatings in jail. At least one was sentenced to 20 years behind bars, and others were forced to flee abroad. The plight of these Iranian women is just one example of the danger facing many women and of the courage so often shown in the face of it.

We're here today to honor women of courage from all around the world who are standing tall in the face of extraordinary adversity. This year's recipients include an anti-terror investigator from Djibouti who has put away numerous al-Shabaab terrorists; a Bangladeshi Rohingya lawyer who fights the abuse of trafficking of the Rohingya women and girls; an investigative journalist in Montenegro exposing corruption and organized crime who has been attacked multiple times, yet still continues her work; a Tanzanian lawyer who fights for human rights for women and girls and advocates for more female candidates for public office; a nun from Ireland who helped start a girls' boarding school in South Sudan, which has become a beacon of hope for girls who might otherwise be denied education and forced to enter early marriages; a chief of the women's police department in Jordan who's been recognized for her work with victims of domestic violence and sexual abuse; a leader of a nationwide NGO in Egypt that serves the most impoverished urban slums and rural villages; an activist in Burma who has worked her entire life to support ethnic community displaced by the decades-long civil war; a crusader against child exploitation in Sri Lanka who offers pro bono legal services to child victims of crimes; and finally, Peru's national coordinator for environmental prosecutors, who fights multibillion dollar criminal enterprises that fuel corruption, human trafficking, and destruction of natural resources in the

Amazon.

Please join me again with a round of applause. (Applause.)

It's also important that we pause to recognize and honor those women who paid the ultimate price for their courageous efforts, women like Kateryna Handziuk of Ukraine, who dedicated her journalism career to uncovering and calling out corruption. Even after a brutal acid attack, which ultimately claimed her life three months later, Kateryna refused to be silenced. From her hospital bed, she demanded justice, setting a powerful example for her fellow citizens.

Here at the State Department, stories like these motivate and inspire us. Our colleagues in the Office of Global Women's Issues work to integrate women's empowerment into our foreign policy, and our Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs assists in the push for inclusive, quality education for girls and women all around the world. And at USAID, we're working on a new plan with the goal to empower at least 50 million women across developing countries. It's called the Women's Global Development and Prosperity Initiative. We're very proud of these efforts here at the State Department, but we acknowledge that work remains to ensure that participation of women exists in all spaces of public life and all across the world.

Women of courage exist everywhere. Most will never be honored. They face different challenges, but challenges that still matters. I've personally, of course, had this experience as well. I've witnessed women service in my time in the military and have been inspired by them in my personal life. My mother, too, was a woman of courage. She was born in rural Kansas. She helped make ends meet while raising three kids. She never managed to get to college, but made sure that each of us had enormous opportunity. You all know women like this. They're strong. She was dedicated to providing opportunity for me and my siblings, and we didn't appreciate the sacrifices that she had endured. And she also raised me to be really smart; I met another courageous woman, Susan, my wife, who's here with me today. (Laughter and applause.)

We all know – I know – from a lifetime of experience that women of courage exist everywhere and they're needed everywhere. That's one reason I've appointed women to dozens of senior leadership roles here at the place I am privileged to work. From under secretaries to assistant secretaries to non-career ambassadorships, we know here we can't succeed without empowering women worldwide, and that means we need to make sure that we have women empowered at our department worldwide.

And now it's my honor to welcome our distinguished guest speaker today, a woman of incredible power and courage, a woman who has been a powerful advocate in her own right. Since becoming First Lady, she's been increasingly outspoken against the enslavement of human trafficking and sexual abuse of women and girls all around the globe. I know she will continue to be an influential leader, an influential voice who inspires future women leaders like herself all around the world. Please join me in welcoming the First Lady of the United States of America, Melania Trump. (Applause.)

(The First Lady gives remarks.)

MS PRYOR: Thank you. And now, ladies and gentlemen, it is time for the presentation of the awards. Razia Sultana. Razia Sultana of Bangladesh is being honored for her fearless efforts to defend the Rohingya community in Burma, conducting human rights advocacy on behalf of Rohingya refugees and documenting systematic sexual violence against women and girls. (Applause.)

Naw K'nyaw Paw. Naw K'nyaw Paw of Burma is being honored for her brave efforts to condemn the military-led violence against the Rohingya people and selflessly working to improve the lives of women and children in conflict-afflicted communities. (Applause.)

Moumina Houssein Darar. Moumina Darar of Djibouti is being honored for her acute investigative skills that have led to the disruption of terrorist attacks, perseverance in committing to work in a male-dominated field despite abuse, and determination in standing up for the local community. (Applause.)

Mama Maggie. (Applause.) Mama Maggie of Egypt is being honored for her visionary commitment to serve the lives of the poor and forgotten in her community, realizing the value of those seeking vocational training in order to contribute to society, and providing economic salvation and spiritual direction for impoverished children in her country. (Applause.)

Sister Orla Treacy. Sister Treacy of Ireland is being honored for her noble efforts to address the plight of girls in a region besieged by conflict; commitment to provide school for girls being forced into early marriage and denied an education; and compassion for teaching and pastoral service. (Applause.)

Colonel Khalida al-Twal. Colonel Khalida al-Twal of Jordan is being honored for her steadfast leadership in advancing women, peace, and security; addressing a diverse range of issues on behalf of victims of domestic, physical, social, sexual violence, refugees, and family protection. (Applause.)

Olivera Lakic. Olivera Lakic of Montenegro is being honored for her dedication as an investigative journalist and a galvanizing symbol for media reform who refuses to back down in her quest to expose stories about crime and corruption, even in the face of threats to herself and her family. (Applause.)

Flor de Maria Vega Zapata. Flor de Maria Vega is from Peru and is being honored for tireless and visionary efforts to spark change in Peru's environmental enforcement efforts, defying threats aimed to derail her work, and promoting environmental stewardship to protect Peru's natural resources and the communities that depend on them. (Applause.)

Marini de Livera. Marini de Livera of Sri Lanka is being honored for her dedication and pro bono legal work on behalf of women and child victims of crime, defense of children in orphanages, and the innovative use of visual arts and street theater to promote legal literacy. (Applause.)

Anna Henga. Anna Henga from Tanzania is being honored for her groundbreaking efforts in coordinating Tanzania's anti-female genital mutilation coalition, defense of the rights of women in the Massai communities, and encouraging women's political participation. (Applause.)

MS PRYOR: Thank you, thank you. Now please join me in another round of applause, and as we bring up a speaker to speak on behalf. So you may be seated, and we will bring out Naw K'nyaw Paw. Naw K'nyaw Paw, again, from Burma, is going to speak on behalf of all of the awardees in this group. (Applause.)

MS PAW: Thank you. Excellency, ladies and gentlemen, good morning. It is an honor and privilege to be with these courageous women and the team at this event. I would like to thank the U.S. Department of State, Mrs. Trump, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, and all who gather here for this honor.

As I stand with these amazing award recipients, I am both awed and humbled. We have many courageous women in Burma, and when I look at this group, I realize just how much we can accomplish when we are not afraid and we work together. My fellow recipients fight for and serve the neediest across the globe. Sister Orla, she is educate girls in South Sudan. Colonel Khalida helped people like me in Jordan. Olivera writes the truth in Montenegro, even though she's been threatened and attacked. Very courageous. And Flor protect environment in Peru. Marini protect women and children in Sri Lanka. Anna defends human rights in Tanzania. Sister Razia documenting human rights violation of Rohingya. And Moumina bring the rule of law to Djibouti. And finally, Mama Maggie educated the poorest in Egypt.

This group touches every part of our lives all over the world. I can only hope to carry on their images, having met them, and inspire me to do more. I want to thank every of you for what you do each day, and for showing me what unbelievable things can accomplish by courageous women, and for inspire me to reach higher and further.

I was born displaced and I spent my entire childhood either running or in refugee camps. Imagine sending your six-years-old girl in Thai village to go to school because it was not safe in your village. Imagine being an 11-year-old girl coming home, see your village empty, family gone, being fled, and then spending days wandering from settlement to settlement looking for your family. I was that six-years-old girl, and I was that 11-year-old girl as well.

At that time, the Burma army burnt and destroyed more than 3,500 villages in southeast Burma and slaughter many thousands of people. The brutalities continues today. My reality as a little Karen girl is sadly still the reality for many of the children in Burma today.

I have been working with the Karen Women's Organization, KWO, for 20 years. KWO has more than 60,000 members in refugee camps in Thailand, in internally displaced people camp in Karen State, and villages across southeast Burma. We work every day to provide protections to women who suffer from violence, and increase the voice and power to the women. We have built our capacities and

now have delivered an education to women, people with disabilities, young children, and newborn babies. We also have a variety of leadership roles and developments for the women to act on our own behalf.

It has changed our community, but of course, this work will never be complete, certainly not until we have true peace in Burma and indigenous rights over our land, our education, and our culture. Our people, including women and children, have been suffering at the hands of the Burma army for over 70 years. The Burma army continue attack us until today. In 2004, KWO release a report shattering silence, highlighting Burma army's sexual abuse to Karen women. A few years later, we released two more reports, *State of Terror*, *Walking Amongst Sharp Knives*, both documenting Burma army abuses to the Karen women.

Then in 2017, the world watched in horror as the Burmese army unleashed unspeakable crime, and this time against the Rohingya women. Thousand of rapes have been documented from one ethnic nationality to another. And still these men run the country and control the lives of our people. I beg the world to take action and to bring these men to justice. (Applause.)

Our hearts are with Rohingya women. We know what the Burma army is. We also know many other women in other ethnic areas continue to suffer at their hands. The Rohingya are not alone. All indigenous ethnic army – women are either vulnerable to attacks or currently being attacked by the Burma army. It will not end until the world take action.

The peace process has stalled. The removal of the sanctions has not brought us greater respect for human rights. It is still unsafe to return nor speak the truth in my country. We need the world to act as a united community to implement target sanctions against military and to have a body outside Burma to bring justice and to hold general accountable to these extreme human right violations.

We are very grateful to the U.S. Government for your longstanding support of refugees. We need this aid to continue and increase so people can remain safely in refugee camp until our ethnic rights and indigenous identity is being respected. We know there are needs all over the world. We hope the world does not forget us and those around us.

I want to again thank you for this wonderful honor. I'd like to close with a poem by Rupi Kaur: "I stand on the sacrifices of a million women before me, thinking what can I do to make this mountain taller so the women after me can see further." Thank you very much. (Applause.)

MS PRYOR: Thank you. Thank you, Naw K'nyaw Paw. We will not forget you.

And now, is it my pleasure to introduce Assistant Secretary Marie Royce to provide closing remarks. (Applause.)

ASSISTANT SECRETARY ROYCE: Good morning, distinguished guests. And thank you, Mrs. Trump and Secretary Pompeo for joining us today. On behalf of the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, it's my great pleasure to be with you in

celebration of this year's remarkable International Women of Courage.

To the awardees, I know I speak for everyone gathered here: You have our deepest admiration and appreciation for your commitment, passion, and sacrifice. You are making a difference. And I hope that today reflects our deepest gratitude for your contributions in your communities and beyond.

I was so pleased to meet each of you, earlier this week, and hear of your incredible impact. We have a shared commitment to your work and aspirations for the positive change you are fostering at home and around the world. As President Trump has noted, by investing in women around the world, we're investing in our families; we're investing in prosperity, and we're investing in peace.

At last year's IWOC ceremony, we acknowledged Roya Sadat for her work in Afghanistan. During an event on International Women of Courage program, she described peace not as just building a project but rather building a culture. Today, you join the illustrious ranks of courageous women from around the world who have received this recognition and who work towards building that culture every day.

And I'd like to take the opportunity to explain to our guests a little more about what lies in store after this morning's ceremony. The awardees are taking part in an International Visitor Leadership Program – an IVLP, as we call it – which is a professional program, a professional exchange program sponsored by the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. After this very exciting week in Washington, D.C., awardees will meet professionals in their respected fields and some of America's greatest towns and cities, including Atlanta, Boston, Chicago, Detroit, Los Angeles, Minneapolis, Pensacola, Portland, Seattle, and San Diego.

Since the inception of the International Women of Courage Award in 2007, the IVLP has hosted awardees in 36 cities across the United States. International Women of Courage meet and share ideas with Americans who work on similar issues, from increasing international security to advancing the rule of law and human rights, to combatting gender-based violence and promoting education, entrepreneurship, and women's economic empowerment. These new relationships with Americans will lead to ongoing cooperation in finding solutions to global challenges here in the United States and in countries around the world.

Alumna of the 2017 International Women of Courage program said, "Courage is contagious." This year's honorees are living proof that she was right. As they embark on their IVLP travels, I know they will inspire Americans. They need to be equally impacted in their endeavors. And that courage will give heart to a new generation that brings about positive change and peace.

And I'd like to conclude by saying to you, the 2019 International Women of Courage, may we each aspire to be models of courage in service to each other, in emulation of your example. You are an inspiration to us all. Thank you again for your very courageous efforts, and now, I'd like to invite you to gather for a photo on stage here with Secretary Pompeo and Mrs. Trump. Thank

you. (Applause.)

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[Press Releases: Release of the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission Report on Investigation Into Chemical Weapons Use in Douma, Syria, on 7 April 2018](#)

Press Statement
Robert Palladino

Deputy Spokesperson

Washington, DC
March 7, 2019

The Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) released its final report on March 1, 2019, regarding its investigation into chemical weapons use in Douma, Syria, on April 7, 2018. The report concluded that there were reasonable grounds that chlorine was used as a chemical weapon in the attack. The FFM found that the weaponized chlorine was not manufactured at the sites, as alleged by the regime, and that it is possible that the chlorine was released by cylinders that had been dropped from the air, as indicated by their condition and surroundings.

The conclusions in the FFM report support what the United States determined in our assessment of the attack last April – that the regime is responsible for this heinous chemical weapons attack that killed and injured civilians. The Assad regime’s use of chlorine as a chemical weapon is a violation of its obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention, to which it is a party, as

well as UNSCR 2118.

The United States commends the FFM for its independent and impartial work undertaken in difficult and dangerous circumstances. We also welcome the full implementation of OPCW's mandate to identify perpetrators of chemical weapons attacks in Syria. The victims of this barbaric attack and their families deserve justice and this is an important step in holding those responsible to account.

Further, the United States rejects the efforts of the Assad regime and its supporters – Russia chief among them – to sow disinformation about alleged chemical weapons attacks. We remain deeply concerned about such disinformation. As noted in our own assessment in April 2018, after the CW attack in Douma, the regime falsely accused opposition groups of perpetrating the chemical weapons attack in Douma; and regime and Russia forces delayed inspectors from entering Douma in an expedited manner with appropriate access consistent with their mandate.

Unfortunately, this is just the latest case where chemical weapons use in Syria has been confirmed by the FFM, an impartial outside investigator. Once again, the United States calls upon the Assad regime to fully cooperate with the OPCW, verifiably destroy its remaining chemical weapons program and completely disclose its activities related to chemical weapons. These are all obligations Syria accepted when it became party to the Chemical Weapons Convention in 2013, but has failed to honor.

The United States continues to condemn the use of chemical weapons anywhere, by anyone, under any circumstances. Those who resort to the use of chemical weapons must be held to account. We call on all responsible nations to help us bring an end to the use of chemical weapons.

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[Press Releases: Secretary Pompeo's Call With Former Iraqi Kurdistan Region President Barzani](#)

Readout

Office of the Spokesperson

Washington, DC
March 6, 2019

The below is attributable to Deputy Spokesperson Robert Palladino: □

Secretary of State Michael R. Pompeo spoke yesterday with Masud Barzani, former President of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and current leader of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP). The Secretary expressed appreciation for Barzani's continued engagement as leader of the KDP and for his commitment to improving Baghdad-Erbil relations. In his conversation, the Secretary emphasized the importance of forming a KRG government that is responsive to the expectations of the people of the Iraq Kurdistan Region. Finally, the Secretary highlighted the persistent ISIS threat in Iraq and re-emphasized U.S. commitment to work with Iraq, at the invitation of its government, to ensure an enduring defeat of ISIS.

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[Press Releases: Senegal Presidential Election Congratulatory Message](#)

Press Statement
Michael R. Pompeo

Secretary of State

Washington, DC
March 5, 2019

The United States congratulates President Macky Sall on his election to a second term as President of the Republic of Senegal. We salute the Senegalese people and all of the presidential candidates for their demonstrated commitment to a peaceful election, which reflects Senegal's strong democratic values and traditions.

We value our relationship with Senegal, which is rooted in the shared ideals of prosperity, security, and good governance. In addition, we look forward to continuing our work with President Sall in the coming years to deepen democratic norms in the region and advance our longstanding mutual interests in economic development, trade and investment, democratic institutions, and safeguarding regional and global security.

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[Press Releases: Department Press Briefing – March 5, 2019](#)

Robert Palladino
Deputy Spokesperson

Department Press Briefing
Washington, DC
March 5, 2019

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TRANSCRIPT:

2:55 p.m. EST

MR PALLADINO: Hi, everybody. I've got water.

A couple things to start with today. So tomorrow, Kirsten Madison – she's our assistant secretary of the State Department's Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs – she's going to be addressing the U.S. state attorneys general, who are meeting in

Washington this week. Assistant Secretary Madison will be discussing the State Department's role in combating transnational crime, and this includes the flow of deadly illicit opioids from overseas into the United States.

Now, two of the key ways that the State Department keeps Americans safe are using diplomacy and foreign assistance to combat international crime, and that includes opioid trafficking, transnational gang activity, and corruption. So our Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs partners with the National Association of Attorneys General to train prosecutors and other foreign legal practitioners in countries that are critical to U.S. national security. Such trainings help partner nations become more effective at fighting the transnational crime that threatens their citizens as well as Americans.

Secondly, I am very pleased to announce that on Thursday at 10:00 A.M., March 7th, Secretary of State Pompeo will host the International Women of Courage Awards. The ceremony will feature special remarks by the First Lady of the United States. This year marks the 13th anniversary of the International Women of Courage Awards and it will honor 10 women from around the world who have shown exceptional courage and leadership in advocating for human rights and gender equality, and often at great personal risk. This year our awardees are, from Bangladesh, Razia Sultana; from Burma, Naw K'nyaw Paw; from Djibouti, Moumina Houssein Darar; from Egypt, Magda Gobran-Gorgi; from Jordan, Colonel Khalida Khalaf Hanna al-Twal; from Ireland, Sister Orla Treacy; from Montenegro, Olivera Lakic; from Peru, Flor de Maria Vega Zapata; from Sri Lanka, Marini de Livera; and from Tanzania, Anna Aloys Henga.

The awards demonstrate the United States commitment to gender equality, social inclusion, and advancing the global status of women and girls from all backgrounds across sectors as part of our foreign policy. The United States firmly believes the global prosperity, security, and stability is not achievable without the full economic, social, and political participation of women and girls.

QUESTION: That's everywhere?

MR PALLADINO: Everywhere.

QUESTION: Including certain countries in the Middle East?

MR PALLADINO: That includes the entire globe.

And we have a personnel announcement. We are delighted to welcome back Ambassador Philip Reeker to Washington later this month. On March 18th, he will become the principal deputy assistant secretary and acting assistant secretary of the Department of State's Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs. Now, Ambassador Reeker is a career Foreign Service officer who's currently the civilian deputy commander at the U.S. European Command in Stuttgart. He's previously served as the consul

general in Milan; as the deputy assistant secretary for the Balkans, Central Europe, as well as Holocaust issues; as the United States ambassador to what is now North Macedonia; and – the only blight on his entire professional career – he was previously the department’s deputy spokesperson. (Laughter.)

QUESTION: So there is hope for your career yet, Robert. Hope for your career.

MR PALLADINO: We will hope – we will put that to the side. Other than that –

QUESTION: It’s not the dead end you thought it would be.

MR PALLADINO: It’s – other than that, there is hope, I guess, for Palladino. I don’t know. (Laughter.)

QUESTION: We have faith in you.

MR PALLADINO: Thank you.

And finally, the United States applauds the people of Venezuela for their actions to create a peaceful, democratic transition, and congratulates Interim President Juan Guaido on his successful diplomatic efforts in the region and safe return to Venezuela. However, we have noticed in news coverage that some outlets are incorrectly referring to Juan Guaido as the opposition leader or the self-proclaimed president. Neither is correct.

A few basic facts: The National Assembly remains the only legitimate and democratically elected institution in Venezuela. Juan Guaido was elected president of the National Assembly on January 5th, 2019, and on January 10th, Maduro usurped the presidency.

Therefore, the president of the National Assembly and relying on Venezuela’s constitution – as president of the National Assembly, and relying on Venezuela’s constitution, Juan Guaido became interim president of Venezuela on January 23rd. Millions of Americans and more than 50 countries recognize Juan Guaido as interim president of Venezuela. He has appointed and credentialed ambassadors to international organizations and the United States and numerous other democratic nations and other democratic nations.

So to refer to Juan Guaido as anything but interim president falls into the narrative of a dictator who has usurped the position of the presidency and led Venezuela into the humanitarian, political, and economic crisis that exists today. The international community must unite behind Interim President Juan Guaido and the Venezuelan National Assembly and support the peaceful restoration of democracy in Venezuela.

That’s it for the top.

QUESTION: Let me get this straight. You’re complaining because news

outlets are calling him by a title that you don't think that he should have?

MR PALLADINO: Not a complaint. Pointing out. Just trying to correct.

QUESTION: Well, it sounds like a complaint to me, and that seems pretty weak-sauce. I don't understand what your problem is. I mean –

MR PALLADINO: He's the interim president, and we don't want to –

QUESTION: Well, you consider him to be the interim president, and as you say, 50 other countries outside of – recognize him as the interim president. But there are more than 190 members of the United Nations. So your 50 countries is not even close to half of that. Is that correct?

MR PALLADINO: We are supporting the constitution of Venezuela and the people of Venezuela. With the – we're supporting the Venezuelan people here. And so the United States – it's time to act in support of democracy and –

QUESTION: And you think that news coverage calling him the legitimate leader, the president, is going to encourage more countries to recognize him?

MR PALLADINO: We don't feed into rhetoric of the current dictator.

QUESTION: Okay. Listen, I have one very brief thing, but then I want to get into a policy question, and that is: Have you – you're aware, obviously, of the helicopter crash in Kenya and the deaths of the four Americans there. Can you give us a very – well, whatever you can, detail in terms of the State Department's involvement with the families? And then I have a really brief kind of policy question.

MR PALLADINO: Sure.

QUESTION: It's unrelated to that.

MR PALLADINO: Sorry. Let me – I've got to flip for a second here.

QUESTION: I can do the policy one first, if you want.

MR PALLADINO: Well, just give me one second. Let me – here it is. Thanks.

Okay. So you're referring to the helicopter crash in Kenya. And we are – in this regard, we are in communication with the Kenyan authorities on the matter, and we can confirm that four United States citizens were killed in the crash. We can confirm the names of the four deceased, if that is information that is helpful. Is that something that you need, Matt, or –

QUESTION: Sure. Well, I mean, I think we already have it.

MR PALLADINO: You have that? Okay.

QUESTION: I'm more interested in knowing what exactly you guys, the embassy is doing for the families and what kind of contact there is.

MR PALLADINO: We would say – we're in sincerest – we'd offer our sincerest condolences to the family at the top, and all the friends of those who were killed in this crash. We are providing all appropriate consular assistance to the families of these U.S. citizens, and I'll stop there.

QUESTION: Well, in that case, does it mean helping recover the bodies and getting them back to the United States?

MR PALLADINO: That is – as a general matter, that is something that consular officials do anytime that an American citizen passes away overseas. It's –

QUESTION: And you don't have any reason to believe this is anything other than an accident, do you?

MR PALLADINO: We don't have any information to that effect, no.

QUESTION: Okay. Very briefly, a policy question. Yesterday you guys got a letter from three House committees, once again bringing up this – the request for to either speak with the interpreter who was present during President Trump's meeting with President Putin in Finland, or – and/or notes and communications regarding that. I saw the answer that you – that's – that the Department provided yesterday, which is basically we got the letter, but we're not going to talk about our cooperation with a different agency. I would like to know, because when Heather was up here, when this first came up last year immediately after the summit, she didn't really give a full answer. And so I want to know: Is it the department's practice, policy, to make available to relevant congressional committees its staff – interpreters, or the interpreters' notes, whatever – to – is it standard practice? Or is this something that has been denied in the past? Or has it never come up?

MR PALLADINO: Matt, it's a fair question, but I got – I just don't know the answer to that today. I don't have that answer for you. But I will get you an answer on that.

QUESTION: Can someone check to find out?

MR PALLADINO: Yeah.

QUESTION: I'd just like to know if it's ever – if you're – if the building, in its vast history –

MR PALLADINO: Yeah.

QUESTION: – has – if there's precedence for agreeing to a request like this.

MR PALLADINO: I mean – right.

QUESTION: Or if there's precedence for denying –

MR PALLADINO: I believe the answer to no, but I want to look into it, okay, before I give you –

QUESTION: No, as in it's never been asked for?

MR PALLADINO: As in it's not been brought previously.

QUESTION: So this is uncharted territory –

MR PALLADINO: That is – that – I want to look into it and get you a proper answer, okay.

QUESTION: Okay. Thank you.

MR PALLADINO: Yeah. Please.

QUESTION: Robert.

MR PALLADINO: Go right ahead, Lesley.

QUESTION: I wanted to raise something yesterday that the Secretary said in his address to students, in which he spoke about the Taliban as terrorists in Afghanistan, at a time when a team from the U.S. is in negotiations with these – with the Taliban. I've looked on the terrorist list; I don't see them as a terrorist, listed as a terrorist organization. So has something changed here in which the Secretary believes that they are terrorists? And then what does it say about the U.S. negotiating with terrorists, something that it's said before that it would never do?

MR PALLADINO: We – right now, as you point out, we are in the process – meeting with the empowered Taliban negotiation led by Mullah Baradar, and that's taking place in Doha, and that's being led by Special Representative Khalilzad. And that's going on right now, and he – we have several agencies that are part of that from the United States Government. These discussions are ongoing, and what they're focusing on are the four interconnected issues that are going to compose any future agreement, and those four are counterterrorism, troop withdrawal, intra-Afghan dialogue, and a ceasefire.

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

QUESTION: So – no, well, I'm – I mean, are they terrorists? Or did he misspeak?

MR PALLADINO: I – the Secretary's words speak for themselves, and I'm not going to go beyond that. I would say we are very focused on bringing better results to what's going on in that part of the world, and that's where our focus currently is. And we'll stay focused on that.

QUESTION: So I assume then that he's – that, well, he didn't misspeak, because you're not saying that he misspoke. And also he says in the transcript that he can travel there in a couple of weeks and help move it along a little bit. Is he planning on meeting with the Taliban?

MR PALLADINO: I have no travel to announce today. Talks are ongoing. More work needs to be done. We're focused on this. We have private diplomatic conversations that are occurring, and we want to give all the parties time to work out these issues. And so, we'll see, and if we have anything more to announce I'll be sure to let you know.

QUESTION: More on those interviews?

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

MR PALLADINO: More on interviews?

QUESTION: Yeah.

MR PALLADINO: Please. Go ahead, Michelle.

QUESTION: Quick question on his interview. In one of his interviews, he just said that Hoda Muthana would present an enormous risk to the United States if she returned and if those like her return. What kind of risk would she present if she were to be brought back and prosecuted for her crimes?

MR PALLADINO: Yesterday, there was a legal decision – let me –

QUESTION: Yeah, they just decided not to fast track it.

MR PALLADINO: Correct. It was –

QUESTION: But what kind of – but if people like her – I mean, ISIS brides or ISIS fighters, some of whom are U.S. citizens – if they're brought back – as he said, others like her would present an enormous risk. What would that risk be, if people like her are brought back and prosecuted here?

MR PALLADINO: Yeah. Avowed terrorists returning to the United States would – could present issues. So that's why Secretary Pompeo has been quite clear in this regard and that we're going to continue to take all lawful measures to ensure that she does not enter the United States. That said, there is a legal case ongoing right now, and that's a separate issue. And we're pleased with the district court's decision yesterday, and we're going to continue to vigorously defend this case.

QUESTION: And the stance that the government has taken on this particular case, could that encourage other countries to disavow ISIS fighters or others who came from those countries if there are similar issues or questions? I mean, the U.S. is essentially rendering this woman stateless. She was born here; she grew up here. You could argue that she belongs to the U.S. or she came – she came from the U.S. So

isn't – if the – if your stance has been to encourage other countries to take back their people from ISIS territory, isn't this encouraging them to do the opposite?

MR PALLADINO: That remains our policy. This particular case is something completely different, and we don't bear a responsibility here. We have been clear that this is not a United States citizen, nor is it anyone entitled to U.S. citizenship. Beyond that, I don't want to talk any further about this case because legal proceedings are ongoing.

QUESTION: Can I just ask –

QUESTION: On Afghanistan –

QUESTION: – if an avowed terrorist with undisputed American citizenship comes back to the U.S. from Syria or wherever, and is in custody and is prosecuted, how – what is the – what's the threat?

MR PALLADINO: I don't want to go into hypothetical situations. If and whether –

QUESTION: Hold on a second. The hypothetical was raised by the Secretary, as was pointed out by Michelle.

MR PALLADINO: Now, what is the hypothetical here?

QUESTION: Well, that she and others like her would pose a risk by coming back to the United States. So what is the risk if someone is coming back to the U.S. and is being prosecuted here and likely to spend a lengthy, lengthy amount of time in prison?

MR PALLADINO: For an American citizen, we have a legal system to deal with these issues. And so –

QUESTION: Well, I know, but what is the risk?

MR PALLADINO: I'm not saying that there is a risk. For someone –

QUESTION: All right, okay. Never mind then.

MR PALLADINO: Okay.

QUESTION: Robert?

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

MR PALLADINO: Sure. Please.

QUESTION: But I mean, on that, we've been listening to you guys for the last couple months, and I asked you this question when you were here last time, and you said, "Our policy in this regard would be to repatriate them." This is Americans or potential American citizens. "It's what we call on other countries to do with foreign fighters" – people – "in Syria too."

So as you are going around trying to get other countries to follow this policy, doesn't it appear to be kind of a "Do what we say, not what we do?" Doesn't that undermine this policy you're trying to sell as you try to convince European allies especially to take back these foreign fighters coming out of Syria?

MR PALLADINO: Not in a case where the person in question is not an American citizen, so this is different.

QUESTION: Robert?

MR PALLADINO: Please, right here. Francesco.

QUESTION: On Afghanistan again. As you said, these new talks have been going on for a week now. How would you characterize them? Are there important progress being made? And how long do you think you can continue doing these talks without the Afghan Government being included? Did you set a deadline when you think the intra-Afghan dialogue should start?

MR PALLADINO: No deadlines to announce now. And these are – and I don't really want to go into much more detail. These talks are ongoing. Special Representative Khalilzad is engaging on this on a daily basis right now, and progress is being made. So I'll leave it at that. More work to be done, obviously, but we'll stay focused on that.

QUESTION: When his trip was announced, it said that we was going to be out there through the end of February. It's now – we're now in March. So is it – it's open-ended – his trip?

MR PALLADINO: You're – I don't have the media note in front of me, but it sounds like his trip's been extended. I don't want to read into that, but some – listen, when we travel, we have a notion quite often of what's going to take place when we travel. Many of you have been on trips. You know that what we think we're going to do sometimes changes and sometimes changes right at the last minute. And so I wouldn't go so far as to say open-ended, but this is the nature of diplomacy. Opportunities present themselves; we change course, we correct, et cetera.

Rich, you had a question?

QUESTION: Venezuela okay?

QUESTION: Robert?

MR PALLADINO: Venezuela? Okay, sure.

QUESTION: The measure announced yesterday in regards to property in Cuba, how much does the Cuban Government support of the Venezuelan Government – or one of them – how much does that play into the Secretary's decision?

MR PALLADINO: I'd say quite a bit. I mean, Cuba's support for the Maduro regime has been significant, and therefore part of our overarching policy is to squeeze Cuba as appropriate, and we would like to see democracy return to Venezuela.

QUESTION: Robert, on –

MR PALLADINO: Yeah, please.

QUESTION: And Robert, just one quick follow-up?

MR PALLADINO: Sure.

QUESTION: You have sanctioned – or the United States has sanctioned – the state oil company. Is there a concern that you are sort of running out of options to press the Maduro regime, and there's not as much to hold over the Maduro regime's head as far as potential future sanctions or measures the United States or world community would take to usher him out? And is there a concern that it's reaching a static point or there's a loss of momentum for the opposition or the Guaido presidency?

MR PALLADINO: We're optimistic. I think we're up to – I think I've got the latest numbers – up to 54 countries have now recognized Juan Guaido as interim president. The humanitarian response global has been overwhelming. That's something we're going to continue to push. And we call – now is the time to act in support of democracy. We think momentum is good. We're going to continue to look at ways that we can support Venezuela's humanitarian needs on one side, and we're going to continue to ask other nations to do the same.

There has been positive news recently of some Venezuelan military and security service personnel standing on the right side of history and recognizing Juan Guaido as interim president. So we're going to continue pushing. We're going to continue pushing. And I'll leave it there.

QUESTION: Since you just mentioned the number again, Robert, 54, that's only about a quarter of countries in the world, is that right?

MR PALLADINO: You know the number of countries. But we've gotten major support in the Western hemisphere, and I would just point that out, as well as Europe. And if we look at the democracies, we're doing pretty well as well. Okay? All right.

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

QUESTION: North Korea?

QUESTION: India?

QUESTION: North Korea?

MR PALLADINO: Michel, go ahead.

QUESTION: Yeah, I have two questions. Secretary Pompeo has announced yesterday that he will be traveling to the Middle East next week to Kuwait, Lebanon, and Israel. What's the purpose of this visit?

MR PALLADINO: We haven't – I don't have the details today to announce, Michel, but I know for Kuwait, if you remember, on our most recent Middle East trip we had to curtail that trip by a day, so this is very much a continuation of that previous trip. There is a strategic dialogue that we'll be pursuing, but I don't want to get much ahead on the rest of the itinerary. That's something that we'll be announcing soon. Okay?

QUESTION: My second question on Algeria. Do you have any comment on the demonstrations there?

MR PALLADINO: I think I do, but you're going to have to give me a second.

QUESTION: Well, it should be in the front, right? A, Algeria? Right after Afghanistan, no?

QUESTION: I think they have binders, right?

MR PALLADINO: I've got –

QUESTION: Albania, Algeria.

MR PALLADINO: I go by regions, Matt, and then I've got a separate folder just for you is what I call – all right, (Laughter.)

QUESTION: Which also probably begins with an A. (Laughter.)

MR PALLADINO: So we're monitoring these protests that are happening in Algeria. We're going to continue to do that. And I would say that the United States supports the Algerian people and their right to peacefully assemble.

Michel, all right?

QUESTION: Following on the Secretary's visit, is it – I mean, considering that the Israeli election is next month, a month from today, is it likely that he would go there before the election? Does that send some sort of a message?

MR PALLADINO: No message. Israel is an ally. We're not going to get involved in the domestic politics of another country.

Please, Lalit.

QUESTION: So – no, no, no, let me just follow up on the embassy, please?

MR PALLADINO: We'll go to Lalit. I'm going to jump.

QUESTION: No, I have – and the consulate.

QUESTION: Whoa, whoa, whoa, wait a second. You're not going to get involved in the domestic politics of another country when that country is Israel. What about Venezuela, huh? Any –

MR PALLADINO: We're supporting the Venezuelan people and their constitutional –

QUESTION: Any involvement there?

MR PALLADINO: Lalit, let's go.

QUESTION: Excuse me. I asked about the consulate. The consulate?

MR PALLADINO: I'll come back to you. Okay, go ahead, go ahead, go ahead. Let's – sorry. I mean, you're next, Lalit, all right?

QUESTION: Obviously –

MR PALLADINO: One, two.

QUESTION: I appreciate it, Lalit.

MR PALLADINO: There we go. All right. Go ahead, Said.

QUESTION: You closed the consulate in Jerusalem yesterday.

MR PALLADINO: Right.

QUESTION: After 175 years of operation. But you're saying the decision was driven by our global efforts to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of our diplomatic engagements and operations. Could you really explain what that means? What does that mean?

MR PALLADINO: It means exactly what it says. We've got – this is an internal administrative decision about how we staff and organize our representation overseas, and that's exactly what it is. The –

QUESTION: Have you done this anywhere in the world? I mean, have you – can you cite an example where you have actually closed down a consulate, let's say, in St. Petersburg and say – if you have one – and then make it part of the embassy? I mean –

MR PALLADINO: I mean, we're talking here about multiple missions within the same city, so there – efficiencies are definitely to be had. But I mean, we do have other examples where administrative functions are shared within – I mean, you could look at Rome, for example, where we have multiple missions – to the Holy See, to the Republic of Italy, to the FAO – where efficiencies are gained by colocation. And that is something that we do –

QUESTION: But they're not part of the same embassy, are they? Your mission in the Rome, I mean – to the Holy See and so on.

MR PALLADINO: But we have one – correct. This is –

QUESTION: Okay. Let me ask you a technical question. I mean, Palestinians have gone to the consulate to get visas, get grants, get all kinds of things – go to school, whatever. How are they supposed to do this now? Because the Israelis restrict the movements of Palestinians to Jerusalem. It will not – they will not allow them to go as they please to Jerusalem. How – what should they do?

MR PALLADINO: All services that were previously provided continue to be provided. There's been no change in the underlying functions. There's continuity in both the diplomatic activity, what is provided by consular services, and that hasn't changed.

QUESTION: Robert, you can say that this is an internal administrative decision, but frankly, it's not. I won't try and argue the point with you here. I have a technical question about this. What happens to the building?

MR PALLADINO: The building we continue to house and use.

QUESTION: As what?

MR PALLADINO: We have – the Palestinian Affairs unit is now stood up within that building, and –

QUESTION: So – and it will stay there? It's not –

MR PALLADINO: Correct. Correct.

QUESTION: So, in other words, this building will be – it's just – it's going to be used for the same purpose as it was on – last week, it's just going to have a different name? And it won't be run by a consul general who reports directly back to us.

MR PALLADINO: Correct. That's correct.

QUESTION: Okay.

MR PALLADINO: Chain of command now reports to the United States ambassador.

QUESTION: Is it going to become – is it going to become a residence for the American ambassador in Israel?

MR PALLADINO: I don't know. I don't have any information on that, Said.

QUESTION: Because there are reports that this is –

MR PALLADINO: Don't have – I promised Lalit.

QUESTION: Turkey?

MR PALLADINO: Yeah. Yes, go ahead.

QUESTION: Sorry, thank you. I have two questions on South Asia, India

and Pakistan. What is U.S. assessment of the situation between the two countries now? And also, can you give us a sense or describe in detail what efforts the Secretary himself made in calming the situation? He spoke to the two leaders in the India, Pakistan earlier this week, and he spoke about it yesterday too in Iowa.

MR PALLADINO: Right, right. Our position – the position of the United States is we continue to urge both sides to continue to take steps to de-escalate the situation, and that includes through direct communication. And we believe strongly that further military activity will exacerbate the situation. So we reiterate our call for Pakistan to abide by its United Nations Security Council commitments to deny terrorists sanctuary and to block their access to funds.

Regarding your second question – this happened in Hanoi last week, actually – Secretary Pompeo led diplomatic engagement directly, and that played an essential role in de-escalating the tensions between the two sides. He spoke with leaders in both countries, and that included the Indian Minister of External Affairs Swaraj, National Security Advisor Doval, and Pakistani Foreign Minister Qureshi.

Since – I'll stop there.

QUESTION: Can I follow up?

MR PALLADINO: Is there any follow-up?

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

MR PALLADINO: Is there a follow-up on that?

QUESTION: Robert, follow – follow please?

QUESTION: Right here.

QUESTION: Follow-up.

MR PALLADINO: Oh, I'm sorry. Please, go ahead, Lalit.

QUESTION: So has he made any further calls since coming here after that?

MR PALLADINO: He hasn't. But what I can say is we've been in continuous – high-level contact has continued. That's with both governments via our embassies in New Delhi and Islamabad, as well as with the Indian and Pakistani embassies here in Washington. That has been sustained, that's been ongoing, and – sometimes we do public diplomacy and sometimes there's a time for private diplomacy, and there's a lot of private diplomacy that's going on right now.

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

QUESTION: One quick thing. India has found use of F-16 by Pakistan. State Department and the U.S. embassy in Islamabad said it is looking

for more information on that. Is there potential misuse of F-16 by Pakistan, and what information you are seeking from?

MR PALLADINO: So we've seen those reports and we're following that issue very closely. I can't confirm anything, but as a matter of policy, we don't publicly comment on the contents of bilateral agreements that we have in this regard involving U.S. defense technologies nor the communications that we have with other countries about that. So we're taking a look and we're going to continue to take a look, and I'm going to leave it at that.

QUESTION: Just one –

MR PALLADINO: Let's move on.

QUESTION: This is on State Department business.

MR PALLADINO: Okay. I'm going to go to Michelle and – I already called on you. Let's go to Laurie. Let me go to Laurie. Let me go to Laurie. We'll try to get back.

QUESTION: I have a question on Turkey's plans to purchase the S-400. How does that stand now, and what will you do if they go ahead with that?

MR PALLADINO: Yeah. We've spoken about that before here, Laurie, and the position hasn't changed. We've long made it clear we would like to work collaboratively on air and missile defense with Turkey, and we have offered opportunities for Turkey to consider Patriot among other systems over the years. We've also made it clear to Turkey that we have very serious concerns with its stated plans to proceed with the acquisition of the Russian S-400 missile defense system.

We've clearly warned Turkey that its potential acquisition of the S-400 will result in a reassessment of Turkey's participation in the F-35 program and risk other potential future arm transfers to Turkey, as well as lead to potential sanctions under Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act, CAATSA, upon any government entities, private industry, or individuals that are involved in such a transaction.

QUESTION: Again, if I could ask you about the latest on Syria, you're leaving – we understand there'll be 400 U.S. troops that will remain in Syria after the departure with additional forces from coalition members; is that correct?

MR PALLADINO: The White House has indicated those numbers, and I'll defer to the White House and Department of Defense on specifics. But what I will say is that a residual force of the United States military is going to remain in northeast Syria as part of a multinational force in order to prevent ISIS resurgence and to support stability and security in northeast Syria.

QUESTION: That means that there will be more troops from the international coalition that will join the U.S. forces?

MR PALLADINO: We are – the drawdown is going to continue. As previously announced, it's going to be done in a deliberate and coordinated manner. And as we transition – transition, we're going to continue to be working with our allies and partners to clear liberated areas, conduct targeted counterterrorism operations, and support stabilization efforts.

As far as – our priorities remain the same and the – and talks are ongoing with our allies about the future.

QUESTION: Robert?

QUESTION: Did you say multinational force?

QUESTION: Yeah, multinational force?

MR PALLADINO: Francesco, a follow-up on that? Yeah.

QUESTION: Yeah. When you say multinational force, what are the other nations? What pledges do you have for this force?

MR PALLADINO: We're not going into details. Talks continue. We have nothing to announce today.

QUESTION: You don't have any pledge to announce?

MR PALLADINO: We'll go – please, thank you.

QUESTION: Thanks so much.

MR PALLADINO: Absolutely.

QUESTION: A question on Saudi Arabia. Given the case that was publicized this week of an American woman who, due to circumstances surrounding a divorce, is unable to leave Saudi Arabia, I wondered if the State Department has any concerns about the guardianship laws generally in Saudi Arabia and the effect it has on women there.

MR PALLADINO: Just speaking generally about any time an American travels overseas, they're, of course, subject to the laws of the country in which they travel, and we routinely encourage American citizens to make sure – to read what we publish and to understand the laws of the countries to which they're visiting.

In the case of Saudi Arabia, as you point out, married women, including non-Saudis, require their husbands' permission to depart the country, while unmarried women and children require the permission of their father or male guardian. So that's something that we work through.

QUESTION: And can I ask one follow-up on that on another American –

QUESTION: How does this fit in with the International Women of Courage Award?

MR PALLADINO: We continue to engage all countries on the issue of women

and girls' rights, and that's something we speak forthrightly about globally when we travel.

QUESTION: Well, why can't you say in this case about Saudi Arabia, unless it's not a concern with Saudi Arabia?

MR PALLADINO: We –

QUESTION: I mean, if you're only – if all you're doing is warning American women who are married to Saudis that if they go there they might not ever be able to leave, that doesn't sound like you're trying to change their – the policy.

MR PALLADINO: We engage with the Saudi Government and all nations on these issues. It's something that we do routinely in our diplomacy. It's something that we continue to stand up for and something that is part of what we as the diplomatic corps do globally. I'll stop there.

QUESTION: On North Korea?

QUESTION: One follow-up question on that?

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

QUESTION: Robert –

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

MR PALLADINO: Let's do one North Korea. How about one on North Korea?

QUESTION: Thank you very much. Thank you very much.

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

MR PALLADINO: All right. Over to Janne. She's got a North Korea. Let's see how it goes. All right.

QUESTION: Thank you very much. On United States and North Korea, Hanoi talks broke down in the last week. What are the next step in the United States – is there any plan to have the next meeting with North Korea? United States have any planned next meeting with North Korea? What do you have scheduled?

MR PALLADINO: Not yet. Not yet.

QUESTION: Not yet. But the Pompeo said – Secretary Pompeo said there will be sent a special envoy to North Korea. Do you have any plan?

MR PALLADINO: We have no travel to announce for Special Representative Biegun yet. We're – we've just returned from that trip, and we're going to regroup and we're going to drive forward.

QUESTION: So are you saying –

QUESTION: But the special –

MR PALLADINO: Keep going. One more time, Janne.

QUESTION: Yes. Special Representative Biegun were meeting with the South Korean Representative Lee Do-hoon. Do you have anything on this? Because he's arriving –

MR PALLADINO: Can you say – I'm sorry, Janne. One more time. Can you say that again?

QUESTION: South Korean Representative Lee Do-hoon will meeting with Special Representative Biegun today or tomorrow.

MR PALLADINO: Tomorrow. That will happen tomorrow.

QUESTION: Yes.

MR PALLADINO: I can confirm that that meeting will take place.

QUESTION: So they will be talking about this issue with extending –

MR PALLADINO: Of course. This is his counterpart. And so there's very close coordination with the Republic of Korea on this – in this regard.

QUESTION: So currently no plans, right?

QUESTION: Robert, when you say – sorry.

MR PALLADINO: I'm sorry?

QUESTION: You don't have any plan to special envoy to –

MR PALLADINO: At this point, I've got nothing to announce.

QUESTION: All right. Thank you.

MR PALLADINO: No, absolutely not.

QUESTION: When you say that –

QUESTION: So when he was in Iowa, he said in the next couple weeks – he said hoped to have someone – I hope to have a team in Pyongyang headed over there in the next couple weeks.

MR PALLADINO: He says "hope." He says "hope," and we do hope. We want to move this forward, absolutely. But I've got nothing to announce today. And the Secretary is expressing where we want to go. We think we've made progress in Hanoi and we're going to operate from that. We're going to push forward.

QUESTION: So are you saying that there hasn't been State Department contact with any North Koreans since the summit?

MR PALLADINO: I didn't say actually, no.

QUESTION: Well, what is the answer then? Has the U.S. been talking to the North Koreans since the summit?

MR PALLADINO: We – I'm not going to go into private diplomatic channels, but we remain – I would say as a general principle, we remain in regular contact with the North Koreans. And progress was made at the Hanoi summit. Yes, we did not reach an agreement. But at the same time, we were able to exchange very detailed positions, and that has narrowed the gap on a number of issues. And we've also made clear where the United States and the world stand regarding denuclearization.

QUESTION: But you can't say whether there's been conversation by the State Department since the summit?

MR PALLADINO: I'm not going to go into specifics on private discussions. I would say –

QUESTION: But that wouldn't be private. A yes or no, that you've talked would not be giving away anything.

MR PALLADINO: – we are in regular – we remain in regular contact with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

QUESTION: Robert.

QUESTION: Well that's helpful.

MR PALLADINO: Please.

QUESTION: Can I follow-up?

MR PALLADINO: Yes.

QUESTION: Regarding Special Representative Biegun, will there also be a trilateral with Japan this week included?

MR PALLADINO: I can confirm that he's meeting with his Japanese counterpart tomorrow as well.

QUESTION: This week? Tomorrow as well? Okay. Thank you.

MR PALLADINO: Yes, tomorrow.

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

MR PALLADINO: Please.

QUESTION: While we're on the subject of women's rights, does the U.S. also have concern about the future of women in Afghanistan with these ongoing talks with the Taliban, and if the Taliban returns to government in Afghanistan?

MR PALLADINO: Special Representative Khalilzad and his team are working to promote intra-Afghan talks through a national, unified, and inclusive Afghan negotiating team that includes opposition parties and representatives from civil society, particularly women and youth. And so our position is we're going to continue to support a peace process that aims to address the legitimate concerns of the Afghan people and sustains the social and economic gains of the last 17 years, and that means ensures a better future for all Afghans, particularly women and youth.

All right.

QUESTION: One question about Saudi back here?

MR PALLADINO: A Saudi question.

QUESTION: A Saudi women question?

MR PALLADINO: Okay.

QUESTION: Two Virginia lawmakers have written to Secretary Pompeo asking him to raise the case of Aziza Al-Youssef, who's been in jail for almost a year. Says she was tortured, she's a woman activist there. I wondered if the Secretary has raised that case and also the case of the American man who says he was tortured in Saudi custody, a U.S. citizen.

MR PALLADINO: And who was the Saudi man that you're referring to?

QUESTION: It's a Saudi American man who – that – who was in the Ritz-Carlton. *The New York Times* profiled him this weekend.

MR PALLADINO: Okay, right. So it's – Walid Fitaihi is his – is the gentleman's name, right?

QUESTION: Yeah, yeah.

MR PALLADINO: Confirm that he's detained in Saudi Arabia, confirm that we're providing him consular services, and that we have raised his case with the Government of Saudi Arabia. We visited him today, we visited him on the 20th, and we have had consular access previously. We've raised and we continue to raise his case on a consistent basis with the Saudi Government.

QUESTION: And anything you can tell us about his condition that – since you saw him today?

MR PALLADINO: I have no updates on that regard, no.

QUESTION: And anything –

QUESTION: A follow-up question? Saudi?

QUESTION: And about the woman who's the –

MR PALLADINO: I don't have that in front of me today. I'm sorry. I just don't want to misspeak on that issue. But I would say we – I don't have the facts of that case. I don't want to misspeak, Michele. All right. Please.

QUESTION: Congress is considering sanctions on Saudi Arabia, Robert. Do you have anything on this?

MR PALLADINO: I'm sorry, Michel?

QUESTION: Congress is considering sanctions on Saudi Arabia.

MR PALLADINO: We don't preview sanctions and I've got nothing to announce in that regard.

QUESTION: Robert – Robert –

MR PALLADINO: All right. This is the last question. We're going to wrap it up and I'm going to try you. Please.

QUESTION: Okay. Senators had a closed-door briefing yesterday with a senior State Department official and Lindsey Graham said it was a waste of time, Mitt Romney said he learned nothing new. If senators learned nothing new, what was the point of the briefing? And the other question really quickly on Israel: Israel's prime minister is facing indictments. I know you said you don't get involved in domestic issues, but how does that – and does it affect the administration's peace plan?

MR PALLADINO: I'm not going to comment on the second question. Israel is an ally. We deal with the Government of Israel and that's the way – we pursue our own interests as the United States of America. We take countries as we find them.

Regarding your first question, that was a closed-door session and I'm not going to attempt to read out what was briefed, and I'm certainly not going to react to members, our elected representatives. Not going to do that from the State Department. We continue to regularly engage the United States Congress on these issues and to provide information. Our position has not changed. We continue to gather facts. We'll follow them where they lead and to hold those responsible responsible.

QUESTION: Including the crown prince?

MR PALLADINO: We have repeatedly said that we will follow the facts where they lead and hold those who are responsible responsible, and with that, I'm going to stop. Guys, thank you very much.

QUESTION: You don't have anything to say about this whole controversy around Representative Omar, do you, and her comments?

MR PALLADINO: Not from the State Department. Thank you, Matt.

QUESTION: Thank you.

(The briefing was concluded at 3:43 p.m.)

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