

Press Releases: Department Press Briefing – August 24, 2017

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Spokesperson

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Index for Today's Briefing

- [AFGHANISTAN](#)
- [QATAR/IRAN](#)
- [QATAR/ISRAEL/PALESTINIANS](#)
- [ISRAEL/PALESTINIANS/UNITED NATIONS](#)
- [NORTH KOREA/SYRIA/UNITED NATIONS](#)
- [NORTH KOREA/EGYPT](#)
- [NORTH KOREA/RUSSIA/CHINA](#)
- [REPUBLIC OF KOREA](#)
- [NORTH KOREA](#)
- [CUBA](#)
- [TURKEY](#)
- [CAMBODIA](#)
- [DEPARTMENT/RUSSIA](#)

TRANSCRIPT:

2:25 p.m. EDT

MS NAUERT: Air conditioning still not fixed?

QUESTION: No.

QUESTION: Love it. Thank you. It's great.

MS NAUERT: Goodness. Do we have an electrician in the house? I was told it's a motherboard issue, and I haven't heard the word motherboard since, I don't know, maybe 1992 or something.

QUESTION: It was so cold we couldn't even sit in here.

MS NAUERT: Andrea, come on. You know the lights. They get hot. How is everybody?

QUESTION: Great.

MS NAUERT: We're doing all right? Matt, I understand you are eager to get out of here.

QUESTION: I am.

MS NAUERT: So enjoy your vacation. We will miss you.

QUESTION: Yes.

MS NAUERT: Okay. Starting out today, I want to start out in Afghanistan and talk a little bit about an announcement, an important announcement, that came out of Afghanistan from the government there today. President Ghani launched the Afghan Government's new compact. It's called the Afghan Compact. The compact represents the Afghan Government's commitment to key reforms aimed at improving security and creating a more peaceful, stable, and prosperous society.

We have long stressed and supported the Afghan Government's efforts to fight corruption and improve its governance, and the compact is an important new step in that effort. The implementation of the new commitments, which include benchmarks in four key areas – governance, security, peace and reconciliation, and economics – they carry with them the opportunities to improve the delivery of government services, stem official corruption, and prepare for secure national elections in 2018. The benchmarks are tied to global standards of good governance put forward by the World Bank and other leading institutions.

The development of the compact and its ultimate implementation was an important consideration in the development of the administration's new South Asia strategy. Chief Executive Abdullah highlighted the fact earlier this week, when he said that nation building is a job for the Afghans themselves to do and not the United States or other countries. So we congratulate Afghanistan on that and look forward to any way that we can assist them.

Today's announcement demonstrates Afghans' renewed commitment to taking up its share of the burden. As President Trump has said, the United States remains committed to supporting Afghanistan, as long as they continue to make real reforms, show real progress, and produce real results.

And I'll take your questions.

QUESTION: That's it?

MS NAUERT: That is it.

QUESTION: All right.

MS NAUERT: Where do you want to start?

QUESTION: I have – I don't have a lot, but I have two very brief follow-ups, but I'll wait until the end to ask those. So the only other thing I have is: Do you guys have any thoughts on the – what appears to be a bolstering of relations between Qatar and Iran, with Qatar sending an ambassador back to Iran? This is not the direction that the other – that the Arab neighbors wanted to see Qatar move in. So do you guys have anything to say?

MS NAUERT: So let me first just mention something about the overall Qatar dispute, and that is something that we continue to keep a very close eye on. As you know, our Deputy Assistant Secretary Tim Lenderking was recently over there, working on that issue, along with General Zinni. We remain very deeply concerned with the status of that dispute. It's been now – how many weeks? – 12 weeks or so – let me double check the facts on that. But it's –

QUESTION: Since June 5.

MS NAUERT: Since when?

QUESTION: June 5.

MS NAUERT: June the 5th. It's gone on for far too long. It really has. So we remain deeply concerned with the status of that. In terms of your question, Matt, about restoring diplomatic ties with Iran and Qatar doing that, we would just basically say that we encourage the parties to try to minimize the rhetoric. I know this – you're going to want more of answer on this for you on this particular matter. The Governments of Qatar and Iran are the best ones to answer those questions. Just want to say overall, we just remain very concerned about the dispute.

QUESTION: Well, I understand that. But I mean, you guys have been involved, albeit maybe not enthusiastically, but you were forced to get involved because they weren't making any progress on their own. And I – so I don't think it's out of the – I don't think it's inappropriate to ask what – if the United States thinks that Qatar and Iran restoring diplomatic relations is a good thing for the dispute resolution process or not.

MS NAUERT: Yeah, completely fair question. There are diplomatic things that may be going on that we're simply not aware of or can't speak about right now. So I know it's not a very satisfactory answer. You're more than welcome to ask me about it as much as you like. I just want to go back to just say we're concerned about the status of the dispute.

QUESTION: Right. I get it. But does this make it worse?

MS NAUERT: And we'll continue to have conversations with the Government of Qatar.

QUESTION: Do you not have an opinion?

MS NAUERT: Is the dispute – do we regard the dispute as worse?

QUESTION: No. Is the restoration of diplomatic ties helpful to resolving the dispute? Does it hurt?

MS NAUERT: I just don't –

QUESTION: Is it something you don't have an opinion on?

MS NAUERT: I'm not – I'm just not going to characterize it, whether it's a good thing or a bad thing. But overall, we remain very concerned about the status of this dispute and we're making those messages clear.

QUESTION: Okay.

QUESTION: Could you clarify something with Zinni?

MS NAUERT: Yeah.

QUESTION: Is his involvement was just that one mission or is he an envoy, like an ongoing process?

MS NAUERT: I'm not certain if he has a particular role or title. Let me double check on that for you. My understanding is that the general was brought on with his broad range of expertise in his previous career in the military as assisting with the Qatar dispute.

Okay? All right. Let's move on.

QUESTION: Can we move on?

MS NAUERT: Yes.

QUESTION: Can we go to the Palestinian-Israeli –

MS NAUERT: Yeah, go right ahead. I understand –

QUESTION: One follow-up on Qatar?

MS NAUERT: Yes. Hi.

QUESTION: Hi. In terms of the White House delegation that traveled to the region this week, they were in Qatar on Monday. And it seemed like that was a portfolio that the Secretary was taking care of and owning the dispute. So what's the benefit of sending the White House delegation there to follow up? And did Tillerson speak with them before they went on the trip?

MS NAUERT: Yeah. So we remain in very close contact with the White House, with Mr. Kushner's office, Mr. Greenblatt's office, and so forth. All of these meetings our embassy is involved with. We're involved in the facilitation of the meetings, attending a lot of the meetings, debriefing following the meetings. I can give you somewhat of a readout from that meeting that you just asked about.

On August 22nd, 2017, Senior Adviser to the President Jared Kushner, Special Representative for International Negotiations Jason Greenblatt, Deputy National Security Adviser for Strategy Dina Powell, and Deputy Assistant Secretary for State for Arabian Gulf Affairs Tim Lenderking met with Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani of Qatar and his senior advisers to talk about advancing President Trump's goal of a genuine and lasting peace among the Israelis and the Palestinians. The parties discussed the importance to the peace effort of countering terrorists and extremists, improving humanitarian situation in Gaza. The two sides affirmed the close relationship between the United States and Qatar and committed to strengthening the relationship and close cooperation.

So I think that was really the limit of their conversations.

QUESTION: Did the Secretary have conversations with them before they went over there?

MS NAUERT: I'm not certain if the Secretary himself actually spoke with – you mean with Mr. Kushner and Mr. Greenblatt?

QUESTION: Kushner and Greenblatt.

MS NAUERT: I'm not certain of that. But I know our staffs talk regularly, and we talk with them as well as the NSC, and they communicate with us very well.

Okay? All right. Anything else on Qatar? Okay. Said, why don't you go ahead?

QUESTION: Yeah. I want to go to –

MS NAUERT: What do you want to talk about?

QUESTION: – the Palestinian-Israeli issue.

MS NAUERT: Pardon me?

QUESTION: I want to go to the Palestinian-Israeli issue, if I may.

MS NAUERT: Okay.

QUESTION: I wanted to ask you about an issue that the United States is pressuring the United Nations, I guess, Human Rights Council to – or not to publish the list of American companies that are doing business in Israeli settlements. Can you confirm that? Or what reason would you have to pressure the United Nations to delist or not to publish the list of these companies?

MS NAUERT: Yeah. I think we take issue with the list itself, and we've been very clear about that. The United States is adamantly opposed to this so-called black list and this resolution. We have been from the very beginning. We fought against this in Geneva. That's where it was originally proposed. We consider these types of resolutions to be

counterproductive, and they really do nothing to advance peace between the Israelis and Palestinians.

QUESTION: And certainly you don't want to encourage the settlements to have their own semi-independent kind of economy and trade and all these things.

MS NAUERT: I'm sorry, say that again?

QUESTION: Well, the target of this list is to show the companies that are doing business with settlements that you and the rest of the world consider to be illegal.

MS NAUERT: Look, I think overall we just view that type of black list as counterproductive. Does that help facilitate peace? I don't think so. I don't think so.

QUESTION: Well, but –

MS NAUERT: And the United States, I think, has been pretty clear about that.

QUESTION: – but neither are the proliferation of settlements and their economy. Does it help peace?

MS NAUERT: We don't think that that kind of list is productive, period.

QUESTION: Okay. Can I get you to comment on one last –

MS NAUERT: Yes.

QUESTION: – on a last issue. The – a report shows that there are 35 – 3,400 – 3,455 Israeli structures in the West Bank on privately owned Palestinian land, which you opposed. And in the past, there were condemnation of these efforts. Thus far, since this administration came into office, there have been no condemnations of such building of settlements on privately owned Palestinian land. So I wanted to ask your position on this.

MS NAUERT: I think in terms of building on lands, it gets back to – the administration is committed to doing what it can to try to advance peace. The President, as well as others in the administration, have said repeatedly – and I feel like I get this question every single day from you – that unrestrained settlement activity does not advance the cause for peace. I'll leave it at that. Okay? Let's move on to something else.

Andrea, hi.

QUESTION: Related subject in terms of the Greenblatt-Kushner trip. In the meetings with Netanyahu, was it the decision of the embassy to defer to Israel's decision to have only government cameras there? An embassy camera shot their statements as well as state – Israeli – as far as I know, there were no reporters there.

MS NAUERT: Yeah, you know what? I'm afraid I don't have anything for you on that. I have not asked that –

QUESTION: Could you take that question as to the policy of our embassy in coverage?

MS NAUERT: So the question is: What is the policy of the U.S. embassy –

QUESTION: When Kushner is traveling –

MS NAUERT: Uh-huh.

QUESTION: – and there is a photo op, which there was, and he made a statement, which he did.

MS NAUERT: Okay, mm-hmm.

QUESTION: And so did the prime minister. What is the policy now? To only have so-called “fake news” by the government cameras cover that rather than journalists?

MS NAUERT: I'm sorry. Whose cameras covered this?

QUESTION: A camera – I am told a camera from the embassy, from the American embassy, and a camera from the Israeli Government –

MS NAUERT: So an official – an official photographer?

QUESTION: Right. Shooting statements that made it look like they were press statements. I will – I was not there, so I'm taking this off of reports I've seen.

MS NAUERT: Yeah, I'm not aware of this report. I can't confirm that that took place, but I can certainly look into that for you.

QUESTION: I'd like to know what the U.S. embassy's policy is.

MS NAUERT: I will look into that. I will look into that for you.

QUESTION: When Kushner is traveling and making statements.

MS NAUERT: Yep, I'll look into that for you, certainly. Okay. Hi, Laurie.

QUESTION: Hi. My question –

MS NAUERT: What do you want to talk about? Iraq?

QUESTION: Actually, no. Syria.

MS NAUERT: All right.

QUESTION: The UN reported earlier this month that two shipments had been intercepted in the past half year from North Korea to a Syrian

Government agency responsible for chemical weapons production. Can you provide more details on those shipments, and do you think that, then, are your efforts to isolate North Korea and prevent Syria from manufacturing, using – and using chemical weapons effective, or do you think there are problems with it?

MS NAUERT: So a couple things on this. This is a confidential report. This was put together by the UN. It is – hold on a second. I have some more information on this. I'm looking in the wrong place. Give me a second for you. Here we go, okay.

So that report, my understanding is that it will be released eventually by the United Nations. So USUN will have to provide all the specifics on that report, but as a general matter I can say overall that we would applaud the work of this particular committee and its work to try to hold North Korea responsible or accountable.

We continue – and we talk about this a lot – to encourage member-states to provide that committee with information on the DPRK's attempts to circumvent UN sanctions. So there are the sanctions against the DPRK. If, in fact, this is true, what is being – what is being reported, that would be a very grave, gave concern to us.

QUESTION: And to follow up on that, *The Washington Post* has a big article which you doubtless saw saying that the real motivation, energizing motive for this dispute with Egypt over financial aid, was really Egypt's dealings with North Korea. Is that true? Is that accurate?

MS NAUERT: So I mean, what I can tell you about that is that we've long talked about concerns about democracy, about human rights. We have long listed our concerns about Egypt and the direction that it has been – it has been going in.

As it pertains to DPRK and Egypt, we continue to work with our allies and partners. Egypt is one of them. We have conversations with Egypt and many other countries around the world about the need to isolate the DPRK, and we do that because we recognize that countries around the world that do business with North Korea enable money to go into North Korea's illegal nuclear and ballistic weapons programs. And that is a huge concern of ours and it's a huge concern to the international community as well.

We have a deep and multifaceted relationship with the country of Egypt. We have a lot of areas of close cooperation. But DPRK overall as a broad matter is a big concern to the United States. Okay?

QUESTION: On Raqqa, on Syria, if you may –

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

MS NAUERT: Hold on, let's just stick –

QUESTION: Syria.

MS NAUERT: Does anyone else have any questions about Egypt?

QUESTION: DPRK.

QUESTION: DPRK.

MS NAUERT: Okay, let's then switch over to DPRK. Hi, how are you?

QUESTION: A follow-up. Good. A follow-up on that part. Are you concerned that the recent sanction against Chinese and Russian entities and individuals may harm the progress you have been seeing with those?

MS NAUERT: No, and here's why: The companies and the individuals who have been sanctioned – the third-party sanctions – are in China and Russia, but we don't target any specific governments at all with regard to sanctions. We look at those sanctions – and Treasury can talk about this more – but we would regard those sanctions as not being necessarily a part of the government but companies that are involved in illicit activity, companies or individuals who are involved in illicit activity.

Russia and China have pledged to adhere to the sanctions, to adhere to the sanctions against the DPRK, and we trust and look forward that – to them adhering to that. We take them at their word; they said that they would and we don't have any reason to believe that they wouldn't now. Okay?

QUESTION: But the Chinese foreign ministry actually came out, object this sanction. I wonder if during the phone call between Secretary Tillerson and Chinese State Councilor Yang Jiechi the Secretary Tillerson explained the motivation behind this sanction.

MS NAUERT: Again, this isn't to target a government. These are to target entities and individuals who are funding some of DPRK's programs. Okay?

QUESTION: Last one –

MS NAUERT: And this can happen anywhere around the world where we see people who are involved in those types of things or companies. And we will keep an eye on them and, if appropriate, Treasury will look into it and then sanction them. Okay?

QUESTION: And last one: Could you please explain what's the precondition now for the United States to start the negotiation with North Korea? Because in March, Secretary Tillerson actually – he said the negotiation could only be achieved if North Korea give up the weapons of mass destruction, but recently he also suggested that Pyongyang only had to demonstrate that it was serious about a path before the talk begin.

MS NAUERT: Look, overall our policy on DPRK has not changed. We want a denuclearized Korean Peninsula. The world wants that. UN Security Council resolutions have backed that up as well. So that has not

changed. But the Secretary has looked at this, as one of the countries that cares deeply about this issue, and has said that Kim Jong-un needs to take steps – further steps – in order to show that he is serious before we are willing to sit down. So our policy on that hasn't changed.

QUESTION: But serious about what? Serious about giving up their weapons program or serious about not advancing it beyond where it is currently? Because he said both things –

MS NAUERT: Yeah, and let me read, let me read a quote from something he recently said: "The U.S. is willing to negotiate with Pyongyang, but given the long record of North Korea's dishonesty in negotiations and repeated violations of international agreements, it is incumbent upon the regime to signal its desire to negotiate in good faith. A sincere indication would be the immediate cessation of its provocative threats, nuclear tests, missile launches, and other weapons tests."

Susan Thornton has talked about this – and look, we hope to get to that point with them, but there's still a long way to go.

All right, anything else on DPRK?

QUESTION: Yeah, one follow-up.

MS NAUERT: Okay. Hey, how are you?

QUESTION: Yeah. The sanctions on China and Russia – there are reports that maybe the U.S. Government is still considering expand the range of these sanctions, like to some major banks in China. So I'm just wondering that can you confirm there is a discussion about this –

MS NAUERT: I can't, because that would be something – I can't confirm it. It would be something that Treasury would be looking at and considering if that were to be the case, but I'm just not aware of that. Okay?

Hi.

QUESTION: Hi. You mentioned United States is pleased to see North Korea demonstrate some level of restraint, but at the same time, we can see the joint military exercise between U.S. and South Korea. So we know this is like pre – or planned before, but have you ever thinking about if cancel this kind of joint military exercise, that would be beneficial to regional stability?

MS NAUERT: I feel like I keep getting this question again and again and again. These exercises with South Korea, or any of our allies for that matter – these have been done for decades and decades. In particular with South Korea, which is ongoing right now – I suppose that's why you're asking me about that – we've been doing it since 1953, and this is something that we do for military readiness. It's something that we do to our ally as – with our ally. As you know, we have a very close relationship with the Republic of Korea.

The – it's a combined command-and-control event. It's designed to improve the alliance's ability to defend the Republic of Korea. We also have 17,500 U.S. servicemembers who are serving and participating in that. There are 3,000 who are involved in this coming from off-peninsula. These are regularly scheduled; it's an annual exercise that we do all the time. It comes with many months of planning. But to suggest that our activity with our ally of the Republic of Korea is in any way equivalent to the DPRK's actions is simply false. Okay?

All right. Anything else on DPRK?

QUESTION: Yeah, I have one, just – on DPRK.

MS NAUERT: Yeah. Hi, Dave.

QUESTION: Thank you. The Secretary spoke of a measure of restraint that he wants to acknowledge, and it's true that there haven't been any missile tests or nuclear tests since the new round of sanctions. But this week, they did release a round of propaganda photographs showing Kim Jong-un and what were described as missile scientists and commanders, and there was various missile paraphernalia in these photographs and diagrams on the wall.

MS NAUERT: Yeah.

QUESTION: Does that give you cause for concern? Is that provocation even if it didn't involve an actual firing?

MS NAUERT: And I'm glad that you refer to it as a propaganda photo because that's simply what it is. We don't know that the timing – we don't know the timing which that photo was taken. We don't know if it's an old photo or if it's a recent photo. We don't know if that photo was taken before the Secretary's comments or after the Secretary's comments. Sometimes there's a lag time between things that are said here and things that get posted in the DPRK.

We consider it overall a good first step that there haven't been any missile launches or testing for three – three – three-plus weeks or so, but we need to see more.

QUESTION: You need to see more of nothing?

MS NAUERT: We need to see – (laughter) – we need to see them take more action, more – or inaction in that instance.

QUESTION: Okay. But this gets back to the – I remember when I first asked this the other day –

MS NAUERT: Yeah.

QUESTION: – and you made the kind of joke about you were going to reward your kid for not stealing a cookie.

MS NAUERT: Yeah.

QUESTION: But isn't that what this is?

MS NAUERT: In what way?

QUESTION: Well, I mean, if you're willing to talk with them as long as they don't do something –

MS NAUERT: No, we're not at that point yet, so I don't want to get ahead of activities or forecast what's going to happen in the future or talk about hypotheticals. We need to see more action, more serious action –

QUESTION: So they actually have to do something, just not do nothing?

MS NAUERT: The point is they need to take steps in the right direction. Okay? It's been three-plus weeks since they haven't done any missile launches or missile tests. We're pleased with that and we'd like to see that go on more, but they need to do a lot more.

QUESTION: Okay.

MS NAUERT: Okay? Okay.

QUESTION: During this period, has Ambassador Yun been able to speak to Mr. Pak Yon-kil or any of his colleagues at the North Korean delegation in the UN?

MS NAUERT: I just don't – I don't have any conversations, calls, or meetings to provide you right now.

QUESTION: Because there aren't any or because they're –

MS NAUERT: I just don't – I don't have any.

QUESTION: Okay.

MS NAUERT: Okay.

QUESTION: Just – just one – just one –

MS NAUERT: You know one of the problems with it being hot in here is everybody gets sleepy. (Laughter.)

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

MS NAUERT: Okay.

QUESTION: Just one clarification.

MS NAUERT: Okay.

QUESTION: Thank you.

MS NAUERT: Conor, how are you? You want to talk about Cuba? Okay.

QUESTION: Yes, quickly.

QUESTION: Staying on North Korea, just a –

MS NAUERT: Okay. Pardon me one second. I'll do North Korea and then I'll move –

QUESTION: Yeah. Just a clarification: How are you confident that China will honor the latest sanctions against North Korea? It hasn't done in the past. And what about the monitoring of the commercial corridor between those two countries? The coal is going, everything, and – so how are we going to be confident that, yes, this time China is honoring?

MS NAUERT: China – China has talked about how it intends to do that. We have to take some of our partners at their word. The situation – and I think many nations want stability in the Korean Peninsula. Many nations understand the threat that the DPRK faces. Let me read to you just a little bit from Secretary Tillerson when he was in Manila and he was referring exactly to this with regard to the Chinese.

He said, "We had discussions in Manila about the situation." He's referring to the Chinese and also the Russians. He said: I know they're having talks as well with representatives 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 UN Security Council resolutions, which both China and Russia have voted for in the past. 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 will be."

So there are ways that, certainly, other nations can reach out and communicate their messages to the DPRK.

QUESTION: Okay.

MS NAUERT: So we're taking China at its word right now. Okay? Conor, go right ahead.

QUESTION: Yeah. So yesterday you said that the State Department had brought medical professionals down to the staff in Havana. I'm wondering if you can say whether or not one of those doctors was one of the Americans who has been injured by the activity.

MS NAUERT: I am not aware of that. I am not aware of that at all. This is the first I'm hearing of that.

QUESTION: So it's exclusively U.S. diplomatic personnel who have been injured and have these symptoms?

MS NAUERT: My understanding is that – again, my understanding is that the people who experience these symptoms were U.S. Government employees who were there working for the U.S. Government.

QUESTION: Okay.

MS NAUERT: Okay?

QUESTION: And then just as well, the – I've have heard from some senior officials here that Cuba has been responsive to the U.S. request for an investigation. Would you say that the Cubans have been working with the U.S. on the investigation, or is that an over-characterization?

MS NAUERT: I don't know. Responsive, working with – I –

QUESTION: But it's not a joint investigation with the two –

MS NAUERT: I don't believe it's a joint investigation. The U.S. Government is investigating this. We have multiple agencies and departments who are involved in this and take it extremely seriously. We were talking about this yesterday. This is something that we have not experienced in the past. We are working very hard to try to take care of our folks who are there – they're on official duty – and trying to provide them all the care and the treatment and the support that they would need.

QUESTION: And then just one last question.

MS NAUERT: Yeah.

QUESTION: I'd ask yesterday, but you ran out of time. Can you say whether or not the attacks are ongoing still?

MS NAUERT: I was briefed on this both yesterday and today, and I was told that the incidents are not ongoing at this point. Okay?

QUESTION: Okay. Thank you.

MS NAUERT: I do have some news, which I know some of you will be very interested in hearing about this. I want to mention that I have an update for you on this, on the number of people who have been affected. We have not provided that information in the past. We only now have the confirmation of the number of Americans who have been affected by this. We can confirm that at least 16 U.S. Government employees, members of our embassy community, have experienced some kind of symptoms. They have been provided medical treatment in the United States as well as in Cuba. We take this situation extremely seriously. We are trying to provide them the help, the medical care, the treatment, and the support that they need and the support that they deserve.

QUESTION: Can I –

QUESTION: May I follow up on that?

MS NAUERT: I know, I know. We'll have a lot of questions about this. And I don't have a ton of information.

QUESTION: But when you –

QUESTION: Well, but when you –

MS NAUERT: I'll give you what I can.

QUESTION: Do they – does that include spouses at all, who may –

MS NAUERT: My understanding is that all the – you know what –

QUESTION: – that come under chief of mission authority, but are they all actually –

MS NAUERT: You know what, let me check on that for you, because I just got this information as I was coming out here and I don't have that in front of me. So let me find out if these were all actually employees or if some of these are family members. Can we check on that while we're in here and see if we can get you that information before the briefing ends?

Andrea.

QUESTION: When you said that the – that there were no more – that they are no longer experiencing the symptoms, did –

MS NAUERT: I'm sorry. Did I say no longer experiencing the symptoms? I mean the incidents.

QUESTION: No, no. The incidents.

MS NAUERT: The incidents are no longer occurring.

QUESTION: Does that mean that something was found or something at – in these buildings was intermediated? I mean, how do you know that it's no longer an issue? Was there some physical –

MS NAUERT: There –

QUESTION: – object or –

MS NAUERT: To my knowledge –

QUESTION: – discovery?

MS NAUERT: – nothing – last I heard, nothing has been identified as here is a piece of equipment, for example.

QUESTION: And can you update us on the report – CBS had a report of brain damage according to a doctor treating at least one employee. I'm not sure whether – about the numbers. Have you anything further –

MS NAUERT: I –

QUESTION: – to suggest –

MS NAUERT: I can't confirm.

QUESTION: – quote, "brain damage?"

MS NAUERT: I can't confirm any of that. I can't confirm that CBS report, and we would never give information about the health status of one of the Americans.

QUESTION: And for all the 16 that you mentioned –

MS NAUERT: Yeah.

QUESTION: – are they all out of country now, or are some still –

MS NAUERT: No, I believe that some of them are still there. Okay.

QUESTION: When you say at least 16, could that number climb?

MS NAUERT: All I have is – and again, this is information that I got just as I was coming out here. At least 16 members – that number could change.

QUESTION: Sure.

QUESTION: Can you say anything on-the-record about what you think happened to them at this point?

MS NAUERT: Well, we've talked about this before. I think –

QUESTION: Do you have, like, any new information that you could share on-the-record?

MS NAUERT: No. I don't. I don't have anything new for you. What I've said in the past, that these incidents started taking place late in 2016, that we know our Americans started experiencing some symptoms, started reporting them in to embassy personnel, we started investigating, and eventually we got to this point. Okay? All right.

QUESTION: Turkey?

MS NAUERT: Hi.

QUESTION: Sorry if I had missed this, but there are also reports that this – these same victims of attack had also had cars vandalized, homes broken into, pets poisoned. Can you confirm that these same individuals were harassed in different ways?

MS NAUERT: Yeah. I don't have any information on that for you in particular. As a general matter, I know that various governments have seen that kind of behavior from the Cuban Government in the past. But

again, we're not assigning responsibility at this point. We don't know who the perpetrator was of these incidents. That is why I want to be firm and say, because I've seen some misreporting on this, the investigation is ongoing. The investigation is ongoing and we will continue to try to find the source of these incidents and the perpetrator.

QUESTION: Just to button up the answer –

MS NAUERT: Yeah.

QUESTION: – to Andrea's question, so if we haven't found a device and we don't know who did it, and we're talking about symptoms that are not, like, "Ow," no longer ow; we're talking about things that have – that developed over time, how do we – how do we know that this isn't ongoing?

MS NAUERT: How do we know that it's not – because we talk with our staff and we talk with the medical professionals.

QUESTION: And what percentage of the embassy family are 16?

MS NAUERT: Matt asked that question. I said we'll see if I can get you something on that. I don't know. These – again, this information was just given to me as I was coming out here, so let me try to see what I can get for you. I may not be able to provide you an answer, but I will do my best to do that.

QUESTION: And the U.S. Government employees, are they all U.S. citizens?

MS NAUERT: Yes. Okay?

QUESTION: Change to Turkey?

MS NAUERT: Hi. How are you, Ilhan? Nice to see you.

QUESTION: Doing fine. Thank you.

MS NAUERT: Okay. And then we have to wrap it up.

QUESTION: On –

MS NAUERT: Because I see –

QUESTION: No, no, no. I got my two very brief follow-ups, Heather.

MS NAUERT: Okay. Let's go to – let's go to Ilhan, and I know – I see some of you falling asleep in here in the heat. (Laughter.) Taking a little nap in here. It happens to me too.

QUESTION: In Turkey today –

MS NAUERT: Yes.

QUESTION: – local court issued another arrest for American pastor

Brunson, who has been mentioned by President, Vice President, and recently by the Secretary of State.

MS NAUERT: Yes.

QUESTION: And he is accused of attempting to abolish Turkey – Turkish Parliament, change of constitutional order, and spying accusations. What that means is that it doesn't seem he's going to get release any time soon even if the other arrest warrant is perished. Do you have any comment on this recent?

MS NAUERT: Yes. So you're talking about Pastor Andrew Brunson. That is a case that people here follow very closely. Some of our bureaus – I've had numerous conversations with them about his case. Pastor Brunson has not been forgotten. The safety and security of Americans is one of our top priorities here at the State Department. Secretary Tillerson has spoken about this, about Pastor Brunson, who's now been imprisoned for about 10 months now. He was taken into custody back in October of 2016. The Secretary said this: The United States continues to advocate for the release of Pastor Andrew Brunson. He's been wrongfully imprisoned in Turkey. We take this issue very seriously. We take our obligation to assist U.S. citizens abroad very seriously. Since Pastor Brunson's arrest, our consular officers have visited him regularly. They continue to do so. I will see if I can find a date of his last consular visit for you. I do not have that, though, at my fingertips. We continue to provide appropriate consular services to Mr. Brunson and his family. He does have an attorney who may be able to answer some additional questions about his legal case.

QUESTION: Final one: There are about dozen or more American and Turkish American citizens in Turkey prison since the last coup attempt. How do you assess in general Turkish policy regarding these issues? Have you been able to provide consular services other citizens or are you happy with – anything change recently on this?

MS NAUERT: There have certainly been some instances of delays or denials of consular access to some of our U.S. citizens who are in Turkey, who have been detained or arrested by security forces. Some of them are also dual nationals who possess Turkish citizenship, and some of this all continues. So – just want to remind folks that in accordance with the Geneva – excuse me, the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations, the United States has a legal right to access our U.S. citizens who have been detained in Turkey and who do not also possess Turkish citizenship. U.S. citizens – although the United States does not have a legal right to access the dual citizens, and that's the case in quite a few countries – Iran, for example – U.S.-Turkish citizens detained in Turkey, and we continue to press for access to them.

Okay. All right, guys. We're going to have to wrap it up there.

QUESTION: Can I get another too?

MS NAUERT: Matt, go right ahead.

QUESTION: Just wondering if you had anything – any response from the Cambodians to your message the other day, or if there's any – have there been any developments, improvement, or regression in the situation? That, and then secondly – well –

MS NAUERT: Want me to do that one first?

QUESTION: Yeah.

MS NAUERT: Okay. So just a couple things: Since you asked and are interested in that and – we have a lot of concerns about the situation in Cambodia. I was able to put together sort of a list of some of our meetings, some specifics – ways that we have reached out to the Government of Cambodia to express our concern about what they're doing with regard to newspapers, publications, Radio Free Asia, Voice of America, and the organization that you used to work for as well.

A couple things here. Our ambassador has had numerous meetings. The most recent one was on August the 22nd in which he met with the head of the Cambodian tax authority to urge Cambodia to avoid the perception and the reality of using the tax code in a biased fashion against entities they perceive to be as their enemies. We talked about this yesterday where they're imposing exorbitant taxes on these entities. It seems to drive them out of business. So that is a huge concern of ours.

He also had some meetings back in June with the prime minister. They talked overall about freedoms in Cambodia, including freedom of the press, democracy, and so forth. Our Under Secretary Shannon has had meetings on this issue here in Washington. He met with the foreign minister. I can't remember if we talked about that at the time, but they talked about our commitment to democracy.

So these conversations – it's just a sprinkling of a few that have taken place. The Secretary has written to the foreign minister about these types of issues and our concerns.

QUESTION: Was that recent?

MS NAUERT: He wrote to them earlier this spring.

QUESTION: Have they given an –

MS NAUERT: So these conversations are certainly ongoing.

QUESTION: Do you know, to the best of your knowledge, have the Cambodians given you any sense of where they got the idea that journalists or news organizations would be the enemy?

MS NAUERT: No, I – they haven't –

QUESTION: No?

MS NAUERT: They haven't, not to my knowledge.

QUESTION: Even after what I told you the other day?

MS NAUERT: Even after what you told me the other day, certainly.

QUESTION: Okay. And then –

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

QUESTION: Okay. And the second follow-up is on – now it's – we have a week now – this is Russia – before the – and I'm just wondering, have the staff reductions begun? Or I mean, because it seemed – the clock is – the clock is ticking.

MS NAUERT: Right, right. Just to sort of reiterate some of the points that I made yesterday, we consider this to be regrettable. This is not our choice to have to reduce the number of U.S. staff and U.S. personnel serving in Russia. Not only does it affect our employees and people who are simply trying to do the work of promoting democracy, helping Americans, et cetera, overseas, but it also hurts Russian citizens. We have many Russian citizens who work for the United States as locally employed staff. They will now be out of jobs. President Putin claims that he cares about the economy in Russia. That's a funny way of showing it, caring about the economy by putting your people out of work. The Russian Government knew the impact of these staff cuts and the impacts that it would have. We have until September 1st in order to – that deadline in order to get back to the Russian Government about our next steps.

To answer your question, in terms of Americans, yes, some of them are now being brought home and are in the process of that.

QUESTION: Okay. Maybe – is it – I thought that the staff – the reduction of staff had to be done by September 1st. Is it your understanding that you just needed to reply to the Russians by September 1st?

MS NAUERT: We have said that –

QUESTION: Maybe I'm – I might have this wrong.

MS NAUERT: I'm not sure, but we have said we will respond by September the 1st.

QUESTION: Right, but when – but my – I had been under the impression that your response was going to be pulling the – reducing – reducing the – reducing the staff.

MS NAUERT: That's a good question. I'm not – I'm not sure.

QUESTION: Okay.

MS NAUERT: Let me – let me double-check that for you.

QUESTION: Thank you.

MS NAUERT: Okay.

QUESTION: Thanks.

MS NAUERT: All right, guys. Everybody, thanks a lot. And if anyone's off next week, have a great vacation. I'll be off next week, so – but we will try to bring you briefings and other people who can fill your newspapers and all of that, publications and everything.

You're on –

QUESTION: Televisions?

QUESTION: With me.

QUESTION: Thank you.

MS NAUERT: We're on vacation together? Okay all right. Everybody, take care. Thank you.

(The briefing was concluded at 3:04 p.m.)

DPB # 47

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