

Press Releases: Department Press Briefing – July 24, 2018

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TRANSCRIPT:

3:10 p.m. EDT

MS NAUERT: Hi, everybody. How are you?

QUESTION: Wow, a briefing.

MS NAUERT: I'm sorry?

QUESTION: Wow, a briefing.

MS NAUERT: It's good to be back with you. As you know, it always is good to be back with you. We've obviously had a very busy travel schedule lately, Michelle. We look forward to having you on the trip. (Laughter.)

So I'd like to start out with a few announcements. I wanted to begin by noting that the State Department welcomed our new assistant secretary for the Bureau of African Affairs yesterday, Ambassador Tibor Nagy is a retired Foreign Service officer who spent 32 years in government service, including more than 20 years in assignments across Africa. He served as the United States ambassador to Ethiopia and ambassador to Guinea. He also served as deputy chief of mission in Nigeria, Cameroon, and Togo. For the past 15 years, he's served as vice provost for the international affairs at his alma mater, Texas Tech University, and we are thrilled to have him back here at the State Department. We're excited to have him get to work. There's a lot of good stuff going on there.

Next, I'd like to mention that on Monday, July the 30th, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce will host the Indo-Pacific Business Forum, including keynote remarks by Secretary Pompeo on America's Indo-Pacific economic vision. The forum will outline the economic and commercial components of our Indo-Pacific strategy. The day-long program will include participation from senior administration officials, the private sector,

and officials representing Indo-Pacific nations. The forum will highlight U.S. Government initiatives to advance economic engagement in the region, particularly on key sectors including energy and infrastructure and the digital economy. The forum will also emphasize the importance of public-private partnerships, the benefits of transparency and good governance, and unlocking the power of markets for sustainable development, and the need for U.S. collaboration with regional partners.

The program on July the 30th will also include Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross, Secretary of Energy Rick Perry, OPIC President Ray Washburne, Acting Ex-Im Bank Chairman Jeffrey Gerrish, and USAID Administrator Mark Green. We'll have some additional information for you all on that soon.

Next, I'd like to talk about the deteriorating situation in Nicaragua. I know many of you are following that closely. The United States Government condemns the ongoing the violence and intimidation by the Ortega-controlled armed groups in Nicaragua. That includes the arbitrary arrests of 700 Nicaraguans who have opposed the Ortega government, as corroborated by multiple sources. We also condemn the cowardly attacks on the Catholic Church leadership, the buildings, and adherents there. Along with the deaths of hundreds of protesters, the attacks have been widely documented internationally and are completely unacceptable. The Nicaraguan Government cannot continue to its excuse its behavior and blame others for its actions or the actions of those affiliated with it. The United States continues to support church-led efforts to resolve the ongoing conflict in Nicaragua. We join the international community in calling for early, free, fair, transparent elections and the protection of universal human rights in Nicaragua.

That brings me to the next point, and that is something taking place here at the State Department today. I don't know if any of you had a chance to talk with some people who've joined us here for the Secretary's first-ever religious freedom ministerial that's taking place today through Thursday of that – this week. Today, in fact, we've had many survivors of religious persecution join us here at the State Department. Among the other people who are here at the State Department today: a Catholic priest from Nicaragua. I understand some of you may be interested in trying to contact him later to talk about some of his experiences in that country. If anyone is interested in that, I'd be happy to help put you in touch with some folks who are working with him.

To that end, Secretary Pompeo and the United States will host the first-ever Ministerial to Advance Religious Freedom here in Washington. That ministerial will bring together foreign ministers and representatives from international organizations, religious communities, and civil society from every region of the world. As the first such event with high-level global and diverse participation, the ministerial will reaffirm the international community's commitment to religious freedom and identify concrete ways to advance shared goals. We look forward to that, and the Secretary will participate, as will the Vice President. Later this week, on Thursday, he will be here at the State Department.

QUESTION: Heather, just on that, do you have a list of the participants, the other foreign ministers who are coming? Or could –

MS NAUERT: I don't have one handy, but I will see if I can make that available to you. We have – I believe it's more than 80 delegations here taking part.

Okay. And with that, I'd be happy to take your questions.

QUESTION: Right. Thank you. Yesterday, there were some complaining from the people on the Hill about the Secretary not being able to testify before the House Foreign Affairs Committee. And today, the ranking members of three committees have sent a letter to Secretary Pompeo, Secretary Mattis, and DNI Coats in a – not really – not demanding, I guess, but strongly encouraging them to schedule testimony before their – the HFAC, the – and two other committees before Thursday at noon. Is that – the Secretary said this morning he's looking forward to testifying tomorrow before the Senate.

MS NAUERT: Yes.

QUESTION: I realize he's on a plane right now flying back. But is this something – I mean, they say it's urgent for him to brief Congress about, in particular, the summit between President Putin and President Trump.

MS NAUERT: Look, I can tell you the Secretary would very much like to testify, as the House had invited him to do that, today. However, he's returning from California, where he's been with Secretary Mattis meeting with our important partner, the Australians, in San Francisco. Before that, as you know, he was in the Los Angeles area.

He has an extremely busy schedule. That does not mean that talking with members of Congress is not important to him, and that is why he will spend considerable time tomorrow briefing the Senate. Unfortunately, his schedule this week is extremely jammed. We have the religious ministerial in which he will be hosting many foreign ministers from around the country, and there's simply not the time.

Now, perhaps if the Senate decides to stay in longer, perhaps there could be some time found on his schedule.

QUESTION: The House.

MS NAUERT: The House. Excuse me. But the Secretary has a good relationship with his counterparts, and I –

QUESTION: His former colleagues.

MS NAUERT: His former colleagues. Yes, exactly. And we've had good dialogue going back and forth, and I'm sorry just his schedule does not accommodate it tomorrow.

QUESTION: Okay. So basically – or not – they’re not saying tomorrow. They’re saying by noon on the 26th. So basically, if they want to hear from him in open testimony, they’re going to have to stay in Washington longer?

MS NAUERT: Matt, this is the way it goes with every cabinet secretary when the Hill tries to ask them to come testify. The secretaries, whether it’s the Secretary of State or the Secretary of the Defense, they have extremely packed schedules, and I’m sorry, it’s just not something that is – he’s going to be able to accommodate at this time. But that – no one should draw any conclusion that speaking with members of Congress is not important to the Secretary.

QUESTION: So on the substance of this, when he testifies tomorrow, is he going to be able to talk about the specifics of what was agreed to in Helsinki, if anything? Because frankly, it’s been – it’s been more than a week now. It’s been eight days and nobody seems to know, apart from this business council and the track two idea –

MS NAUERT: I guess my question to you is: Why would you want to get ahead of the senators? The senators will have plenty of questions for the Secretary about what took place at the ministerial, and he will – or at the conference.

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

MS NAUERT: And I’m sure he will answer those questions.

QUESTION: My entire goal in life is to get ahead of the Senate.
(Laughter.)

MS NAUERT: Yeah, yeah.

QUESTION: That’s it.

MS NAUERT: He will be answering questions –

QUESTION: I have no other aspirations in life.

MS NAUERT: He will be answering questions tomorrow. And so I won’t get ahead of the Secretary, but I will let him take care – control that.

QUESTION: All right, fine. I won’t ask you to answer the questions that he will be asked tomorrow, but I just want to know: Is he going to be able to put some meat on the very – I don’t even know if they’re bones – fragments of –

MS NAUERT: I guess that is your opinion. The White House has talked about how the President has had full conversations with his foreign affairs counter – with colleagues who work with the President, including the Secretary and other cabinet officials. And I am sure there will be more coming.

QUESTION: So he will be able to provide details about –

MS NAUERT: I think the President has said and the White House has said that the President had full meetings with cabinet officials after his meeting in Helsinki. And I am not going to get ahead of the Secretary and his testimony on the Hill, but the White House has said that they've all been briefed.

Andrea, good morning.

QUESTION: Hi. Do you have any problem with the way Moscow has described the so-called agreements from Helsinki?

MS NAUERT: Which in particular are you referring to?

QUESTION: On Syria, for instance.

MS NAUERT: Can you be more specific? Which exactly? Because they've said a lot. Yes.

QUESTION: Well, I wish I could be, but I hesitate to take their word for anything.

MS NAUERT: Right.

QUESTION: So were there agreements on Syria that might involve disengagement in the situation on the ground?

MS NAUERT: So I will give you one example that we have seen reports about, and that is about refugees. And I'm not going to be able to comment on everything the Russian Government has said, but the Secretary addressed this on Friday, that there is some sort of proposal regarding refugees in Syria. That's obviously a very serious situation. Our State Department policy continues to be and will not change: We support refugees going home under these conditions – safe, voluntary, dignified returns at the time of their choosing and when it is safe to do so. I don't think the situation, as UNHCR backs up right now, allows for that at this time. Hopefully, someday people will be able to be – to head back home. There have been some parts of Syria where we have seen people slowly be able to return home, but in other parts of country that clearly is not safe.

So that's one example that I can give you where –

QUESTION: I just wanted to ask you, sort of following up on other things that the Secretary will clearly be asked about tomorrow – the President said today that there had been progress on North Korea. Is he referring to public reports that there has been some signs of deconstruction of that missile launch site, or is there some other development on remains, or are there other developments that are being alluded to?

MS NAUERT: Yeah, I can't speak for the President, so I can't comment on that. But I can tell you we have –

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

MS NAUERT: I can tell you we have working-level meetings, working-level conversations continuing with the North Korean Government. There is certainly a lot of work left to be done. I can tell you our Deputy Assistant Secretary Mark Lambert is in – heading so Seoul, I believe it's actually today, where he'll be continuing his meetings with his counterparts. So again, a lot of work left to be done, but we look forward to continuing that work.

QUESTION: Which counterparts, if I may ask?

MS NAUERT: He'll be meeting with the South Koreans and the Japanese.

QUESTION: Can I –

MS NAUERT: Hi, Barbara.

QUESTION: Heather, just to clarify, when you say they're continuing working-level meetings, this is about the denuclearization agenda or is it about the remains?

MS NAUERT: I'm not going to get into the specifics, but we are continuing to have meetings. Okay.

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

QUESTION: Syria?

MS NAUERT: Lesley, go right ahead.

QUESTION: A question on – well, can I just follow-up on something on refugees? Yesterday, there was a letter sent to the Secretary –

MS NAUERT: Oh, I'm sorry. Let me go back to that for one second, regarding Mark Lambert's meeting. He'll also be meeting with the Chinese Government as well.

QUESTION: But not the North Koreans?

MS NAUERT: Nope. China, Tokyo, and Beijing. Excuse me.

QUESTION: No worries. Yesterday there was –

QUESTION: China, Tokyo, and Beijing. Wait. Are all his meetings in Seoul –

MS NAUERT: South –

QUESTION: – or is he going to Tokyo, Seoul –

MS NAUERT: Seoul. All of his meetings are in Seoul. Pardon me.

QUESTION: So he's not going to Beijing, he's not going to – okay.

MS NAUERT: He's not going to Beijing. He's going –

QUESTION: All right. Thank you.

QUESTION: But he's meeting –

QUESTION: I just have a follow-up.

MS NAUERT: I'm sorry. Let me back up. I'm sorry. I misstated this. Forgive me, please. It's –

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

MS NAUERT: It's been a long few weeks, so bear with me.

QUESTION: He also went to Mongolia. (Laughter.)

MS NAUERT: Yes, let me clarify. Mark Lambert is going to Seoul, Tokyo, and Beijing, and that is where he will meet with his counterparts.

Okay. Lesley, go right ahead. Sorry about that.

QUESTION: All right. No worries. I just want to just follow-up quickly something on – there was a letter yesterday to the Secretary from 32 former ambassadors and national security people about the possible closure of PRM, the bureau. Did – can you confirm that he actually got that?

MS NAUERT: I cannot confirm that. As you know, the Secretary's on an airplane. That is not a letter that I am familiar with the State Department having received. It doesn't mean that we haven't received it. I'm just not personally familiar with it.

As many of you know, OMB had included in a plan earlier this summer a review of our humanitarian assistance structures or systems here at the State Department in its reorganization report that it put forward. I can tell you nothing has been finalized on that. Part of what the Secretary's job and role is to take a look at various programs here at the State Department and make sure they're effective and efficient and the best use of taxpayer dollars and structured in the best way to adhere to our mission. So nothing has been changed. Nothing has changed. We've not made any kind of decisions, but this is something that the Secretary's certainly aware of.

QUESTION: Can –

QUESTION: Can we move on to Russia, please?

QUESTION: Hold on. Just one thing on that. Are you saying that OMB is now going to be in the driver's seat when it comes to refugee policy?

MS NAUERT: Of course not, Matt, but that was a plan that they – that is a plan that they put forward, and I think you all are aware of that.

QUESTION: Well, yeah. But, I mean, is he seriously going to consider this?

MS NAUERT: Matt, I'm not going to get ahead of any of the Secretary's decision making on this issue. It's an important issue that will recover a lot of – will require a lot of careful thought.

QUESTION: Well, does the Secretary believe that the functions of PRM should stay at the State Department?

MS NAUERT: Matt, that's not a question that I've asked the Secretary. We have a lot of conversations about things, but I've not asked him that question in particular.

QUESTION: Quick follow –

MS NAUERT: Lesley, did you have something else?

QUESTION: I want to go to Iran.

MS NAUERT: Okay.

QUESTION: So the President today said he's ready to make a real deal on Iran. Given his tweet this week that seemed to stir – to make one wonder whether he's pushing for regime change, this seems to backtrack a little bit as to – that he's ready to make – negotiate a follow-up on the JCPOA.

MS NAUERT: Lesley, I'm going to be very cautious about not parsing the President's words. I'd have to refer you to the White House for anything that the President said on that.

QUESTION: No, no, no. But this is it – is that – given that the State Department has been in front of the pushing – making sure that countries reimpose these sanctions and stuff, is it your understanding that officials from the State Department are also prepared to engage in a negotiation on a JCPOA?

MS NAUERT: I don't have any – engage in negotiations on the JCPOA? We've been talking with our counterparts all around the world about the re-imposition of sanctions and holding the Iranian Government responsible for the horrible acts that his government – its government has been involved with in many parts of the world. And beyond that, I'm just not going to have anything else for you.

QUESTION: It's the Secretary, though, who suggested that the United States stands with the Iranian people –

MS NAUERT: Yes, we do.

QUESTION: – but their regime is a mafia kleptocracy.

MS NAUERT: Yup, mm-hmm.

QUESTION: So there are certainly suggestions of support for regime change.

MS NAUERT: The Secretary's been very clear about that. He has said the only change we want is a change of behavior. I would say anything beyond that is an interpretation that is coming from whatever individual is saying that.

QUESTION: Well, who would the –

MS NAUERT: That is not what the Secretary has said.

QUESTION: And you don't think that the President's remarks today, that Lesley was just citing, are in any way a conflict with the tone and with the tenor of the Secretary's remarks?

MS NAUERT: I don't think so. Okay? Okay.

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

QUESTION: And just – on India?

MS NAUERT: Go ahead, Said.

QUESTION: Yeah. Thank you. I have a very quick question on the Palestinian issue. Last week, Israel passed a controversial nation state bill with no mention of equality to minority rights and so on. I wonder if you are concerned that such a law would make some citizens of Israel less equal than other. Do you have any comment on that?

MS NAUERT: We hesitate to respond – or to answer questions about other country's legislation, much like we don't comment on pending legislation. We are certainly aware of that new law. I'd have to refer you to the Government of Israel for the specifics of that law and their position on that. But I can tell as a general matter, and as it pertains to this, that we believe in equality of all persons before the law.

QUESTION: Do you feel that such a law could compromise Israeli democracy, that you highlight all the time?

MS NAUERT: I'm not going to comment from that. That would be a question for Israelis. Please.

QUESTION: Really a couple quick other questions –

MS NAUERT: Yes.

QUESTION: – with your indulgence. One, there was a meeting today at the Security Council regarding the situation in Gaza and in the Palestinian territories. And of course, it calls for preventing war, another war in Gaza. It also talks about aid, the humanitarian situation. And could you update us on the status of, let's say, this Gaza aid package that you or that the administration has worked on for the past few months?

MS NAUERT: In terms of when we look at –

QUESTION: It terms of (inaudible) –

MS NAUERT: When we look at the situation in Gaza, we remind folks why the situation there is as terrible as it is, and that's largely because of Hamas. And that's because Hamas continues to foment disagreement and discord among its own people. Hamas doesn't spend the money that it needs to on some of its own programs, such as electricity, food, clean water, all of those things. So this government has been behind trying to find alternatives and to try to create a better life for the people living in Gaza. You've certainly seen Jason Greenblatt and also Jared Kushner talk a lot about that. I believe it's 13 trips or so that they've made over to the region to discuss these issues. I'll see if we have anything new for you on that. I'd be happy to bring it to you when we do.

QUESTION: Okay. Just to clarify there was a couple of back-to-back op-ed pieces by Mr. Greenblatt, Kushner, and Ambassador Haley.

MS NAUERT: Right.

QUESTION: There seems to be a backtracking from this aid to Gaza first as a way to, let's say, put forth the deal of the century. Is that the case now? Are we back to –

MS NAUERT: I would have to refer you to them for specifics about their op-eds.

QUESTION: On India?

MS NAUERT: Hi Laurie.

QUESTION: Hi. Human Rights Watch has issued a –

QUESTION: Just – can we just go back to this law –

MS NAUERT: Matt –

QUESTION: – (inaudible) Israel for a second? I –

MS NAUERT: Well, Matt, I will come back to you. Laurie, go right ahead.

QUESTION: Human Rights Watch has issued a report about the Iraqi suppression of protests, criticizing the excessive, unnecessary lethal force, particularly from the Badr Organization and the Interior Ministry. What is your comment on that?

MS NAUERT: Yeah. So we're certainly aware of that Human Rights report that was issued on July the 24th. It's something that we're watching carefully. Our understanding is that the Iraqi Government is conducting an investigation into this. That is something that we would certainly support, that the U.S. Government does. But I'd also like to say we

support the right of the Iraqi people to peacefully protest, as we do all around the world. The Iraqi Government has said that it will take measures to try to safeguard both the right and security of both public and private property. And I would just like to say I'd like to express our – the loss of life. There's certainly been a loss of life in this and injuries as well.

QUESTION: Would you be willing to say that some elements of the Iraqi Security Forces, like the Badr Organization are more thuggish than other parts?

MS NAUERT: Laurie, I'm not going to characterize that. (Laughter.) I think that's – that would be an unfortunate trap.

QUESTION: Okay, and may I ask you about the Lavrov – the discussion between Foreign Minister Lavrov and Secretary Pompeo. Your readout said they discussed ideas on implementing counterterrorism process coordination. What might those ideas be?

MS NAUERT: Well, I'm not going to be able to get into the specifics of that, because some of that is private diplomatic conversation. But our government has spoken numerous times about how there are ways that we could work together with other governments on issues of counterterrorism. Terrorism is not something, obviously, unique to the United States. It's also something that other countries have experienced as well. And if we could find some small places in which we could work together with the Russian Government on certain elements, on certain things, that would certainly be a good thing. And that's part of what the President has talked about.

QUESTION: And did the arrest of Maria Butina come up?

MS NAUERT: That is something that I would not get into. That would be a Department of Justice issue. And let me make something clear, that the State Department – unlike other governments around the world, the State Department would not be involved in any kind of law enforcement situation like that. That would all be under the Department of Justice. And so the Secretary would not have anything to say on that. Okay?

QUESTION: India?

MS NAUERT: Nazira, go right ahead.

QUESTION: Thank you, Heather. Two question. One question regarding General Abdul Rashid Dostum returning back to Afghanistan, how much he is useful or maybe not, or yes. What's your comment? Election is close.

The other question is Abu Dhabi meeting for country Emirate, Afghanistan, United States, Saudi. Do you know the result, how much is going to be (inaudible)?

MS NAUERT: So first thing, I can tell you that our senior bureau official for SCA, Alice Wells, is returning today from Doha, Qatar, and

that's where she's been meeting with the – she met with the deputy prime minister. She also met with other government officials to talk about their contributions to the situation in Afghanistan. Qatar has been an important and valuable partner in that. They have helped with training and equipping, they have helped with supplies, things of that nature that are obviously needed by coalition partners to help facilitate what is going on right there. So Alice is returning. She's had good meetings. And part of the reason she went there was to commend the government for their ongoing support for peace in Afghanistan.

To your second question with reports about General Dostum returning to Afghanistan, we would see that largely as an internal matter for the Government of Afghanistan to handle. We're certainly aware of the reports. But while we are on the subject, I just want to say how gravely sorry the United States Government is for the loss of life that took place in the terror attack on – I believe it was on Sunday that killed about 14 people, I believe it was.

QUESTION: Yes.

MS NAUERT: We want to send our deepest condolences to the government. And Nazira, since it's been a while since I've seen you, we had a good, productive trip to Afghanistan, and it was really incredible to meet with President Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah and have conversations with their cabinet officials about the President's overall strategy in Afghanistan and what the United States Government sees as hope – possible hope for Afghanistan. I know some folks in the media and around the world have pooh-poohed that ceasefire that lasted a few days, but our view on this, if you can get a ceasefire that lasts a few days, perhaps you could get another one that lasts a little bit longer, and that gives the people of Afghanistan hope. So I hope it gives you some hope as well, and good to see you. Welcome back.

QUESTION: Thank you very much.

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

MS NAUERT: Yeah. Hey, Nick. I'm going to try to get around to as many people as possible (inaudible). Hi, Nick.

QUESTION: On China. U.S. airlines are saying they are going to comply with this Chinese request to change how they refer to Taiwan. Some of them are saying that –

MS NAUERT: They have said that they would? I haven't seen that development.

QUESTION: And they're sort of laying the blame with the State Department, saying that this was the result of failed negotiations between State and the Chinese Government to come up with a solution. State Department had said earlier that it opposed this Chinese demand. Do you have any update?

MS NAUERT: Oh, we would oppose a government's demand on private corporations that private corporations label something the way that the government demands it to do that. I was not aware that the companies said that they would fold to the Chinese Government, so I would just refer you back to those American companies.

Hey, Kylie.

QUESTION: Can we just, for a second, go back to North Korea? The Secretary today said that he wanted inspectors on the ground at the Sohe missile testing site location with – that they're going to be destroying. Was that the initial agreement that Trump and Chairman Kim made when they established this plan in Singapore, or is this a new ask that the U.S. is coming at with –

MS NAUERT: Well, I think the dismantling of that would be in line with Chairman Kim's commitments to the United States, and I'll just leave it at that.

QUESTION: Okay. And so if they dismantle this testing site and there aren't any U.S. inspectors on the ground, is that a signal of success? Is that a positive thing?

MS NAUERT: Yeah, I'm just not going to get into the specifics of that. Verification is obviously something that is paramount. Verification from legitimate groups and done by legitimate countries is something that – is something that the United States Government will be looking for.

QUESTION: But that's only –

QUESTION: Just to clarify on this –

MS NAUERT: Okay. Hi.

QUESTION: – did North Korea notify to the U.S. Government that they were beginning dismantling this site or do you just –

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

QUESTION: – are aware of it by reports or –

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

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

MS NAUERT: Uh-huh. Yeah.

QUESTION: Can we go – can we go to Russia?

MS NAUERT: Kylie, go right ahead.

QUESTION: U.S.-Burma?

QUESTION: So still on North Korea, there have been reports that some of

the remains will be repatriated this week. Is that true?

MS NAUERT: I'm not going to get ahead of anything that may or may not happen. As you all know, we had some good conversations and feel like we made some degree of progress when the last meeting was held on the 16th, and our working group conversations continue. And I'll let you know when we have any changes. Okay?

QUESTION: What about –

QUESTION: India.

MS NAUERT: Okay.

QUESTION: India.

MS NAUERT: Hi. How are you?

QUESTION: A Kremlin aide has said that President Putin has not accepted President Trump's invitation to come to Washington, and saying that with all the backlash and the negative reaction, it might be better to let the dust settle. Do you have any comment on that? Is that – is the State Department already involved in –

MS NAUERT: That would – I mean, that would be something that would come out of the White House, so it's – you'd have to direct that question to the White House about whether or not it was a formal invitation. I don't believe it's been a formal invitation, but really, I'm speaking – that's out of my lane, and so I'd just refer you back to the White House. My understanding is that nothing has been set up at this point. Okay? Okay.

QUESTION: Can we stay on Russia?

QUESTION: U.S. border.

QUESTION: I've been asking – we're back on Russia.

MS NAUERT: Michelle, this is not just about you. There are other people, as you see. I've been trying to get around to various people in the room. I will come to you now, but as you can see, I'm not –

QUESTION: Well, I only asked because it was Russia.

MS NAUERT: Yes, that's fine. Go right ahead.

QUESTION: I wasn't asking for personal reasons.

MS NAUERT: Sure.

QUESTION: So now that you've had several days since the summit in Helsinki, and I'm assuming that you and your team have been able to speak to the Secretary – when he was asked about it today, he said only that he had conversations with Trump and Lavrov and that – and he called it an incredibly important meeting. Do you know that he feels like he's

fully aware of everything that happened between Trump and Putin –

MS NAUERT: I can tell you the Secretary and the President have an excellent relationship. They talk frequently, as does the President with other members of his foreign policy team. The Secretary and the President spent time together shortly after that meeting, and they've been in touch every day, if not several times a day, since then.

QUESTION: But does that mean that he feels like he fully knows what went on in the meeting?

MS NAUERT: I think the Secretary does. He and the President are closely connected.

QUESTION: U.S. border.

QUESTION: Okay. And on –

MS NAUERT: Last question, Michelle.

QUESTION: Okay. Well, let me try to narrow them down.

MS NAUERT: Okay. Well, I have other people to go to, so I'll come – go right ahead. Go right –

QUESTION: Before the summit –

MS NAUERT: Yes.

QUESTION: – he said that he was confident that President Trump would say in no uncertain terms to Putin that interfering in the U.S. elections was absolutely unacceptable. Does he know that that indeed happened during the summit?

MS NAUERT: The President spoke about that himself. I'll refer you to the White House or back to the – hold on – back to the transcript where the President said that he brought up the issue of meddling in the election. The Secretary has also spoken to this –

QUESTION: But bringing it up isn't making it clear.

MS NAUERT: – many times that that kind of activity would not be acceptable. I can't say it to you more than I already have that the Secretary has addressed this issue, the President has addressed this issue. 2016, unacceptable. If they attempt to do that again in the future, that is also unacceptable in the eyes of the United States Government. And I think that's exactly why the White House has assigned duties to the Department of Homeland Security, to the Department of Justice, and other U.S. Government agencies and departments to not only be on the lookout, but is also giving them tools and resources that they need to try to combat against any of this.

QUESTION: So what did the Secretary think of that press conference in

Helsinki?

MS NAUERT: I have not asked him that question, Michelle.

QUESTION: Turkey.

QUESTION: U.S. –

MS NAUERT: Okay, go right ahead.

QUESTION: This question is about the U.S. border, where in the prison there are hundreds of Indians now, confirmed reports, mostly from Punjab, and they are coming through the human smuggling rings. So have you reached out to the Government of India to stop these rackets originating from Punjab? And the second – and what is going to be the future for these young men? And the third one is about all this talk about religious freedom here going on. These people have been asked to – their turbans have been taken away, and – which is a religious symbol for them, Sikh.

MS NAUERT: I understand.

QUESTION: And so what is the take on these points from –

MS NAUERT: I don't have all the specifics on the case that you are describing to me, so my apologies for that. I could certainly link you up with some of our folks who are covering that and following that more closely.

But what I can say as a general matter is that we support religious freedom. That's precisely why we are hosting this ministerial here this week with people from around the world from various faiths, and frankly, we've invited people who don't have faith as well, because we want to talk about the importance of religious tolerance and religious freedom, thinking that – believing that that not only makes for better societies, stronger countries, it helps with investment and bring investment into various countries, because you know that governments and people are more stable. But I'd be happy to link you up with some of our folks to discuss –

QUESTION: About the – with the – have you reached out to the Government of India on these rackets that – starting from – and it has been going on?

MS NAUERT: Well, I'll certainly look into that for you, okay? I just don't have any information on that. Okay? Okay.

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

QUESTION: One more on India.

QUESTION: One more?

MS NAUERT: Last question. Last question, Matt.

QUESTION: Can I go back to this Israel law, and then – well, you said that you believe in the equality of all people under the law, but yet you don't have any comment on this new law in Israel. So I'm just wondering, does that mean that you do not think that this new law affects the equality of all people under the law?

MS NAUERT: Matt, you know very well that we don't comment on other countries' legislation or even pending legislation, okay?

QUESTION: That's just not true, Heather. I can think of – I wrote them down as you said this. I can think of laws in Hungary, in Poland, in Turkey – and that's just off the top of my head – that you guys have opined on regularly. It's not true that you don't comment on other countries' laws. When other countries' laws you find problematic or concerning or offensive or whatever, you regularly speak out on them. So I'm just going to assume, I guess, that you don't have a problem with this law in Israel because –

MS NAUERT: Matt, no, don't ever assume. Don't ever assume anything. When we talk about equality and how equality is something that America stands for, I would stand firmly behind that comment. So don't assume anything, okay? Don't assume anything, okay?

QUESTION: I'm not assuming anything about the U.S. I'm trying to figure out what you think, if anything, about the law in Israel.

MS NAUERT: Final – final question. Janne, go right ahead.

QUESTION: I'd also like to know if you have any comment about the appointment, the promotion, the nomination of four senior State Department officials to be career ambassadors by the President. This building didn't say anything about that when it came out last week. Is this a good thing?

MS NAUERT: We did see that nomination come out, and that is something that we were very pleased with, four career ambassadors. As you all will recall, it was less than a year ago when many of you were making snarky comments about the reduced number of career ambassadors, so we're pleased that the White House put forward the announcement of four career ambassadors. I hope that won't be lost in your reporting. I hope that also goes to show the Secretary's – how important he finds our career folks here at the State Department and how much he respects what they have to do. So we hope to –

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

MS NAUERT: Hope we have a speedy process in Congress and through the Senate.

Okay, final question.

QUESTION: So the U.S. Senate – six senators, bipartisan senators – have proposed a bill to restrict international loans for Turkey. Would you support those sanctions? They say they are there because – they proposed the legislation because of the detainment of Pastor Andrew Brunson.

MS NAUERT: Yeah. And so –

QUESTION: Would you support such measures?

MS NAUERT: – if that's a sanction matter, that's something we just would not preview. But I mean, I can certainly tell you that the case of Pastor Brunson is one that we have all followed very closely, very carefully, not just here at the State Department. The Vice President has. The President has as well. And we would like to see Pastor Brunson brought home soon.

Okay, and that's all.

QUESTION: Just one more question?

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

QUESTION: One more?

MS NAUERT: Thank you, everybody. Good to see you.

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

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