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Index for Today's Briefing

TRANSCRIPT:

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MR PALLADINO: A couple things from the top. Next week, we welcome the Democratic Republic of Congo's president, Felix Tshisekedi, on his first official visit to the United States. That'll be April 3rd through 5th. We share President Tshisekedi's interest in developing a strong partnership between the United States and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and we're committed to working with him to advance his agenda to combat corruption, strengthen the rule of law, enhance security, protect human rights, and promote economic growth through increased foreign investment and trade, particularly with the United States.

During his visit, President Tshisekedi will meet with Secretary Pompeo as well as other United States Cabinet-level and high-level officials to discuss United States-Democratic Republic of the Congo cooperation on a range of issues, including efforts to contain the Ebola outbreak in Eastern Congo. We support President Tshisekedi's commitment to delivering change that the Congolese people desire and deserve, and we share a common interest in realizing Congo's potential and in creating a better and more prosperous future.

Secondly, while staying on Africa, yesterday the United States announced nearly 3.4 million in emergency humanitarian food assistance in response to Cyclone Idai and related flooding in Mozambique. This is the worst natural disaster in Southern Africa in nearly two decades.

QUESTION: I'm sorry, you said 3.4 million what? Dollars, pounds, tons?

MR PALLADINO: 3.4 million dollars –

QUESTION: Okay.

MR PALLADINO: – in emergency humanitarian food assistance. This is the

worst natural disaster in Southern Africa in nearly two decades. The United States Agency for International Development is already on the ground. They have a 13-person Disaster Assistance Response Team that is delivering relief supplies to inaccessible areas. The Department of Defense is also supporting the response by providing airlift and logistics support.

The United States Government continues to assess humanitarian needs and coordinate response efforts with the Government of Mozambique and humanitarian organizations. More than 440 people have died as a result of the storm, and more than 600,000 people are in need of assistance. Our thoughts are with the people of Mozambique.

And finally, team on the field: Today Secretary Pompeo sent a note to all staff announcing that Stuart McGuigan has joined us yesterday as both our new chief information officer and head of the Bureau of Information Resource Management. The Secretary said that, quote, "Every aspect of the department's information technology capabilities and operations now falls under Stuart's oversight, including architecture, infrastructure, cyber security, data management, software, and application development and acquisition," end quote. Mr. McGuigan joins us after nearly seven years as CIO of Johnson & Johnson, where he was responsible for information technology strategy there and operations for the company's 130,000 employees around the world.

At the same time, the Secretary – we also want to express our thanks to Karen Mummaw for her service these past 15 months as the department's acting CIO. Karen is a career senior Foreign Service officer with a distinguished record of service both at home and abroad. And after 31 years of public service, Karen has elected to move forward on retirement plans that were put on hold, actually, when she assumed the acting role of CIO back in December 2017. So her service exemplifies what our team is all about, and we thank her for her service.

And finally, I would just note that our back row is filled with interns from our Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor. Welcome. You're not allowed to ask questions, but you're – (laughter.) Okay.

QUESTION: I'm sure they'd have some good ones.

MR PALLADINO: They might have some good ones, though.

QUESTION: Can I ask you a logistical question on the Congolese president? Since the White – unless I missed it while we've been here, I haven't seen any kind of an announcement from the White House, which usually announces heads of state visits. Since you're doing it, does that mean that he won't have any meetings at the White House or –

MR PALLADINO: Nothing to announce at this time. The Secretary of State looks forward to hosting him, and he will have a series of high-level agencies throughout the interagency.

QUESTION: Right. But I mean, he is the president of the country that is in –

MR PALLADINO: Nothing to announce at this time, Matt, no.

QUESTION: North Korea?

MR PALLADINO: Go ahead, Lesley.

QUESTION: I – do you want to go to North Korea?

QUESTION: Is that okay?

QUESTION: That's – if you want to continue the conversation.

QUESTION: Okay. What was President Trump talking about when he tweeted about revoking sanctions that have been imposed? There seems to be much lingering confusion about that.

MR PALLADINO: This is the United States State Department, and for secretaries – we speak on behalf of the State Department from this building, of course.

QUESTION: Well I thought you might know something about this.

MR PALLADINO: Of course we do.

QUESTION: Well, you also speak on behalf of the administration, the entire administration.

MR PALLADINO: Of course. And the point here is that our position hasn't changed in the least, and that the international community will continue to implement United Nations Security Council resolutions to underscore to North Korea that the only way to achieve the security and development that it seeks is to forsake its weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery. That remains our policy and that remains what we're pursuing.

QUESTION: Well are there sanctions that are being withdrawn or not?

MR PALLADINO: For sanctions I would refer you to the Department of Treasury. That's not something that we address from the State Department.

Please.

QUESTION: Just thought I'd ask.

QUESTION: Wait a second.

QUESTION: Yeah.

QUESTION: That's not true. You guys address sanctions all the time.

MR PALLADINO: Well, the status – I would refer you for details on –

QUESTION: You can't – you know what, look, you got to be consistent.

MR PALLADINO: – department of – sanctions – I would refer you to the Department of Treasury.

QUESTION: You can't pick and choose when the President lets loose with a tweet about sanctions, which you talk about all the time, on Venezuela, on Iran, on North Korea, in fact. So what's going on here? Are they –

MR PALLADINO: For the details of the Department of Treasury sanctions that were announced last week, I would refer you to the Department of Treasury. But –

QUESTION: As far as you understand, as far as this building understands, those sanctions are still in place?

MR PALLADINO: Absolutely.

QUESTION: Thank you.

MR PALLADINO: Please.

QUESTION: One more (inaudible) Steve Biegun.

MR PALLADINO: Please, go ahead.

QUESTION: Yes. Special Representative Biegun said that he ask the China to cooperate with sanctions against North Korea, but why President – there has been lift new sanctions – I mean additional sanctions? It's kind of a little confused, one or the other is – they say we going to cooperate with the UN sanctions, but he say (inaudible) sanctions no longer – no.

MR PALLADINO: We consult regularly with China and other partners on these matters, and our goal remains the same. That's the final, fully verified denuclearization of North Korea. That hasn't changed, and that's something that we are – continue to pursue with China and other partners as well as our allies.

Please.

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

MR PALLADINO: Is there more North Korea?

QUESTION: Yes, sir.

MR PALLADINO: All right. Let's go one more North Korea.

QUESTION: So President Trump tweeted that he said he ordered withdrawals new, large-scale sanctions. And you just mentioned that all sanctions are still in place.

MR PALLADINO: Our policy, yeah, has not changed, and that is, the international community is going to continue to implement the United Nations Security Council resolutions to underscore to North Korea that that's the only way to achieve the security that they seek. The pressure campaign is what has been instrumental in creating a diplomatic opening, and the President has made clear throughout the process that that will continue until denuclearization is complete.

Let's move on, moving on.

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

QUESTION: North Korea?

MR PALLADINO: Go ahead. Laurie, go ahead.

QUESTION: Yeah. Could you clarify a point from yesterday's briefing about the forces that are to maintain the safe zone in Syria? I've got three questions. That – will the forces in the safe zone in Syria include U.S. and other coalition forces like Britain and France, even if their main mission, as Ambassador Jeffrey said, is to defeat ISIS? They're going to be in the safe zone? Will the Syrian Democratic Forces be involved in protecting the safe zone? Will Turkish or Turkish allied forces be involved?

MR PALLADINO: Okay, thanks. Yeah, Ambassador Jeffrey spoke about this yesterday at length. What I would say is that the – ISIS, while the territory's – been defeated – we said this often now – it remains – and that is a big accomplishment. It's a big deal, to use Ambassador Jeffrey's words. They remain a threat throughout northeast Syria, and as long as they're a threat, this is what we're focused on. We are going to – as Ambassador Jeffrey said, we're going to have a small residual force of the United States military. They're going to remain in northeast Syria, and that will be as part of a multinational force. And they will be there to prevent an ISIS resurgence, and, related to that, to provide support, to provide stability in northeast Syria so that our partners can do everything to maintain pressure on ISIS and those networks that exist.

Now, regarding composition and the more detailed things, we – we're consulting. We are planning proactively with other members of the global coalition who have identified their intent to support this transition phase of operations in Syria. That continues. As far as – we're going to continue to work, as Ambassador Jeffrey said, on the details of this matter, and we're optimistic. We're confident that we can achieve a good outcome on that front.

QUESTION: Would that include forces from the Syrian Democratic Forces?

MR PALLADINO: I don't have anything further to provide beyond that with – to what Ambassador Jeffrey alluded to yesterday at this point. We're talking about it. We're looking at it, and I don't have anything further

beyond that at this point.

QUESTION: Robert?

QUESTION: On Syria still?

MR PALLADINO: Yes. I'll take the water, thank you very much. All right.

QUESTION: On Syria still, Robert? On Syria?

MR PALLADINO: Syria.

QUESTION: Very quick.

MR PALLADINO: Okay. Go ahead.

QUESTION: Today the Secretary of State issued a statement on the 40th anniversary of the Egypt-Israel Camp David Accord, the peace treaty, which was premised on Resolution 242 and the principle of land for peace. So I guess now there is no land to sort of trade between Syria and Israel. Is that the case? Do you consider 242 to have been fulfilled, null and void? What is your take on that?

MR PALLADINO: Yeah. Well, the decision that the President announced was a critical strategic and of security importance to the state of Israel and to stability of the Middle East. So to allow the Golan Heights to be controlled by the likes of Syrian and Iranian regimes would be to turn a blind eye to threats emanating from a Syrian regime that engages in atrocities, and from Iran and terrorist actors, including Hizballah, that would seek to use the Golan Heights as a launching ground for attacks against Israel.

QUESTION: I understand all that, but the principle of land for peace –

QUESTION: Well, hold on just – sorry, Said. You might understand it. I don't understand it at all. Was there some threat that Iran and Syria were actually going to control the Golan Heights?

MR PALLADINO: Without –

QUESTION: If there was, I missed it.

MR PALLADINO: There have been –

QUESTION: Maybe I'm –

MR PALLADINO: There have been many efforts threatening –

QUESTION: Yeah, not to control it, though.

MR PALLADINO: But a lack of Israel's ability to defend that area would be to undermine Israeli security, and enhancing the Golan Heights is to enhance Israel's security and which strengthens, frankly, our ability to partner with Israel to fight the common threats that we face.

QUESTION: I don't understand what is different three days ago about Israel's ability to defend the Golan that – what is different today than it was three days ago? And you talk about the regional stability, but every single country in the region except for Israel, every single one of them, all of Syria and Israel's neighbors, have come out against this and say it's bad for stability. So this is a case where you and Israel are right and everyone else, including the neighbors, are wrong?

MR PALLADINO: Not a popularity contest.

QUESTION: Well, that's good because if it was –

MR PALLADINO: Standing up for what is right oftentimes is not. This is something that the President has been considering for some time. As he made clear, the statement on the Golan Heights fully reflects our understanding of the unique circumstances that makes it appropriate to recognize Israeli sovereignty at this time.

QUESTION: I get that. But is it your position that Israel's control of the Golan without this announcement by the President would have been somehow threatened or that it was in jeopardy that –

MR PALLADINO: It was a recognition of reality that the President moved forward on this position.

QUESTION: And do you think that it will change Iran's efforts or Syria's efforts to infiltrate terrorists or fighters into the Golan simply because there's a U.S. – the U.S. President has signed a proclamation saying that it's – that it – recognizing Israel's sovereignty over it?

MR PALLADINO: It certainly makes things clearer, and Israel's security is something that, of course, they're going to continue to defend –

QUESTION: Oh, I know.

MR PALLADINO: – and something that we're going to continue to support.

QUESTION: And this administration has made it clear, as have previous administrations, but this one has made it clear – say, with Gaza, with the border with Lebanon, and that the land that Israel has there is Israeli sovereign territory, and that hasn't stopped Hamas or Hizballah from trying to – from either launching attacks or – so I'm just curious as to why you think that the proclamation actually changes conditions on the ground to the point where – that some kind of threat to Israel's control over it is now done.

MR PALLADINO: We're not saying the threat is over in any way. The threat, of course, continues, and Israel's need and our need to help support continues, of course. That affects all the stabilization.

Yeah.

QUESTION: Yeah, I just want to finish my question, if I may. So to be

clear, so do you consider 242 to be null and void, completely fulfilled? There is no land to trade since the whole premise of that is land for peace. So that land is no longer, as far as you're concerned, is no longer Syrian, correct? So 242, is it null and void? Is it – and 338 as a matter of fact, the other UN resolution, is it considered fulfilled, null and void? What is your designation to the resolutions 242 and 338?

MR PALLADINO: The administration has made clear that it supports negotiation towards a comprehensive peace between Israel and its neighbors.

QUESTION: Including Syria?

MR PALLADINO: This administration, unlike previous administrations, is willing to acknowledge the reality that there can be no comprehensive peace agreement that does not satisfactorily address Israel's security needs in the Golan Heights. This is an area that is vital to Israel's national security.

QUESTION: Gaza. Real quick on Gaza. I just want – things are heating up again, and the Israelis now are saying that a ceasefire can only be implemented if it's somehow conditioned on ending the demonstrations, the demonstrations that take place every Friday in Gaza. Do you agree with that premise or agree with that principle that they ought to be tied – the ceasefire and ending the demonstrations?

MR PALLADINO: We condemn the rocket attacks from Gaza into Israel.

QUESTION: I'm not talking about the rockets. I'm talking about –

MR PALLADINO: It's important to say this. We condemn the rocket attacks from Gaza into Israel, and we strongly support Israel's right to defend itself. The attacks are outrageous and unacceptable.

QUESTION: So you –

MR PALLADINO: Our position is there must be a complete and permanent halt. We welcome efforts by regional allies that are seeking to restore calm and prevent further attacks. And I have nothing further on that.

QUESTION: That's all excellent, but is it – should it be tied to the demonstrations and ending the demonstrations?

MR PALLADINO: We welcome efforts by regional allies that are seeking to restore calm and prevent attacks.

Go, please. Rich, Fox.

QUESTION: Robert, very briefly on Mexico City, the Secretary mentioned this morning that perhaps you would have some more specifics, maybe even a ballpark, on how much the U.S. is withholding from the OAS. And this is the second expansion of the policy that the administration has announced while it's in office. Do you see that perhaps there is more

room to tighten this policy going forward?

MR PALLADINO: Give me a second here. Right. So regarding your first question on the specific numbers, this has to do with the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, which is part of the Organization of American States, and in light of concerns regarding certain of their activities related to abortion. The Secretary of State directed the withholding of part of the Fiscal Year 2019 U.S.-assessed contribution to the Organization of American States. Specifically to your question, that withholding is $210,000 and that is the equivalent to the United States proportional share of possible OAS costs in question.

QUESTION: Robert, India?

QUESTION: Is that money directly supposed to go to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, or was it just to the OAS more broadly? In other words, is the entire OAS being hit with this because of something that the Inter – the Commission did?

MR PALLADINO: My understanding is it's specific to the – let me get the acronym right – IACHR. Correct.

QUESTION: Perhaps you're familiar with what country actually led the charge to create this commission. In fact, former Secretary Powell was in South America on 9/11 pushing for the charter to be adopted that that charter created this. So are you saying now that because this commission that you, in fact, created – you meaning the United States – has taken a position against the criminalization of abortion, which is what I understand they did, that you're now going to withhold money from it? Is that right? You don't see any kind of irony there?

MR PALLADINO: We work tirelessly to ensure –

QUESTION: You created this thing.

MR PALLADINO: – United States support for the Organization of American States to make sure that it's used for purposes that align with United States foreign policy objectives and national interests. We continue to support –

QUESTION: So it's gone rogue? Is that right?

MR PALLADINO: We continue to support the Organization of American States as well as the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. That supports a number of important United States and shared regional foreign policy objectives in the hemisphere, including those in Venezuela, Cuba, and Nicaragua. We also take our obligation very seriously to ensure that activities implemented with U.S. funds are consistent with what the Secretary discussed this morning, this Siljander Amendment. And so we see no inconsistencies.

QUESTION: What was the total – 210,000 of how much?

MR PALLADINO: Two hundred and ten thousand, correct.

QUESTION: Of how much?

MR PALLADINO: I don't have the full budget, but this is the proportional part directly related to those activities in question.

QUESTION: And then on just room going forward to tighten, is the administration looking at other ways?

MR PALLADINO: Don't have any information in that regard. Nothing to announce at this time.

QUESTION: I have a follow-up on that.

MR PALLADINO: Go ahead, Shaun. Go ahead.

QUESTION: Different part of the world, on Thailand. If you have a follow-up, then –

QUESTION: I have a follow-up on Mexico City. Is that okay?

MR PALLADINO: All right, let's – okay, one more, sure.

QUESTION: Great. So speaking to what Rich was asking, are there other multilateral institutions that you believe the U.S. would be in violation of the Siljander Amendment if they continued giving them funds? Are there other multilateral institutions that you think are lobbying for or against abortion?

And also, do you have any estimate of the amount of programs that you think will be affected by the expansion announced today of the Mexico City Policy, and are there specific groups that the U.S. is looking at who they believe are funding or financially supporting other groups who are promoting abortion?

MR PALLADINO: Yeah. I don't have anything on specific groups that – to announce at the podium, and as far as future actions that we may be considering or take, nothing to preview at this time.

QUESTION: Should other multilateral institutions be on the lookout, be warned? Are you issuing –

MR PALLADINO: I think the United States – I think Secretary Pompeo made pretty clear this morning that this administration is a pro-life administration and that we're going to continue to seek to advocate our values strongly and globally.

Now, Shaun, I'm going to go back to you, because you –

QUESTION: Thailand. Thailand had elections over the weekend, first since the military coup. Do you believe that these were free and fair elections? Do you believe that this represents a restoration of

democracy? There's been concern, notably from former Prime Minister Thaksin, who alleges widespread irregularities.

MR PALLADINO: Right. We congratulate the tens of millions of Thai citizens who participated in the long-awaited March 24th election for demonstrating their strong support for return to elected government. The voting, along with, we note, robust media coverage of the process and open debate of its merits – those are positive signs for a return to a democratic government that reflects the will of the people. We stand with the Thai people in calling for the expeditious announcement of voting results and a fair and transparent investigation of any reported irregularities. The United States looks forward to working with Thailand's newly elected government to advance values that bring our countries closer together, including democracy, security, and prosperity for all citizens.

QUESTION: Just following up briefly on that, the – are you – are there any concerns about representation of parties? One of the major parties was disbanded legally ahead of the election. Do you think that there is a broad enough spectrum represented in the political process?

MR PALLADINO: We are interested in a result that reflects the will of the Thai people. The United States does not support any candidate or political party. We support the democratic process.

QUESTION: What about Algeria? Do you have any comment on the military calling for the presidency to be vacated now?

MR PALLADINO: I don't have – I haven't seen that and I don't have anything for you on that.

Please.

QUESTION: Robert, Robert.

QUESTION: On Bangladesh.

QUESTION: India.

MR PALLADINO: Let's go to Nike, please.

QUESTION: Okay. Thank you very much. If I may, I would like to stay in Asia. On Tibet, yesterday, the State Department release its report to Congress on Section 4 of the Reciprocal Access to Tibet Act of 2018. Could you please elaborate some of the details? What is the U.S. asking from China? And you may speak Mandarin if you want.

MR PALLADINO: (In Mandarin.) Okay?

QUESTION: Fair enough.

MR PALLADINO: (In Mandarin.)

QUESTION: Very good. (Laughter.) Very good, very nice. (Applause.) How about in English?

MR PALLADINO: All right, all right. We'll do it in English, exactly. All right.

QUESTION: Wonderful.

MR PALLADINO: So pursuant to the Reciprocal Access to Tibet Act of 2018, as you allude, yesterday, the State Department submitted its first annual report to the Congress regarding United States access to Tibet. The report concludes that the Chinese Government, quote, "systematically impedes travel to the Tibetan Autonomous Region and Tibetan areas outside of the Tibetan Autonomous Region for U.S. officials, journalists, and tourists."

What we seek here is reciprocity – reciprocity from China regarding open access that China enjoys in the United States. We're going to continue to work closely with the Congress in pursuit of that shared goal and make sure that Americans have access to the autonomous region and other areas as well.

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

QUESTION: The Chinese Government has pushed back. How do you respond to the Chinese Government's assertion that this report is – quote, "disregards the facts, is full of prejudice, and the Chinese side will never accept it"? How do you respond? Thank you.

MR PALLADINO: We – this is a well-documented report, statistics were kept, and we would note that when the Chinese Government did allow access, the access was infrequent and highly restricted and scripted. We're asking for reciprocity. That's not something that the Chinese Government would be subjected to in the United States. It's not something that we think Americans ought to be subjected to in China. We'll continue to advocate for shared reciprocity. And you know what? It reminds me of the recent decision by the European Union to decline a visit to Xinjiang Province (inaudible). We were – their rationale was that they wanted to see – they wanted more time to plan a trip and to ensure that – in fact, that they were allowed to have access and they would be allowed to – for unscripted view of what was taking place in Xinjiang Province, and we support their decision.

QUESTION: A follow-up, China?

QUESTION: Robert, on Asia, the Secretary will meet the Egyptian foreign minister this afternoon. What's on the agenda?

MR PALLADINO: We'll be sure to put a readout out after that. I don't have anything to preview on the meeting of –

QUESTION: And what's your view regarding the constitution amendments in Egypt? Do you have anything on this?

MR PALLADINO: Nothing. Nothing today for you, Michel. Please?

QUESTION: A follow-up, China?

QUESTION: Robert?

MR PALLADINO: More on China?

QUESTION: Yes, sir.

MR PALLADINO: Okay. Let's go – let's try, please.

QUESTION: Robert, thank you very much. Chinese president said that Dalai Lama is a terrorist and Masood Azhar is a spiritual leader. And where do we go after China voted against the UN resolution and supported this Masood Azhar, most wanted terrorist by the U.S., India and Israel and other countries? And he's the mastermind of – or what you call – Pakistan is supporting him and he was kept by the Pakistani military in a hospital. But after the Chinese vote in favor of him, he said why they kept me in hospital, I'm fine, nothing is wrong with me.

So where do we go after this most wanted terrorist was protected by China, and they continue to protect him?

MR PALLADINO: Well, our policy on Tibet respects China's territorial integrity, and we consider Tibet to be a part of China, but at the same time, we have been clear we're deeply concerned by the lack of meaningful autonomy for the Tibetan people, the deteriorating human rights situation in Tibetan areas, and severe restrictions on religious freedom and cultural rights there. So we will continue to urge China to cease restrictions on the human rights of Tibetans as well as their religious, cultural, and linguistic identity.

QUESTION: Can we go to India?

QUESTION: And as far as this –

QUESTION: India?

QUESTION: – protecting the Masood Azhar and the UN vote by China?

MR PALLADINO: I don't have anything further on that today.

India? Sure, Tejinder. Go ahead, please.

QUESTION: Is there a shift in U.S.-India defense relationship? There has been denial of visas to Indian defense officials and that also after extending an invite to them. I have two examples from last three weeks. One is the secretary DRDO, Dr. Satheesh, and he was here even in December with the Indian defense minister. And the second one is Dr. Guruprasad, DG production, and out of a team of five he was only one who was denied visa. So these both were not coming first time or any clearance issues. So is there a shift in the policy? Because I know that

you don’t talk about visas from the podium, but please, is there a policy why these people are getting denied the visas after then invite?

MR PALLADINO: The United States – no, okay. The United States-India defense and security cooperation is rapidly expanding as part of our deepening strategic partnership, and India is one of the premier security partners in the Indo-Pacific region. So as part of that effort, exchanges, reciprocal visits between American and Indian defense officials – they’re increasing at an unprecedented pace. We – the United States, we seek to expand our defense and security cooperation with India, and that includes defense and security officials. And I’ll stop there.

QUESTION: Pakistan. Can you take one question on Pakistan too, please?

MR PALLADINO: A question on Pakistan. Sure.

QUESTION: Thank you so much. Thank you so much. Sir, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has said that there are five big issues that threaten the American security and one of them is Pakistan’s nuclear program. So can you a little bit elaborate that how Pakistan’s nuclear program is a threat to America?

MR PALLADINO: Nuclear proliferation is a – one of the very first national security concerns articulated in our National Security Strategy. It’s at the very top of the list. So that absolutely remains something that this administration thinks about often, because the level of – the level, the impact, of what could happen is simply so great. So that remains at the very top of our national security considerations.

As far as Pakistan itself, the Secretary has also emphasized that – the need to deliver outcomes and to build confidence and trust between our two nations, and we do want to see a prosperous Pakistan that contributes positively towards regional stability and security. And I’ll stop there.

QUESTION: Anything on Pakistan’s role during the – on the peace process in Afghanistan?

MR PALLADINO: Pakistan could play an important role in bringing about a negotiated settlement in Afghanistan, and something that we’re thankful for.

QUESTION: Sir, I have a follow-up.

MR PALLADINO: Let’s go to Tejinder, sure.

QUESTION: China?

QUESTION: Sir, I have a follow-up.

MR PALLADINO: I don’t mean Tejinder. I did not mean to say Tejinder, all right? (Laughter.) Please, go ahead.

QUESTION: Thank you very much.

MR PALLADINO: Let's go ahead.

QUESTION: Thank you very much, mister.

MR PALLADINO: All right. We're going to stay in South Asia? Is that what we're going to do?

QUESTION: Yes, on Bangladesh. In two days, our national independence day.

MR PALLADINO: Is it? Happy independence day.

QUESTION: Thank you.

MR PALLADINO: Very good.

QUESTION: The recently released Human Rights Report stated that Bangladesh election was not considered free and fair. And obviously, the opposition party rejected this election result. So I am wondering what steps are – is the U.S. going to take to restore democracy in Bangladesh and voting rights, as U.S. position is that election was not considered free and fair and credible?

MR PALLADINO: Well, Mushfiqul, I would just point out that, as you correctly note, we recently released our Human Rights Report and we noted that the December 2018 election was not free and it was not fair given widespread reports of irregularities, including ballot box stuffing and intimidation of opposition polling agents and voters.

That said, we have a – the United States and Bangladesh have a long history of cooperation and a vision for a tolerant, democratic Bangladesh that strengthens its democratic institutions, respects human rights, and seeks to improve its governing structures and institutions. Bangladesh has an impressive economic development – impressive record of economic development – and respect for democracy, freedom of expression, human rights. These are not competing objectives and these would in fact reinforce economic growth. So United States looks forward to continuing to work with the ruling government as well as the opposition to continue to advance these interrelated goals. I'll leave it at that.

QUESTION: Robert, can I ask you – that trial in Turkey. One of the consulate employees –

MR PALLADINO: This is the last one. Let's go to Turkey. Last one, sure.

QUESTION: Do you have any concerns about – this is one of your consular employees has been charged with terrorism-related – I believe the trial opened today. Do you have any concerns about the process?

MR PALLADINO: What I would say is we are following this very closely. Our – the trial, as you point out, has opened. It'll go on this week,

several days, and I can confirm that our charge, Hovenier, attended the hearing. Beyond that, at this point, nothing to add to that. But we're watching this very closely.

QUESTION: Okay, and presumably, a guilty verdict or something that you think is not fair would be met with a response, correct?

MR PALLADINO: At this point we're going to continue to watch this trial closely.

QUESTION: And then just lastly, there's a story that just came out on Politico and – about – it's a profile of the Secretary. You're quoted as saying – this is in response to criticism about the Secretary's trips, recent trips, domestic recent trips – you're quoted as saying, "Every recent secretary of state has taken trips inside the United States – Secretary Pompeo simply visited Iowa, Kansas, and Texas, places often flown over by his predecessors, instead of Martha's Vineyard, Boston, and the Hamptons." Is that an accurate quote? Did you say that?

MR PALLADINO: I said that.

QUESTION: And you're a career Foreign Service officer. Secretary Pompeo's immediate predecessor, Secretary Tillerson, actually lived in Texas, and spent probably – every couple weeks spent a good deal of time there and in Colorado. So exactly which predecessors are you referring to in this statement?

MR PALLADINO: I think – this kind of information is publicly available. You're able to put those to –

QUESTION: So you're referring to James Baker and George Shultz and Condi Rice and Colin Powell.

MR PALLADINO: Okay. So the point remains there's been an awful lot of questions that have come our way about this Secretary of State's ability to communicate to the American people in his role as the nation's top diplomat, to actually explain to American citizens what it – what the State Department – what State Department employees are doing and staff are doing to advance their interests.

QUESTION: Right.

MR PALLADINO: This is a challenge for the State Department. Everybody understands what the Department of Defense does.

QUESTION: Yep.

MR PALLADINO: Explaining to the American people how this building is advocating its interests – this is something that needs to be done.

QUESTION: Yeah.

MR PALLADINO: This is something that we are proud that the Secretary is

doing, and it's about time.

QUESTION: It's nice that you're – you're absolutely right, 100 percent, but that's not really the point of my question. When these predecessors you refer to went to Martha's Vineyard, Boston, and the Hamptons, were they going there to talk about what the State Department does, or were they going there on private trips?

MR PALLADINO: There has not been any scrutiny of those kinds of trips. And this is the point that we're trying to make here. Would anybody be – why is it that when the Secretary wants to speak to the people of Kansas –

QUESTION: No one is –

MR PALLADINO: – that it becomes of such great interest? That's the point we're trying to make here.

QUESTION: Have you gotten any questions about the Secretary's personal travel?

MR PALLADINO: This is a secretary of state –

QUESTION: You're turning this into something that –

MR PALLADINO: Okay.

QUESTION: – that I have never once asked you about these domestic trips, okay, and the suggestion that it's improper for other reporters to ask about them is wrong. And yes, there is a role for the Secretary of State to try and get out, to create a base of support for the State Department, which is something that most Americans – a large percentage of Americans – don't have enough about. But I kind of wonder if you're – how comfortable are you when you're talking about clearly Secretary Tillerson's immediate predecessors in this, given the destinations that you list, which were all not for public diplomacy events or to educate, but private trips. Those secretaries under – in the Obama administration also traveled domestically and did these kind of outreach things that the Secretary is doing now and should be doing now without criticism. I'm just curious how comfortable you are saying – I mean, is this intended to be humorous? Is it snark or are you going to claim that it's just a statement of fact? Well, they went to the Hamptons or they went to Martha's Vineyard, and therefore it's appropriate for me, a career Foreign Service officer who has worked under administrations of both parties, to say this.

MR PALLADINO: Of course, and I will work under both administrations. The point remains this Secretary of State has made a concerted effort to reach a portion of the United States that –

QUESTION: And no one is saying –

MR PALLADINO: – traditionally has been neglected.

QUESTION: No one is saying he hasn't.

MR PALLADINO: Something beyond the west coast and the east coast. We are trying to communicate to more Americans. This is a good thing. This is something –

QUESTION: I'm not saying it's not a good –

MR PALLADINO: – that needs to be done.

QUESTION: No one is saying it's not a good thing.

QUESTION: No one's saying that.

QUESTION: I'm just wondering why you're comparing his trips, which are business trips to the Midwest, which are good and fine and there's nothing wrong with them, to former secretaries of state who went on vacation over the summer. Look at officials in this administration, starting at the top, who spend time at golf courses and country clubs. I – no one's begrudging that, right? He goes there for private visits, which is what these are. So I just think – how is this not apples and oranges, you comparing Iowa, Texas, and Kansas to a vacation in Martha's Vineyard or Boston and the Hamptons?

MR PALLADINO: The level –

QUESTION: And I would also point out that one, Secretary Kerry, actually had meetings with Chinese officials and others in Boston, so how is it – how is it not apples and oranges?

MR PALLADINO: Certainly, certainly, certainly possible to have meetings in the good town of Boston. The point remains, this Secretary is making a concerted effort to expand what the State Department has traditionally done beyond the coasts and to reach out to the American people and explain what it is that this United – this U.S. State Department is doing to advance their interest, to talk about how we are expanding economic opportunities; we are opening places to increasing trade for them, to advance American values. It's been neglected. We're glad that the Secretary is taking that to the people.

QUESTION: I – and I agree with you. It has been neglected, and I'm glad that he's doing it. My question is not to question the motives of his travel. It's to question your quote in this and wonder – and to question whether you think it's actually appropriate to compare private trips to work trips. That's my question. It doesn't have to do anything at all with this Secretary and his travel habits. It has to do with you as a Foreign –

QUESTION: May I – then may I –

MR PALLADINO: Secretary's travel –

QUESTION: Let me ask another question on that, because isn't it valid,

don’t you think, that to ask a question about the Secretary going to Kansas, when there is a lot of speculation out there that the Secretary could be campaigning to actually – even though he denies it, although in some interviews that he did in Kansas, he didn’t completely deny it. So isn’t it valid that the press ask about that, that whether he’s going back to Kansas, like some secretaries of state would go back to Boston, or whether to – whether he’s campaigning. I mean that is a very valid question, so I don’t sort of see why you need to criticize the press for asking just that very valid question, given that the Senate seat is coming open.

MR PALLADINO: Of course.

QUESTION: So is he go – did he go there to campaign as well?

MR PALLADINO: No. He was there to explain to the American people what it is the United States Department of State is doing for the American people, and he did that in different ways. Texas, Kansas, Iowa. Frankly, it’s something that we’ll be looking for more opportunities to do in the coming future. It’s not something we’re going to shy away from. It’s important that Americans understand what role the State Department is playing in national security and in the economic lives of average people. It’s important for average citizens to understand what their government is doing to advance their interests.

This is something that the Secretary feels strongly about. And if you talk to Foreign Service and Civil Service and the State Department, you go around the country, you meet your aunt in Iowa, and you say the State Department, quite frequently there’s confusion. Is that the Forest Service in Iowa or – it’s important for us to explain what we are doing globally on any given day to promote their interests, and that’s something that’s going to continue. I’m going to stop there.

Thank you very much, guys.

QUESTION: Thank you.

QUESTION: Sir, I – sir, I have come all the way from Dallas. Can I get one question in?

MR PALLADINO: Come back.

QUESTION: All right.

(The briefing was concluded at 3:41 p.m.)

endorsement of the views or privacy policies contained therein.