

Press Releases: Department Press Briefing – March 7, 2019

Robert Palladino
Deputy Spokesperson

Department Press Briefing
Washington, DC
March 7, 2019

Index for Today's Briefing

- [DEPARTMENT](#)
- [VENEZUELA](#)
- [MEXICO](#)
- [NORTH KOREA](#)
- [ISRAEL/PALESTINIANS](#)
- [IRAN/REGION](#)
- [CHINA](#)
- [PAKISTAN](#)
- [VENEZUELA](#)
- [EGYPT](#)
- [NICARAGUA](#)
- [SYRIA](#)
- [ZIMBABWE](#)
- [DEPARTMENT](#)

TRANSCRIPT:

2:53 p.m. EST

MR PALLADINO: All right, one thing to begin with today. Yesterday, the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs launched the Academy for Women Entrepreneurs, and this is a new initiative supporting women entrepreneurs around the world. The academy will equip women with the practical skills needed to create sustainable businesses and enterprises.

Through an inclusive learning community, women from around the world will be given opportunities to explore the fundamentals of business, including creating business plans and raising capital, with the goal of building a better future for families and communities around the world. The inaugural cohort will feature women in 26 countries, primarily Latin America, the Caribbean, and Africa, and that's going to include the Bahamas, Barbados, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Ghana, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Kenya, Nigeria, Papua New Guinea, Peru, Senegal, Spain, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Venezuela, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

QUESTION: Venezuela, huh?

MR PALLADINO: Venezuela.

QUESTION: Okay.

MR PALLADINO: The program will support the White House-led Global Development and Prosperity Initiative, which is designed to empower at least 50 million women worldwide by 2025 to fulfill their economic potential, and in doing so, create conditions for increased stability and security and prosperity for all. And with that, I'd be happy to take some questions.

QUESTION: I got two extremely brief ones, one just to clear something up on Venezuela. Yesterday the Vice President said that 77 additional visas had been revoked or whatever it is that you guys do for that. And then today, the assistant secretary, Kim Breier, tweeted that 77 additional visas – are they the same ones? Are we –

MR PALLADINO: The same 77, right.

QUESTION: Okay. All right, so that's –

MR PALLADINO: So yesterday, that was an additional 77 visa –

QUESTION: Yeah, but it's –

MR PALLADINO: – revocations, and to date, more than 250 is the number.

QUESTION: Okay. But you're not doing these in blocks of 77? So there's not –

MR PALLADINO: No, there's nothing special, Matt. Yes.

QUESTION: All right, and then secondly, I don't know if you're aware of this report that came out of San Diego last night about DHS and the CBP – Customs and Border Protection flagging U.S. citizen travelers to Mexico for specific – for additional questioning, et cetera. Are you aware of this?

MR PALLADINO: I have seen that story, I have.

QUESTION: Does the State Department have anything to do with this? And if it does not, can you say whether it would exceed to some kind of – to a request from another federal government agency to provide information about – passport information about Americans for what would seem to be noncriminal or just kind of political actions or reporting or activism?

MR PALLADINO: What I can say is definitively the State Department has nothing at all, no role to do with any of this. This is a – this is apparently related to actions that are taken by other governmental agencies, so I'm not going to speculate what those are. Of course, law enforcement possibly could be involved, but I don't want to speculate. And then if you're – for further information, I think Department of Homeland Security would be the best place to go.

QUESTION: You're going to knock this down as a hypothetical, but I'm going to ask it anyway. If another government had done this, what would the – what would this – the building's position be on that? Would that be something that would raise concerns from the State Department if, say, this was the Government of France or –

MR PALLADINO: I'm not going to speculate. I don't want to do a hypothetical, Matt, all right?

QUESTION: All right. Thanks.

MR PALLADINO: Thanks.

QUESTION: Robert.

MR PALLADINO: Francesco.

QUESTION: May I have one?

MR PALLADINO: Sure.

QUESTION: Thank you, Robert. On North Korea, on the reports that the site has been rebuilt by North Koreans, I wanted to know if you guys have reached out to the North Koreans to ask an explanation, and at least if you have had any contact with them since the summit in Hanoi on Tuesday. You weren't able to answer to that.

MR PALLADINO: Before I get to your question, I should have read – said – mentioned something at the top, just for the general group. At 4 o'clock here today, there will be an on background briefing by a senior State Department official on the subject of North Korea, for anyone that's interested. So there will be some more subject matter expert later today. But regarding your –

QUESTION: In other words, Francesco, he's not going to answer your question. (Laughter.)

MR PALLADINO: No, no.

QUESTION: Yeah, I know. But –

MR PALLADINO: That is not what I just said, actually. And what I would say is – if I could remember your question now, Francesco. (Laughter.)

QUESTION: Did you reach out to the North Koreans to get an explanation or at least to –

MR PALLADINO: I think the President spoke to this yesterday. And he said, were it to be true, he would be disappointed.

QUESTION: But my question is different. Did you have any contact with North Koreans?

MR PALLADINO: Right. And I'm not going to be able to discuss or confirm every communication that the United States is having with North Korea. But our message here publicly – and privately, for that matter – is we're ready. We remain ready to engage North Korea in a constructive negotiation.

QUESTION: A follow up?

MR PALLADINO: Please, Lesley.

QUESTION: Robert, but today there was a 2.1-magnitude earth tremor in North Korea in a mining town. Do you believe this has got anything to do

with testing, a testing site, or any kind of testing or questionable behavior by the North Koreans?

MR PALLADINO: Yeah, I have seen those reports. We're aware of them. I have no evidence suggesting that to be the case.

QUESTION: Can I follow up?

QUESTION: Robert?

MR PALLADINO: Any on this subject? Can we –

QUESTION: Yeah.

MR PALLADINO: Mr. Gordon, please.

QUESTION: Just a sort of policy question, not an intel question. President Trump and senior State Department officials said that, at the Hanoi summit, Kim Jong-un had reaffirmed the moratorium on missile test launches and nuclear tests. And my question is: Is it the U.S. understanding that this missile test moratorium also applies to satellite launches, should the North Koreans undertake such a activity from their satellite launch site? If they were to do that, would you consider that a breach of their missile test moratorium? I ask because of the reported work at that satellite launch site and the history of dealing with North Korean Leap Day agreement.

MR PALLADINO: Yeah, we've seen those reports, and we're not going to comment on intelligence. And regarding what would be our policy in this regard, I'm not going to respond to that today. I'm going to defer on that. All right?

QUESTION: Can I follow up, Robert?

MR PALLADINO: Sure. Right here, please.

QUESTION: A little while ago President Trump said in the Oval Office that "We'll let you know in about a year" on North Korea. Can you elaborate on what that means for negotiations?

MR PALLADINO: I would refer you to the White House. I'm not going to try to –

QUESTION: So negotiations are ongoing?

QUESTION: Robert?

MR PALLADINO: Said, please.

QUESTION: Thank you. Very quick question. This, on the occasion of the International Women's Day, there are 48 Palestinian women at the Damon prison. I mean, there are many more, but in this particular prison, many of them – if not all of them, but many of them – are on administrative

detention that just keeps getting renewed all the time. There are girls that have grown up to be women in there. I mean, there are mothers with their children that are denied exercise and denied books, and on all these – could you look into it? Could you look into this issue? And what would you have to say to the Israelis? Would you urge them to release those who are on administrative detentions? Because that is not a policy that is – that, let's say, Western democracies implement, administration detentions.

MR PALLADINO: What I would say is, Said, I'm not familiar with any of these cases that you're referencing. So I mean, I would have to refer you to the Government of Israel for more information on –

QUESTION: I understand.

MR PALLADINO: Right.

QUESTION: And I know that I could be referred to the Government of Israel and so on, and I probably know what they would say. But do you – are you alarmed by this situation? Are you alarmed by young girls – 14, 13, 15 – that are – that get to prison and they spend years and they grow up to be women in the same prison and so on, denied any access to recourse of – or legal recourse? Does that bother you? Does that – do you feel uncomfortable knowing that your ally Israel is doing that?

MR PALLADINO: Again, I know nothing about that. But I would say that as close partners and allies with Israel we have frank discussions and on a wide range of issues.

Laurie.

QUESTION: You don't know anything about administrative detention in Israel?

MR PALLADINO: I don't know – I don't – I know nothing about the specific cases that Said is raising.

QUESTION: Said has been asking about this for, like, every day for the last, like, five years.

MR PALLADINO: These 47? I don't know anything about these cases. Go ahead, Laurie.

QUESTION: The Iranian President Hassan Rouhani will visit Baghdad on Sunday with a trade delegation. So I have two questions. One, do you have any comment on his visit in general? And two, any comment on the trade delegations? They were all complying with the sanctions on Iran?

MR PALLADINO: I would say that our concerns about Iran's malign influence in the region are well known. In Iraq, Iran's support of armed groups, many of which engage in criminal behavior that undermines the security of Iraqi civilians, especially those from persecuted religious communities. And that's why we insist that armed groups in Iraq must be

under the effective command and control of the central government, and we believe strongly in Iraq sovereignty, that it must be respected. And we remain concerned about any actions that could heighten sectarian tensions inside of Iraq. So our position is we urge Iran to avoid actions that undermine the authority of the state, efforts that are aimed at promoting reconciliations among communities in Iraq and the rights of all Iraqi citizens.

As your second question was regards to a trade delegation, I would say that the question of Iraq's foreign relations is for the Iraqi Government to answer. And after years of conflict, we believe that the Iraqis, first and foremost, would value their sovereignty and independence.

QUESTION: Well, to follow up on your statement about the pro-Iranian militias, you sanctioned al-Nujaba the other day. There's also calls for you to sanction Qais Khazali's militia, Asaib Ahl al-Haq, which was involved in attacking Americans and other coalition members during the Iraq – during Operation Iraqi Freedom. What do you have to say about the fact that that militia still remains active in Iraq and that Khazali has 15 seats in the Iraqi parliament?

MR PALLADINO: Yeah. Nothing further on that today, Laurie. Sorry.

Yeah. Please, right here.

QUESTION: On China, Chinese telecommunication company Huawei filed a lawsuit, suing the U.S. Government for prohibiting the federal agency of using its equipment. Do you have anything on the latest deferment? Is there any diplomatic conversation between U.S. and China on Huawei's legal battle?

MR PALLADINO: Regarding this litigation, I don't have any comment on that, because it's pending litigation. That's really all I have to say about that lawsuit. We have made our – more generally, aside from that lawsuit, on the question of Huawei, that's something that we have spoken about regularly and consistently in recent days, on the Secretary's travel especially.

The United States advocates for secure telecom networks and supply chains that are free from suppliers subject to foreign government control or undue influence, which would pose risks of unauthorized access and malicious cyber activity. Because we believe that these risks posed by vendors subject to extrajudicial or unchecked compulsion by foreign states that do not share our values need to be weighed rigorously before making procurement decisions on these technologies. So we are in the process of routinely engaging our allies and our partners to provide them with information to help them to evaluate the risks, to exercise vigilance, so they can secure their own systems and protect their own people. This is something that we are engaged in, and this is a decision that every nation must make for itself.

QUESTION: Secretary Pompeo is going to Houston next week for energy conference to address – in your words, to address how America’s energy revolution strengthens national security in an age of renewed great power competition. And meanwhile, we understand there are a group of 11 senators, bipartisan senators, has wrote a letter and asking the government to look at new issue and also to call for a ban on electrical device, meaning inverters produced by Huawei not to be used in the energy infrastructure. First, do you agree with those senators’ call? And secondly, should we expect Secretary Pompeo to warn the energy sectors not to use products, specifically inverters, produced by Huawei?

MR PALLADINO: Regarding the first specific call as I understand it, I’m not familiar with that specific ask, and I don’t have a specific answer to give. So I’m going to refrain from doing so.

Regarding what the Secretary is going to be raising next week, he’s going to be talking about energy policy as a matter of national security, and on that I’m certain that our – the Indo-Pacific will very much be a focus. But I don’t want to get too far ahead of what the Secretary will or will not be speaking about next week. We’ll have some more information to give you in that regard, so –

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

MR PALLADINO: Let’s go to –

QUESTION: Thank you.

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

QUESTION: (Inaudible) follow-up on Huawei, Robert? Follow-up on Huawei?

MR PALLADINO: Huawei. Okay, let’s – little bit more Huawei. Sure.

QUESTION: (Inaudible) explicit. So do you include Huawei among the list of vendors that you believe poses a threat to telecom (inaudible)?

MR PALLADINO: We do.

QUESTION: Okay. And then, do you believe that Huawei has grounds to file this lawsuit in the United States?

MR PALLADINO: Not going to comment on the legislation. I’d refer to the Department of Justice.

Lalit.

QUESTION: Thank you. The news reports coming out of the UN building in New York City says that U.S., France, and Britain have moved a new resolution in UN Security Council for terrorist designation of Azhar Masood. U.S. has – U.S. and France has done this in the past, but China has always blocked it, saying that you people don’t have enough evidence against Azhar Masood. So what has changed now? What – do you have any

fresh evidence? Have you talked to the Chinese? They are convinced this time?

MR PALLADINO: Our views on Masood Azhar and Jaish-e-Mohammed are well-known. Jaish-e-Mohammed is a United Nations-designated terrorist group that has been responsible for numerous terrorist attacks and is a threat to regional stability. Masood Azhar is the founder and leader of JEM. As far as your specific question on United Nations sanctions committee deliberations, those are confidential and as such, it's not something that I'm going to be able to comment on specific matters in that regard. But we will continue to work with the sanctions committee to ensure that the list is updated and that it's accurate.

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

MR PALLADINO: Let's go to Sri.

QUESTION: Follow-up? Follow-up?

MR PALLADINO: Let's go – Sri, please, go ahead.

QUESTION: Yeah, thanks. My question is also about India and Pakistan. As you know, Pakistan has arrested 44 people who are members of terror organizations. In the past, Pakistan has taken action against such individuals, but they haven't been credible or long-lasting. This time, do you think – how is the U.S. viewing this? Is the U.S. viewing this as more of the same old, same old, or is it viewing it as a structural break, that something is different this time? And if you're optimistic about things this time, why the optimism?

MR PALLADINO: I would say that we, the United States notes these steps and we continue to urge Pakistan to take sustained, irreversible action against terrorist groups that will prevent future attacks and that will promote regional stability. And we reiterate our call for Pakistan to abide by its United Nations Security Council obligations to deny terrorists safe haven and block their entry to funds. And I'll leave it at that.

QUESTION: Just follow, Robert?

MR PALLADINO: Please, Rich.

QUESTION: Robert, on Venezuela, can you – can you confirm that Venezuela has deported an American citizen and journalist to the United States?

MR PALLADINO: He's on his way to Miami, as I understand, and we're happy on that regard. Yes.

Please.

QUESTION: Venezuela.

QUESTION: Robert. Robert.

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

MR PALLADINO: Let's try right there.

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

QUESTION: It's just the one, yeah.

QUESTION: Thank you. Actually, my subject of the question is kind of old, but it might be new anytime – sometime soon now. Mr. Palladino, as you know, State Department has held some of those individuals in Congo accountable and even imposed –

MR PALLADINO: I'm sorry, where?

QUESTION: Congo.

MR PALLADINO: Congo?

QUESTION: Yeah, in Congo accountable, and even imposed some sanctions due to human rights abuse and undermining democracy, releasing a statement about that. But the Sisi government has been reportedly torturing and executing opposition members without a fair trial, as it happened with nine young Egyptian citizens a couple of weeks ago, and is it about to happen again due to the ongoing trials. But we haven't heard anything from the State Department about this. Do you have any comment on that?

MR PALLADINO: Sure.

QUESTION: To prevent the further executions, maybe.

MR PALLADINO: We discuss human rights regularly in all of our interactions when we engage with other nations, and that includes Egypt. I don't have anything specific on the particular case that you are raising today, and I would want to gather a little more information before responding specifically to that, but we have raised and will continue to raise at senior levels the fundamental importance for human rights and fundamental freedoms and the need for a robust civil society. I'll stop there.

Please.

QUESTION: Nicaragua.

MR PALLADINO: Nicaragua.

QUESTION: On Syria.

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

MR PALLADINO: Okay, we'll try Nicaragua. Please.

QUESTION: There is a dialogue going on in Nicaragua. Does the U.S.

support this dialogue, and specifically if the U.S. thinks that the Catholic Church, which were very relevant in the previous dialogue, if they should participate as a witness in the negotiations?

MR PALLADINO: We continue to urge the Ortega government to take concrete actions now to join the church-led peace dialogue, and to negotiate in good faith. That's what I'd say.

Please, Syria. Okay.

QUESTION: Thank you. So, as you know, there are thousands of women and children who have escaped Baghouz. The women, of course, they were ISIS brides, and the children are their children. So what's your stance on the children, and should they suffer for the crimes their parents have committed?

MR PALLADINO: Our position on foreign terrorist fighters we've spoken about previously here, but you're asking specifically about –

QUESTION: About the children.

MR PALLADINO: – children that could – I mean, we're taking – those on the ground are taking every precaution possible as that – the final fight continues and we're coming close to an end. There are many groups on the ground with whom we're engaging that are very involved in that, and of course we're trying to ensure everything is done to minimize any danger.

QUESTION: Is anything done, like, by the State Department's human rights and labor department to make sure these children are safe and not harmed in the process of trying to bring the mothers or the fathers to justice?

MR PALLADINO: We're working with those groups that are on the ground in this regard, and we will continue to do so.

Please, Christina.

QUESTION: On Syria. Could I just ask you why it took you six days to put out a statement about the OPCW findings on the Douma attack?

MR PALLADINO: Six days ago would have been Saturday morning and I had just gotten back from Hanoi. I'm sorry. Yeah.

QUESTION: March 1st it came out.

MR PALLADINO: You got it today. I know.

QUESTION: No, but I mean –

MR PALLADINO: Sorry. We're slow.

QUESTION: Well, don't apologize to me. But I mean, if you want your – it just seems to me to be smart from a communications point of view that if

you want your sense, your stance on something known, you should try and get it out a little bit more contemporaneously with the actual thing you're commenting on.

MR PALLADINO: Again, again, I want to hire you for our communications team at some point, but your point is taken.

QUESTION: It's like offering condolences for President Truman's death.

MR PALLADINO: We'll be better. We'll be better. Christina. Christina had a question.

QUESTION: I just wanted to ask a follow-up. To that point, though, is there any kind of State Department policy in the offing, in the works to deal with the kids of these foreign fighters, especially foreign fighters that you said you're not going to repatriate? Hoda Muthana comes to mind. Because it just seems to me it's a little shortsighted to say, okay, so now we've got a bunch of kids of people who aligned themselves with terrorists in refugee camps, growing up I'm assuming even angrier at the U.S. than their parents would be. Isn't this – by not having a way to deal with this, aren't you kind of shooting yourselves in the foot when it comes to trying to deal with these policies and these people and making sure there's not another generation looking to join ISIS and start this all over again?

MR PALLADINO: We're taking a look at these issues and we're going to continue to do so, but I don't have any policies to announce today.

Let's go to Lesley, please.

QUESTION: I have a twofer, as they say. President Erdogan said yesterday that his country would never turn back from its deal to purchase the S-400 from Russia and that it would actually also look at the S-500 from Russia. Does this in any way – and you've probably seen that the currency's moving, the lira is reacting to this because of – it provides some more tensions for – between the countries. What is your reaction to that? Is it a do-or-die rule that they absolutely cannot buy this? Is there a middle road here?

MR PALLADINO: I was – I explained the policy yesterday in detail, and I would refer back to that. I have nothing additional to add to what we said yesterday.

QUESTION: And then on Zimbabwe, please, yesterday the – or the day before that the President extended the sanctions against Zimbabwe. It comes at a time when African leaders want those sanctions lifted. Is there any – why did the President extend them, and is there any discussions going on with the new government to lift some or all of them?

MR PALLADINO: Right, so you're referring to the March 4th renewal?

QUESTION: Correct, which the President put out.

MR PALLADINO: Right, which would maintain targeted sanctions on individuals and entities in Zimbabwe that are responsible for undermining democratic processes and institutions.

QUESTION: Correct.

MR PALLADINO: The basis of that is something that is renewed annually and has been done for – yeah, the basis – that is the basis of law.

QUESTION: I don't know. That's why I'm asking.

MR PALLADINO: Yes. It's done under – it's in pursuant to the International Emergency Economic Powers Act, which are various executive orders under that – that fall under that.

QUESTION: So you believe that nothing has improved under the new government?

MR PALLADINO: I would say that these sanctions target certain persons and senior – who are senior officials in the Government of Zimbabwe that have participated in human rights abuses related to political repression, or they've engaged in facilitating public corruption by senior officials. This is not comprehensive sanctions; this is targeted sanctions against specific individuals. And the renewal that was – that took place on the 4th is – does not add any new names. It is simply a renewal of the sanctions that were – targeted sanctions that were already in place, and I'll – does that –

QUESTION: So nothing's improved?

MR PALLADINO: We believe that President Emmerson Mnangagwa has yet to implement the political and economic overhaul required to improve the country's reputation with the community of nations, and with the United States, frankly. The actions of the targeted individuals continue to undermine Zimbabwe's democratic processes, and I'll stop there. So we – well, we're also seriously concerned about the ongoing human rights abuses in Zimbabwe.

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

QUESTION: The U.S. embassy in Riyadh – the U.S. embassy in Riyadh – I've got a question about –

MR PALLADINO: Let's go –

QUESTION: – about the U.S. embassy –

MR PALLADINO: Lalit, one more, Lalit. No, I already called on you, Said.

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

QUESTION: One quick one on Afghanistan. Do you have any update on Ambassador Khalilzad's talks to the Taliban? Has any progress, further

progress, been made?

MR PALLADINO: Let me check.

QUESTION: If the answer is anything other than “no,” I will be –
(laughter).

MR PALLADINO: No updates from yesterday – (laughter) – or two days ago.

QUESTION: That means you have to take Said’s question.

MR PALLADINO: But talks continue, talks are continuing, I would say.

QUESTION: So long he’s going to stay there? Do you know?

MR PALLADINO: I don’t have an end, but we remain committed to the efforts there, and that’s something that we’re going to continue to pursue. Special Representative Khalilzad is active on the ground right now with his counterpart, and we’ve spoken about that recently. I don’t have any new information on how the talks are progressing, but it’s something that we’re of course watching closely. The Secretary has indicated as much. He continues to watch this – we’re all watching this very closely, and no updates to provide, though, today.

QUESTION: Robert, U.S. embassy in Riyadh.

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

QUESTION: The embassy in Riyadh –

MR PALLADINO: Guys, we’re going to call it there.

QUESTION: The U.S. embassy in Riyadh.

QUESTION: Hold on a –

MR PALLADINO: That is the end for today.

QUESTION: Wait a – hold on a second. Wait a second.

MR PALLADINO: Go ahead, go ahead.

QUESTION: Well, I’m going to – if Said can’t ask it, I’ll ask it.

MR PALLADINO: Okay.

QUESTION: Do you have any comment on this report about the embassy staff in Riyadh being kept out of Jared Kushner and Jason Greenblatt’s meetings there?

QUESTION: Right, thank you.

QUESTION: And secondly, can you explain why exactly this Finnish journalist was – her – the award, International Women of Courage Award,

was rescinded? Why did that happen?

MR PALLADINO: On the first one, I am not familiar with the report, I haven't heard anything about that, and I don't want to speculate.

On the second one, yeah, I've seen that report.

QUESTION: Oh, I'm sure you have.

MR PALLADINO: What I would say is we made a mistake. This was a regrettable error.

QUESTION: In rescinding it?

MR PALLADINO: In rescinding, we –

QUESTION: You should not have rescinded?

MR PALLADINO: No, no, no, no.

QUESTION: Oh.

MR PALLADINO: We incorrectly notified this individual that she had been selected as a finalist. This was an error. This was a mistake.

QUESTION: So she hadn't been selected as a finalist?

MR PALLADINO: She had not. We regret the error. And to be clear, we admire this journalist's achievements as a journalist, and that was the basis of her nomination by Embassy Helsinki.

QUESTION: Okay. So the process here is that the embassy, wherever the person is – various embassies nominate people, it comes back here, these – the nominations are looked at and then you guys make a decision. Somehow, someone screwed up here and notified her that she had won, but she hadn't?

MR PALLADINO: Yes, yes.

QUESTION: Is that – that's the short? So it has –

MR PALLADINO: Yes.

QUESTION: – nothing to do with any social media commentary that is critical of the President or this administration?

MR PALLADINO: I've seen that speculation. I'm not going to be able to go further into weighing the merits of who was selected, whether one person had more merit versus the other. That's internal. But I can say we regret the error and we've got to do better in that regard. I'll leave it at that.

QUESTION: A follow-up?

MR PALLADINO: We're done.

(The briefing was concluded at 3:27 p.m.)

The Office of Website Management, Bureau of Public Affairs, manages this site as a portal for information from the U.S. State Department. External links to other Internet sites should not be construed as an endorsement of the views or privacy policies contained therein.