

# Press Releases: Department Press Briefing – November 1, 2018

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TRANSCRIPT:

Today's briefing was held off-camera, so no video is available.

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2:24 p.m. EDT

**MR PALLADINO:** One for the top. Today in Vienna, at the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the United States joined a coalition of 16 countries invoking the Moscow Mechanism, a rare diplomatic action reserved for serious human rights concerns. This action triggers a formal international fact-finding mission to look into reports of impunity for human rights violations and abuses in the Russian Federation's Republic of Chechnya.

The United States and other OSCE countries repeatedly have pressed the Russian Federation to investigate disturbing reports of extrajudicial killings, torture, arbitrary detentions, and other violations and abuses in Chechnya. These violations and abuses targeted members of the LGBTI

community, members of human rights, nongovernmental organizations, and those the Chechen regime labeled, quote-unquote, "terrorists."

We and likeminded countries have demanded that Moscow hold accountable those responsible for such violations and abuses. Russia has failed to provide a substantive response to repeated expressions of international concern and calls for accountability. Therefore, with these actions at the OSCE, the administration will continue to work with our European partners to expose Russia's human rights violations and abuses.

With that, I'd be happy to take some questions.

**QUESTION:** Thanks, Robert. This is actually serious, though: Where is Heather? Is she in the building?

**MR PALLADINO:** Heather is in the building, hard at work.

**QUESTION:** Is she in New York, measuring curtains? (Laughter.)

**MR PALLADINO:** Heather is at work today, hard at work.

**QUESTION:** Okay. But she's not down here. She hasn't graced us with her presence in some time.

**MR PALLADINO:** Yes. If you may have noticed, Matt, we have a deputy spokesperson now.

**QUESTION:** Yes.

**MR PALLADINO:** And that would be me. And Heather –

**QUESTION:** Okay. Well, you're welcome to be here too.

**MR PALLADINO:** Excellent. Thank you, Matt.

**QUESTION:** I'm just glad that there is a body up there. Okay. With that out of the way –

**QUESTION:** But can we maybe – Matt –

**QUESTION:** Sure.

**QUESTION:** Let's just ask about – I mean, there's reports that she is – has she accepted a job – the job as UN ambassador?

**MR PALLADINO:** That – any – I've seen that report. And any announcement like that, of course, is the prerogative of the White House, and that's the President's decision to make.

**QUESTION:** Would it be a job that she's interested in?

**MR PALLADINO:** I have absolutely no information in that regard. What I would say, though, is she's a fantastic boss.

**QUESTION:** How many off-camera practice sessions you have been given to? (Laughter.)

**MR PALLADINO:** This will be my fifth. This will be my fifth. Please.

**QUESTION:** Yeah. Into a little bit of substance – just a little bit.

**MR PALLADINO:** Yeah. Good.

**QUESTION:** Today Ambassador Bolton down at Miami made a speech in which he lashed out or criticized what he called the “Troika of Tyranny.” And I want to ask a couple things about that. One is who came up with this “Troika of Tyranny” thing? I mean –

**MR PALLADINO:** These were the national security advisor’s remarks, and I would have to refer you to the national security advisor on his remarks.

**QUESTION:** But I mean, it seems like too cute by half. “Trinity of Totalitarianism” and “Trio of Terrorism” and all those kind of – I mean, it just seems a little odd. But anyway, the speech in fact was serious, even if that line wasn’t. And he went after Cuba, announced new sanctions.

But at the same time as he was giving his speech down in Miami, in New York the General Assembly was voting on the annual resolution that Cuba brings every year that condemns the embargo. Yesterday Ambassador Haley had challenged or had posed the question: Who will vote with us? And today the answer came back: two. Only – well, only one country voted with you – Israel. A hundred and eighty-nine countries voted against; the United States and Israel were alone. And – sorry – 189 countries voted in favor, and the United States and Israel vote – were the only two that voted against the resolution.

And – so I want to know, this is the same thing that happened last year, what does this tell you about your policy toward Cuba?

**MR PALLADINO:** We are – our policy towards Cuba – the ambassador – Ambassador Bolton today laid out our policy towards Cuba pretty clearly. That came out not long ago. And these countries are repressive, and the United States is going to stand firmly against them.

**QUESTION:** Well, I’m sorry, but what does it mean – what does it tell you, for a second year in a row, the second time the administration has gone through this exercise at the UN General Assembly, and literally the entire rest of the world, with the exception of Israel, votes against you. Do you not see that – or can you not accept that other countries have a problem with the policy?

**MR PALLADINO:** We’re committed to the people of the countries that are repressed in our hemisphere, and the suffering of the Cuban people, along with the Venezuelans and the Nicaraguans, is something that the United States is going to continue to stand up for and speak out for. And so we’re – that’s our policy. We’re going to continue to pursue

that.

**QUESTION:** So this vote, this annual vote, is just irrelevant to you? You don't think that it means anything? You don't – you're not willing to take any lesson or anything from the fact that every other single country in the world, with the exception of one, disagrees with you?

**MR PALLADINO:** We're going to continue to speak full-throatedly, forthrightly for the freedom of people in our hemisphere. It doesn't – we're going to stand up for that, and I don't have much further. Yeah.

**QUESTION:** You can do all that – but you can do all that without the embargo, can't you?

**MR PALLADINO:** We are going to maintain pressure on this regime until we're able to see progress for the Cuban people.

**QUESTION:** On the same subject, the election of Bolsonaro was seen as somewhat controversial and pretty divisive there. The comments he's made have been homophobic, misogynist, racist. But the national security advisor said that his election is a positive sign for the region. Does the State Department agree with that, and if so, why?

**MR PALLADINO:** The President and the Secretary of State have both had good calls with the president-elect, and we look forward to working with his administration, and we're confident in Brazil's democracy and the choice of the Brazilian people.

Yeah. Next question?

**QUESTION:** Does –

**MR PALLADINO:** Let's go to Francesco.

**QUESTION:** Does the Secretary and the State Department also think that Bolsonaro is a likeminded leader, the same kind of policies coming from him and the United States?

**MR PALLADINO:** We look forward to working with the president-elect and having a close and constructive relationship with Brazil.

**QUESTION:** Well, is the State Department somewhat disturbed by some of these comments that he's made?

**MR PALLADINO:** We're – we are – we take Brazil's commitment to democracy and human rights, and that's something that we're going to continue to engage on and work closely with Brazil.

Yes. Let's go – any more on the Western Hemisphere?

**QUESTION:** Well, actually, yeah, someone –

**MR PALLADINO:** All right.

**QUESTION:** Does the State Department agree with the opinion expressed by others in the administration that these caravans, plural or singular, represents an invasion of the United States?

**MR PALLADINO:** We're – our position – we're in close contact with Mexico and Central America. I mean, the Secretary of State had a call just yesterday with the foreign minister, and we're working – of Mexico. We remain in close contact, and we are – we welcome the efforts that the Government of Mexico is taking in their plan to work with the UN High Commissioner on Refugees. They're building up an existing program to address this situation. And we support their work and we stand ready to assist both the Government of Mexico and the United Nations High Commissioner of Refugees to address this concern. And I'll leave it at that.

**QUESTION:** What's the concern? The concern is that it's an invasion from the State Department's point of view, or that these people represent a threat? Is that –

**MR PALLADINO:** We are – we encourage all countries in the region to support safe, orderly, and legal immigration. The movements of people between and across countries' borders must be in accordance with the law, and I'll leave it at that.

Any more Western Hemisphere? Let's go to North Korea.

**QUESTION:** Thank you very much. Forgive me my voice, because I've been to dentist today, so I cannot much talk.

**MR PALLADINO:** It sounds fine. Please.

**QUESTION:** Okay. Did the United States allow observator or inspectors to dismantle North Korea's nuclear site? Is it observations or inspections for the North Korean nuclear site? What is it, because a little bit confused about this, because they already destroyed the Punggye-ri nuclear site. But why they invited right now for the observations for that, or they invite other country too for inspectors? Or what is that?

**MR PALLADINO:** Okay. I – this is going to be something that will be discussed moving forward – the details of inspectors, the composition and the modalities of the inspection, and I would leave it at that.

**QUESTION:** What – but –

**MR PALLADINO:** Any more North Korea?

**QUESTION:** Did they have –

**MR PALLADINO:** Any more North Korea?

**QUESTION:** North Korea.

**MR PALLADINO:** Francesco.

**QUESTION:** It's been more than week and a half since the Secretary said that he will meet – week and a half with some North Korean counterpart. Does that mean that this meeting is canceled or that it's just postponed, and do you have any date or announcement to make?

**MR PALLADINO:** He said yesterday that he would be speaking to his counterpart soon – next week, I believe. And so I don't have any further details to announce today on how – on that, and I'll leave it at that.

**QUESTION:** (Off-mike.)

**MR PALLADINO:** Sure, Elise. Go ahead.

**QUESTION:** Okay. The Secretary said he was going to be meeting with his counterpart. That was like – as Francesco said. The South Koreans are saying that he's going to be meeting with him, and he said he's going to be speaking with him. So, I mean, isn't it kind of logical to assume that the North Korean counterpart is coming in the next week or two or in the coming weeks and you just don't have a date? I mean, why are you parsing as opposed to, like, he's speaking to him, he's meeting with him? I mean, he said he was going to be meeting with him, even if a date isn't scheduled.

**MR PALLADINO:** Because I have nothing further to announce at this time.

**QUESTION:** We understand you don't have a –

**MR PALLADINO:** And so I think the Secretary's words speak for themselves and I don't want to get ahead of anything that we have to announce.

**QUESTION:** Well, he said that he was going to be meeting with him, so should we go with that he said he's going to be meeting with him or that he said he's going to be speaking with him? Like, I think there's a little bit of parsing going on and it's like a little too cute by half in a sense.

**MR PALLADINO:** I think a meeting would be a safe conclusion based upon all the things that have been said previously, but I have no further –

**QUESTION:** And there's just no specific schedule? It's not specifically scheduled?

**MR PALLADINO:** We have nothing to announce at this time, absolutely.

**QUESTION:** North Korea.

**MR PALLADINO:** North Korea?

**QUESTION:** Yes, North Korea.

**MR PALLADINO:** Let's go North Korea over there, please.

**QUESTION:** Thank you. Yesterday Secretary Pompeo in an interview said

that inspections in North Korea will be something that he'll be talking with the North Korean counterpart, right, so is he going into such details as a Secretary of State? Because the working-level meeting that U.S. has requested to North Korea, North Korea has refused to hold that with Representative Biegun. Is this why Secretary Pompeo is going into details of the inspections with his counterpart in a high-level meeting?

**MR PALLADINO:** I would disagree with the characterization of your question. The Secretary – there's a lot of things that we are going to be talking about and the Secretary's going to be talking about. I don't want to get ahead of the negotiations that the Secretary of State will be involved in, but one of the big things that he'll be talking about is a – the next summit between the President and Chairman Kim, and that's something that we previously have talked about and it's something very much that we look forward to moving ahead on as well.

And separately, Special Representative Biegun has just been to the region, and he remains engaged with his counterparts as well. Our objectives here remain the same, and that's the final, fully verified denuclearization of North Korea. Nothing has changed in this regard. We continue to move forward and we're at a good place.

A follow-up, sure. Please, follow up.

**QUESTION:** One more follow-up. One more follow-up. One more follow-up to that, yes. So is the State Department in discussion with international organizations like IAEA and CTBTO to set up the modality for inspections in North Korea?

**MR PALLADINO:** I don't have any information on that from the podium today, yeah.

**QUESTION:** North Korea.

**QUESTION:** One more North Korea.

**MR PALLADINO:** Any more on North Korea?

**QUESTION:** Way back here –

**MR PALLADINO:** Let's go to North Korea over here.

**QUESTION:** When the Secretary just recently spoke about international inspectors being let into two sites, one of the things that the North Koreans have stated is that that would only happen if there were corresponding measures by the U.S. Can you say whether or not an end of war declaration is among the measures that the U.S. is still considering in this upcoming meeting?

**MR PALLADINO:** Yeah, I'm not going to get ahead of any future negotiations. There's still a lot of work to be done, and as the President and the Secretary of State both have said, our eyes are wide open, and we continue to work towards this.

**QUESTION:** When he said they committed, though, to allowing inspectors into those two sites, from what we've seen, they've committed as long as the U.S. is taking corresponding measures. So has the U.S. agreed to do anything to – as a corresponding measure in order to allow that to happen?

**MR PALLADINO:** I'm not going to get ahead of any negotiations that are going to be going forward.

On North Korea? Any more on North Korea?

**QUESTION:** South Korea.

**QUESTION:** Way in the back there is, Robert.

**MR PALLADINO:** All right, let's go to North Korea in the back.

**QUESTION:** Thank you. So, when Pompeo last visited North Korea, he had talked about accelerating the working level progress. So, wondering if there are plans for Steve Biegun to finally meet with his North Korean counterpart, and when the working level negotiations for the upcoming summit are expected to begin.

**MR PALLADINO:** I don't have any announcements on the special representative's meetings at this time.

Next subject, let's go to Said.

**QUESTION:** Robert, Robert –

**MR PALLADINO:** Said.

**QUESTION:** All right. Thank you, Robert.

**QUESTION:** Can we stay on South Korea?

**MR PALLADINO:** Let's go to Said. We can come back to South Korea.

**QUESTION:** Thank you. Last Sunday, the Israelis killed three Palestinian boys in Gaza, and yesterday they said it was a mistake because they were doing suspicious activities and so on. Shouldn't this stop? I mean, this has been going on now day after day, the Israelis doing this to suspicious activities. They deem all activities by Palestinians on their side as suspicious. Shouldn't this be outrageous? I think you would be outraged if this happened elsewhere.

**MR PALLADINO:** Well, I guess as a parent – this is a pretty dangerous place. And as a parent I might – I guess I would say that there's really no justification for the recklessness and cynicism that Hamas has shown in urging people to engage in violence that exposes them to this terrible risk. And –

**QUESTION:** But these boys were not part of any demonstrations. They were



playing. They were playing last Sunday. They were playing on their side, and they were targeted because the Israelis thought they were doing something suspicious. Should that excessive –

**MR PALLADINO:** Israel –

**QUESTION:** Let me ask you this directly. Should the excessive use of force that the Israelis do day after day, should they reduce that level of excessive force?

**MR PALLADINO:** Israel has a right to defend itself, and Hamas continues to drive peace further away and cause more suffering.

**QUESTION:** What's the meaning – I mean, you started that –

**QUESTION:** And how is that related to the two kids that were playing? I don't quite make a connection – playing children, Hamas.

**QUESTION:** And I don't get how you – why would you even say "as a parent." Are you somehow holding the parents of these –

**MR PALLADINO:** No. I'm saying –

**QUESTION:** – kids responsible for allowing their children to play?

**MR PALLADINO:** I'm saying this is an extremely dangerous situation, and to allow teenagers into this area strikes – that is the heightened – that is cynicism at its – in its height.

**QUESTION:** So it's the parents – their parents' fault, that the Israelis shot them?

**MR PALLADINO:** We would call on Hamas to put the welfare and safety of the people of Gaza –

**QUESTION:** But you said specifically in your answer – you said "as a parent." So I want to know what it is that you have against these Palestinian parents.

**MR PALLADINO:** This is a dangerous situation, and there really can be no justification for urging people, allowing people, to engage in violence in these areas that exposes them to such terrible risk.

**QUESTION:** But is there – but there is justification?

**MR PALLADINO:** This is dangerous. It exposes them to risk.

**QUESTION:** So – but there is justification? You can find someplace that there is justification for shooting children who are playing?

**MR PALLADINO:** Israel has a right to defend itself. And this is a dangerous situation. And for further –

**QUESTION:** Let me just follow up. One question. One. One more question.

**MR PALLADINO:** Fine.

**QUESTION:** Tomorrow marks the 101st anniversary of the Balfour Declaration, and the Palestinians have been for the past 101 year under occupation, military occupation, and so on. Isn't it time for them to get independence, maybe with your help? I mean, you're always championing human rights and independence and the right to sovereignty, and so on.

**MR PALLADINO:** We're looking – there is a – obviously, at the appropriate time, this administration will be releasing a peace plan, and we hope that the people will judge this plan by its merits. The Palestinian people deserve leadership that will give them a chance for a way forward to end this conflict.

And I'll move on. Let's go on.

**QUESTION:** Syria?

**QUESTION:** (Off-mike.)

**MR PALLADINO:** Laurie. Laurie.

**QUESTION:** Yeah. How do you see the overall political situation in Syria now? On Saturday Turkey hosted a summit that included Russia, Germany, and France. Is there a reason you weren't there? And what's your view of the results of that summit?

**MR PALLADINO:** Our view of the results of that summit are we welcome the endorsement that occurred there regarding the Idlib deconfliction agreement between Turkey and Russia. And I'd say further about that meeting we are encouraged, frankly, on the specific commitment to launch the constitutional committee by the end of the year. And we will continue to consult with those that were present at that meeting to ensure that we continue in that regard.

As far as our coordination goes, we supported the four-party summit. We supported this, and we consulted extensively with the representatives of all four participants prior to it taking place. In the end, the United Nations Security Council Resolution 2254 is what we advocate and what we want everyone behind. This meeting helps us drive towards that as well, so we would welcome that. And our engagement on the issue certainly continues. Ambassador Jeffrey's – was, is in the region – or he's in Europe currently. He just participated in a small group meeting this past Monday, and that's just an example of our engagement. And we'll continue to push forward on that.

**QUESTION:** And if I could ask you a follow-up question on –

**MR PALLADINO:** Sure.

**QUESTION:** – what Secretary Pompeo said in his interview with Tony Katz today. He mentioned Turkey; we're working together to deny terrorist

safe haven, terrorists who have, in fact, plotted to attack U.S. civil aviation. Could you explain what plot that was to attack U.S. civil aviation?

**MR PALLADINO:** I haven't heard the interview and I don't have any further information on that, Laurie, right now. Sorry about that.

**QUESTION:** China?

**QUESTION:** South Korea?

**QUESTION:** Russia?

**MR PALLADINO:** Let's go to South Korea. I promised South Korea. Let's go.

**QUESTION:** Can you confirm reports, both from Seoul and New Delhi, that the U.S. is giving a waiver for oil imports from Iran to South Korea and India?

**MR PALLADINO:** The United States is in the midst of an internal process to consider significant reduction exceptions for individual countries, but that is only on a case-by-case basis. We have – we continue to discuss our Iran policy with our counterparts around the world and the implications of our re-imposition of sanctions previously lifted or waived under the JCPOA.

**QUESTION:** Robert –

**QUESTION:** China?

**QUESTION:** Robert, on Iran?

**MR PALLADINO:** On Iran? Let's go – Iran in the front.

**QUESTION:** Robert, can you say as the administration goes through that process and is set to re-impose the JCPOA sanctions that the regime that will be in place will be at least as strong as the one that was lifted in 2015?

**MR PALLADINO:** We're quite confident moving forward. And then we're – if we look at what's already taken place, we see businesses making business decisions and leaving Iran. We're tracking around 100 major companies that have already made their business decisions to leave Iran and choose business with the United States over business with Iran. We are going to continue to push forward and we're quite confident.

**QUESTION:** There are some – on the enforcement side, though – on the enforcement side, though, there are some concerns. We talked about the waivers that you say you're looking at a case-by-case basis, but also when it comes to processing transactions through SWIFT, that perhaps the enforcement regime won't be as strong as it was years ago.

**MR PALLADINO:** For any questions on SWIFT, I'd have to refer to the

Department of Treasury. We are – we're quite confident moving forward that the actions that are being taken are going to help us exert maximum pressure against the Iranian regime and this leading state sponsor of terrorism is going to see revenues cut off significantly that will deprive it of its ability to fund terrorism throughout the region.

**QUESTION:** Robert –

**QUESTION:** China?

**QUESTION:** On Russia?

**QUESTION:** On Iran?

**MR PALLADINO:** Stay on Iran, please. Lesley.

**QUESTION:** Are there any countries that have actually gone down to zero on oil imports from Iran as you're moving into the sanctions?

**MR PALLADINO:** Lesley, I don't have that level of detail to speak to here at the podium today. Sorry. Anymore Iran?

**QUESTION:** Yeah.

**QUESTION:** China?

**QUESTION:** Russia?

**MR PALLADINO:** Iran?

**QUESTION:** Yes.

**MR PALLADINO:** Let's go – Michele.

**QUESTION:** Thank you. The State Department's Twitter feed and social media has been focusing a lot on human rights abuses and corruption in Iran in recent weeks and days, and I wonder if that's meant to encourage protesters to rise up, to make sure that Iranians don't blame the U.S. for economic hardships once the economic sanctions goes in. Can you just describe a little bit about what you're trying to do there?

**MR PALLADINO:** What I would say is the Iranian people are the ones who have suffered greatly thanks to the misuse of funds by the Iranian regime to fund proxies and malign activities across the globe. I would say the United States has at its disposal diplomatic information and economic avenues, and from the State Department that's something that we – we look at the realm of what we can accomplish and something that we pursue.

**QUESTION:** Wait, what does that – what does that mean?

**QUESTION:** Iran?

**MR PALLADINO:** Yep. Let's go – Nick.

**QUESTION:** So just, right off bat, if the U.S. believes that Iranian human rights negative actions have increased under this policy by this administration, is that not a negative side effect of the pressure that you're trying to impose, and self-defeating if the actual actions of the Iranian regime are going in the opposite direction you're trying to achieve?

**MR PALLADINO:** We're going to continue to exert maximum pressure against this regime. We ask that it modify its behavior, and the Secretary has been clear frequently on what we expect from the regime and human rights are certainly an important aspect of that. It's – this is something that we're going to ask others to help us with and we're going to maintain this pressure on this regime. There is much more that it's going to need to do.

**QUESTION:** (Off-mike.)

**QUESTION:** Are you disappointed – are you disappointed that it –

**MR PALLADINO:** Nick, Nick, do your follow-up. Nick.

**QUESTION:** Just the specifics on the secondary sanctions. Bolton said yesterday a number of countries may not be able to go to zero immediately, we want to achieve maximum pressure, we don't want to harm friends or allies either. So just on what you were saying before, who are those friends and allies that you're negotiating with? And have there been any decisions made – I know you said you're in the middle of it, but any decisions made about specific countries on exceptions to Iranian oil sales?

**MR PALLADINO:** I would just say that we're prepared to work with countries that are reducing their imports on a case-by-case basis, and our goal remains to get to zero.

**QUESTION:** But you are interested in working with countries not necessarily to get to zero so long as they're showing progress?

**MR PALLADINO:** We're prepared to work with countries that are reducing their imports on a case-by-case basis. We have an internal process to consider significant reduction exceptions for individual countries and we continue to discuss that. And I'm not going to go into detail, any further detail on what that would constitute.

**QUESTION:** China?

**QUESTION:** Turkey?

**QUESTION:** (Off-mike.)

**QUESTION:** China?

**MR PALLADINO:** Let's go to China.

**QUESTION:** Real quick.

**MR PALLADINO:** Who had China?

**QUESTION:** China right here.

**MR PALLADINO:** Okay.

**QUESTION:** Yeah. I just wanted to ask, there was a report out of Australia talking about these detention camps in Xinjiang increasing in size in just the last three months alone, and I'm wondering if the U.S. is considering any sanctions.

**MR PALLADINO:** We – I would just start off by saying we don't preview sanctions from the State Department.

**QUESTION:** Well, is the State Department considering any kind of action to sort of change Chinese behavior?

**MR PALLADINO:** I would say about these what the Chinese Government has called humane vocational training sites, I believe – I would say that the United States is alarmed that the Chinese Government has detained as many as one million Uighurs, Kazakhs, and other members of minority Muslim groups in re-education camps in Xinjiang. And claims that these camps are humane job-training centers are preposterous. We will – the United States will continue to demand transparency and access for diplomats and journalists to Xinjiang, and we urge China to immediately release all those arbitrarily detained in these camps.

**QUESTION:** Turkey?

**QUESTION:** On Russia?

**MR PALLADINO:** Any more on China? Okay.

**QUESTION:** Turkey?

**MR PALLADINO:** Let's go to Russia.

**QUESTION:** As we look to that deadline that we talked about yesterday, is it safe – on the secondary tranche of sanctions for chemical weapons on Russia, is it safe to say that they have neither assured the U.S. that they're not using chemical weapons and have not allowed international inspectors in to make sure that's the case?

**MR PALLADINO:** That's not something I'm going to be able to speak to at the podium.

**QUESTION:** Turkey?

**QUESTION:** Robert, can we stay in the region? Can we stay in the region?

**MR PALLADINO:** Let's go right here.

**QUESTION:** Actually, just on that and on the technical point that I raised yesterday about the actual date, so –

**MR PALLADINO:** Yeah. Okay.

**QUESTION:** So it goes by – this was actually announced and the determination was announced on August 8th, not – the determination may have been made on August 6th, but it wasn't – but Congress wasn't notified until August 8th. So are you sure that it's November 6th and not November 8th, as I suggested it might be yesterday?

**MR PALLADINO:** Matt, I'm as good as the information that I have, and I am quite –

**QUESTION:** Well, that's not very encouraging.

**MR PALLADINO:** I know, there we go. (Laughter.) No, I'll take the question, but I'm pretty confident that we are – that we are confident.

**QUESTION:** Thanks. Okay, because if Congress wasn't notified until the 8th, then I don't know –

**MR PALLADINO:** I'd have to look –

**QUESTION:** All right.

**MR PALLADINO:** I'd have to ask a little bit more about that, but based upon the State Department's calculation, we're looking at – we've got the date. Yeah.

**QUESTION:** (Off-mike.)

**QUESTION:** (Inaudible.) Whether it's the 6th or the 8th, do you believe that you have to announce on the 6th or the 8th your decision?

**MR PALLADINO:** Nick, we talked about this yesterday a little bit, and so November 6th is the deadline by which the State Department certifies to the Congress that Russia has met the conditions in the Chemical and Biological Weapons Act.

So that certification would basically be us – the State Department saying that Russia has taken steps to get back into compliance, and that would include Russia having ceased and ensured that it's not going to use chemical weapons again, that it has allowed international inspectors to verify those assurances, et cetera. So if we can't make such a certification by that time, then we are required to impose a second round of sanctions by the law after consultations with the Congress.

**QUESTION:** In other words – I'd love to meet the lawyer who wrote that explanation. The – in other words, what you're saying is that you might not do anything on the 6th or the 8th.

**MR PALLADINO:** There's no time – we must make a determination –

**QUESTION:** In other words, if you're unable to – well, hold on a second. If you're unable to –

**MR PALLADINO:** – and begin consultations with the Congress –

**QUESTION:** If you're unable to certify, do you have to affirmatively tell Congress that you cannot certify them on the 6th or the 8th?

**MR PALLADINO:** We – I would have to look at the statute itself on that, but we have to make a determination by the 6th or –

**QUESTION:** Well, apparently –

**MR PALLADINO:** – begin consultations with the Congress. Correct.

**QUESTION:** Right, but you're leaving – the way it sounds now is that you might not do anything on the 6th or the 8th. You don't have to – if you can't positively confirm or certify that Russia has taken these steps, it sounds to me like what you're saying is that you don't have to do anything. You just begin a consultation period with Congress.

**MR PALLADINO:** We will follow the law. We will –

**QUESTION:** Well that's really, really good to hear.

**MR PALLADINO:** Okay.

**QUESTION:** But I'm asking more specifically if you are required to actually do something on the 6th or the 8th if you are unable to certify.

**MR PALLADINO:** We are required to begin coordination and consultation with the United States Congress, and that's something that we will do.

**QUESTION:** Yeah, but that means you don't actually have to do anything on the 6th or the 8th. You don't have to come out and say, "We're not able to certify," or you can just go to the Hill and say, "All right, we're going to start consulting you now, because we couldn't certify." And that means it might be – if this deadline, whatever day it is, could come and go without anything happening, right?

**MR PALLADINO:** We would make an internal decision. We might have nothing to share with you, Matt. That's not to say that –

**QUESTION:** That wouldn't be anything new.

**MR PALLADINO:** Okay.

**QUESTION:** Just to put a point on what Matt's saying –

**MR PALLADINO:** Yeah.

**QUESTION:** There is no deadline for consultations with Congress. There's just a deadline to start consultations with Congress.



**MR PALLADINO:** There is no timeline associated with these consultations. That is correct.

**QUESTION:** Turkey?

**QUESTION:** Myanmar?

**MR PALLADINO:** Let's go –

**QUESTION:** Can we stay on Russia?

**MR PALLADINO:** Let's go Turkey. Turkey.

**QUESTION:** Yesterday, you called on both sides, Turkey and SDF, to de-escalate the situation in Syria. I just want to know if any senior State Department official has reached out to his or her Turkish counterparts on this.

**MR PALLADINO:** Let me – yes, the answer is yes. We have been in touch with our Turkish counterparts on this. Next question.

**QUESTION:** (Off-mike.)

**QUESTION:** Turkey?

**QUESTION:** Yemen?

**QUESTION:** Turkey?

**MR PALLADINO:** I'm sorry. Sure, in the front right here, VOA.

**QUESTION:** Yes.

**MR PALLADINO:** Hi, Cindy.

**QUESTION:** Yes. Parents and families of Jamal Khashoggi are asking for his remains or at least part of his remains to be returned so that he can be given the burial that he wanted in Medina. Would you call on the Saudis to please turn over his remains to his family?

**MR PALLADINO:** Give me a second, please. Excuse me.

**QUESTION:** That would seem to be a question that could be able to be answered relatively quickly.

**MR PALLADINO:** I would say yes.

**QUESTION:** Got it.

**MR PALLADINO:** The United States would say that Mr. Khashoggi's remains should be located and returned to his family for a proper burial as soon as possible.

**QUESTION:** Okay, thank you.

**QUESTION:** Is it your feeling that the Saudis know exactly where the remains are?

**MR PALLADINO:** We continue to work diligently to ascertain all facts involved in this murder. We're going to hold accountable not only those who executed the murder but also those who led, were involved, and were connected to it. Any further –

**QUESTION:** Robert, do you have anything on Myanmar?

**QUESTION:** Yemen?

**MR PALLADINO:** Any further on Saudi Arabia?

**QUESTION:** Yemen.

**MR PALLADINO:** Let's go – Myanmar?

**QUESTION:** Yeah.

**MR PALLADINO:** Sure, let's try Myanmar.

**QUESTION:** Myanmar and Bangladesh have agreed to begin a repatriation of Rohingya refugees beginning in mid-November. There are a lot of concerns, though, that the conditions are not right and that Rohingya could be forcibly returned to Myanmar. Does the United States Government share those concerns?

**MR PALLADINO:** We – it's important to us that our efforts remain focused on steps that would improve the situation for the Rohingya refugees and to hold accountable all those responsible for this. And our goal here is to ease human suffering and to address the root causes of conflict, violence, and abuse. We continue to call for accountability for those that were responsible, and we would look closely at any plans to ensure that it is in fact voluntary.

**QUESTION:** So you don't have any comment on whether or not the conditions are right right now?

**MR PALLADINO:** Not from the podium today I don't. I don't have anything further on that right now, no.

Okay.

**QUESTION:** Yemen.

**QUESTION:** (Off-mike.)

**MR PALLADINO:** Yemen?

**QUESTION:** Here.

**MR PALLADINO:** Okay, let's go Yemen.

**QUESTION:** Do you have any updates on your calls for cessation of hostilities and anything that's reducing the humanitarian crisis that's going on? Has anybody from the State Department has reached out to either side?

**MR PALLADINO:** I would say that we talked a little bit about this yesterday. The deputy secretary of state met with Special Representative Griffiths just last week. We – based upon conversations that we have been having – diplomatic conversations, as well as intelligence, as well as other things that now – there is positive movement and we think that there is a – now is a good time to push forward on this.

**QUESTION:** But you in your statement day before yesterday and yesterday – you asked the rebels to stop and then the coalition will stop. Like, is there any change? Have you talked to either side? Have you reached out to either side?

**MR PALLADINO:** We are having dialogue with a wide range of Yemeni interlocutors and international partners on this, and we are engaged.

Yeah, please.

**QUESTION:** Why the sequencing? If you're calling for a ceasefire, shouldn't you call for a mutual cessation of hostilities? Why does one have to stop before the other, and the one that doesn't have to stop is the one that's bombing population areas?

**MR PALLADINO:** A little good faith up front, I think would be a good thing as we move forward. We've got to focus on what the goal here is, and we are – now is the time that we want to push forward the political solution, so first thing is stop – cessation in the hostilities and then push forward on the political engagement. And that's what in the long run is going to be what reduces the – just the tragedy of human suffering that has transpired.

**QUESTION:** Sure, sure, but why isn't it a mutual cessation of hostilities? Why does one have to end before the other?

**MR PALLADINO:** Our Saudi and Emirate partners, it's – they have a right to defend their borders. We continue to support that right, and we call on the Houthis to cease missile and UAV strikes into Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates immediately, and then the rest of the progression can continue.

**QUESTION:** Robert, are you confident that both sides are interested in speaking, that they're ready to come and actually engage in the way that you want them to?

**MR PALLADINO:** We – the climate is right based upon conversations that have taken place with our partners, with Yemeni interlocutors, and we have got a team very focused on this. And we are – we take – we do think that now is the time. There is a change.

And this is the last question. Yemen? Yemen?

**QUESTION:** (Off-mike.)

**MR PALLADINO:** Yemen.

**QUESTION:** Just to clarify, on Yemen.

**MR PALLADINO:** Yes.

**QUESTION:** Let me ask you to clarify on Yemen: Now, the Yemeni – the Houthis are saying that part of your plan is actually to divide Yemen. You don't support as part of a political solution dividing Yemen again, do you?

**MR PALLADINO:** Martin Griffiths will take the lead on the political settlement, and I'm not going to get ahead of anything that he will be – that he'll be tackling in that regard. That's not something that I would want to address.

All right, last question. This one's last. Okay, let's – sir, let's go. What have we got? You.

**QUESTION:** You're expecting another meeting between President Trump and President Putin in Paris. Are there any meetings between Secretary Pompeo and Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov planned before or during that event?

**MR PALLADINO:** I do not have anything to announce in that regard today, but thank you for the question and thank you all.

(The briefing was concluded at 3:09 p.m.)

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