

Press Releases: Department Press Briefing – November 15, 2018

Heather Nauert
Spokesperson

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TRANSCRIPT:

3:16 p.m. EST

MS NAUERT: Okay. A couple announcements to bring you before I take your questions.

First, I'd like to address a meeting that I was able to have yesterday with some incredible women who are from the Committee to Protect Journalists. They were the winners of the International Press Freedom Award and they joined me here at the State Department yesterday to share some of their stories. These women were incredible representatives of your profession. They were from Venezuela, Vietnam, and the Philippines. I spoke with them about some of their experiences they have faced and also that their family members have faced as a result of their chosen professions.

They shared with me their stories of harassment, the threats that they have received, the intimidation, the detention, and their kidnapping, all faced and that they suffered just simply for doing their jobs. For many of these journalists, this kind of treatment is ongoing. One of the awardees was named Maria Ressa. She's from the Philippines. She was unable to travel to the United States because of legal challenges to her website by the government. We also discussed the threats to journalists and human rights defenders in other countries including Tanzania and also Egypt.

As I've said from this podium many times before, my colleagues and I at the State Department believe very deeply in the right to a free press. That is essential to transparency and also accountability. I appreciate working with you most days. (Laughter.) No, each and every day. It is a real honor, and I think you know I mean that very sincerely. I know some of you had an opportunity to meet these ladies earlier today, so thank you for taking your time to meet with them and hear about their stories,

and I know that they were very grateful for that.

Next thing, our Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of Oceans and International, Environmental and Scientific Affairs Judith Garber and the Libya Ambassador Wafa Bugaighis marked the 10-year renewal for the U.S.-Libya Science and Technology Cooperation Agreement with a signing ceremony that took place here yesterday at the State Department. That renewal provides a framework to strengthen the bilateral cooperation in STEM fields. It ensures open data practices, extends U.S. norms and principles, and also protects Americans' intellectual property. The State Department will continue to support programs that provide new opportunities to talented youth and STEM leaders in Libya, including through the Fulbright Student Program, the Professional Fellows Program, the TechWomen Scholarship, and the U.S.-Libya Space Camp Scholarship. Since the signing of the original agreement in 2009, the department has supported the participation of more than 75 Libyans on exchange-focused STEM subjects, so we're pleased to welcome them.

Last thing is a staffing announcement, and we've had – we've been hard at work getting our team on the field, as we often say here. I have two additional staffing announcements to bring you today. The first is our new assistant secretary for legislative affairs. Her name is Mary Elizabeth Taylor. She has now started and has been sworn in. Ms. Taylor comes to the State Department from Legislative Affairs at the White House. Previously, she served in the office of Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell. She worked on the Senate floor as a senior cloakroom assistant and also as the – acting as liaison between the minority and the majority leadership in order to negotiate agreements on legislative and executive matters.

Next I'd like to announce the addition of Mary Kissel. She has joined us from *The Wall Street Journal*. Many of you may have known Mary during her 15 years at *The Wall Street Journal*, and we could not be more thrilled to have her on board as well. Mary will be working for the Secretary as a senior advisor to the Secretary for policy and strategic messaging. While at the *Journal*, she also served as a member of the *Journal's* editorial board. So we're thrilled to have her on board. She's also an expert on Asia, and we look forward to introducing you to both of them in the near future.

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

QUESTION: Great. Thanks, Heather. Before getting into the news of the day, I just want to – I want to ask you a question about your first topper there in terms of the journalists who are here with the Committee to Protect Journalists. You're right; we did get a chance to talk with some of them, and as did you. And while we all appreciate the message that you send or that you deliver from this podium every day, are you not at all concerned that that message gets diluted a bit when you see what's going on just up the street at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, where there is essentially a full-on war between the President and one

particular reporter and the White House that's trying to put him out?

MS NAUERT: I understand where you're going with this. I think we have to keep this –

QUESTION: I mean, do you – don't you think that your message or is there a concern that your message of support for journalists both here and abroad – more importantly abroad, perhaps – is somewhat diluted or somewhat hurt by what's going on and the rhetoric and the language that comes out of the leadership in the White House about this?

MS NAUERT: Let me – I know where you're going with this question, so let me just stop you and answer it there. No, and here's why: In the United States, journalists are able and allowed to freely practice their profession. We see that each and every day. Administration officials and others across the country sometimes take issue with incorrect, inaccurate reporting. We've had these debates often here. That is one thing.

Journalists can do their jobs in the United States. These women – their family members have been detained, some of them. They've been forced out of their professions entirely. Some of them have been forced out of their countries. And as you all know far too well, some journalists have been detained, sentenced to many years in prison in other countries. So I think the situations are entirely different, and I would encourage you all to keep it into perspective. How journalists –

QUESTION: Wait, wait, wait. But that's not – what I was trying to say. I am –

MS NAUERT: – are handled and treated here in the United States versus the very real risks that they face overseas.

QUESTION: I was afraid that you would try and do this by trying to change the – I am not suggesting in any way that the threats and the persecution, prosecution that these people that – who you hosted, you who met with, is similar to what or is in any way like what those of us in this room deal with. I am asking you if you are concerned at all that your message of support for them, for these journalists who you just hosted is diluted or hurt or may not resonate as much as it did because of the situation that we see here in the United States.

MS NAUERT: I have seen –

QUESTION: And again, I am not trying to compare their situation to our situation.

MS NAUERT: I have seen how when we speak about the cases of some of these journalists how much it has helped them, how much it has helped them in their home countries. Sometimes we don't speak about their cases when we think that speaking about their cases could hurt their cases, but I have seen firsthand how speaking to the realities that they face in their given countries has assisted them, has encouraged governments

across the world to treat journalists better, to stop doing things like taxing them out of business, stop detaining them, and things of that nature.

So what we do here at the State Department in speaking out in support of freedom of speech has helped people, and I continue to believe that that does help people. Okay?

QUESTION: All right, let me say once again I want to ask you about the sanctions that were imposed.

MS NAUERT: Okay.

QUESTION: Can I – just really quick – just really quick on this issue?

MS NAUERT: Okay.

QUESTION: I mean, true – true –

MS NAUERT: Because if you all would like to make this all about you and not talk about other things today, we can do that.

QUESTION: No, no, you – look, we cannot compare how journalists conduct themselves in this country to other countries, but certainly you must agree that many of your close allies, very close allies, mistreat journalists, put them in prison, persecute them, and so on. And you seem to – maybe issue a statement. I mean, I don't want to name countries, but you probably know what I'm talking about. You seem to issue a statement, then it stops there. So you hold, like, foreign journalists in a different standard.

MS NAUERT: I disagree with that because much of what we do – you know this, Said; all of you know this – much of what we do is behind the scenes. And some people may think oh, the State Department isn't doing enough on this case or that case. I'd encourage you to go back and talk to your editors, because we've helped some of your very own colleagues. We won't speak about it, we'll be discreet about it, but we continue to do that, and we're proud of our work. That's what we do on behalf of American citizens and journalists who in some instances are not American citizens.

QUESTION: I just want to say one thing.

MS NAUERT: Go ahead, Gardiner.

QUESTION: In countries around the world, these dictators are using – use fake news as a rallying cry for repression of journalists, directly echoing the President of the United States.

MS NAUERT: But you know what?

QUESTION: That does not cause you any concern?

MS NAUERT: You know what? Since having taken this job – and you know I’m a former journalist myself – I have been disheartened – and I didn’t believe it until I got into this role and started working with reporters each and every day. You all are a great group. You know that. I respect to the Nth degree what you do for a living, and I think we always have fair and honest exchanges of ideas, our concepts, our values, our policies.

I have seen since taking on this role inaccurate and sloppy reporting. Sometimes I think it’s intentional because of bias. Other times it may just be someone’s naivete. And so when the President has spoken about fake news, when other world leaders have spoken about fake news, there is such a thing. We have experienced that just this week: one news magazine, for example, referring – taking the Secretary’s quote about Iran and twisting that quote and making it inaccurate. That information was used by the Iranian regime, for example – and I can give you all the details – for its own propaganda purposes.

So fake news, I hate to say, but is a real thing. It is a real thing, Gardiner. I’m sure you’ve seen it. Others have. You all have had to make corrections at many of your publications, yours included, in the past for inaccurate and sometimes biased reporting.

QUESTION: I didn’t want to get – this isn’t about us. But you mentioned that – okay, so do you think then that anyone that you accuse of fake news is an enemy of the people? Is that the position of the State Department as well?

MS NAUERT: Matt, I don’t think that news reporters are the enemy of the people. What I do think –

QUESTION: Okay, all right. Is that, first of all –

MS NAUERT: Hold on. What I do think is very dangerous is when the news is dishonest when you report – not you, but when journalists report false information. And I’ve seen it come from the highest levels of news organizations, where I’ve had to pick up the phone and call the president of unnamed news organizations, who have been unwilling to change their headlines or to change their stories, despite facts to the contrary. That has to stop.

And when I spoke to these women yesterday, to hear their stories about what they do each and every day, they are the best of what journalists should all aspire to do, and I hope we can all keep that in perspective – fact-based reporting. And I think that’s why the President and others in the country and other countries around the world become very concerned when reporting is taken out of context, is inaccurate, or is biased.

QUESTION: But you don’t agree with the idea that someone who does that, whether intentional or not, is an enemy of the people, do you?

MS NAUERT: Matt, I'm not going to get into this.

QUESTION: All right. Good.

MS NAUERT: I think we've addressed it enough.

QUESTION: Good. I agree.

MS NAUERT: If you'd like to make this entire briefing about the profession of the news business, we could do it or we could take it over to the Newseum and have a conversation.

QUESTION: No, I wanted to change the subject before. Can I ask you about the sanctions on – that were imposed on the 17 Saudi officials today?

MS NAUERT: Yes, you may.

QUESTION: So the reaction to this from various members of the Hill – sorry, members of Congress – has been well, okay, this is a good first step, but it doesn't go nearly far enough. And I realize that the Secretary in his statement said we're going to continue to uncover the facts and as we do we'll act appropriately. But can you say – are you able to say now that this is not the end, that there will be something more substantive – I don't want to say – these are substantive, but something more that will come as the case against these people and perhaps others in the future continue?

MS NAUERT: We rarely preview sanctions or other activities. You all are well aware of that. The Secretary has addressed this in a general sense and has said that this is not the last that you have heard from the U.S. Government on this very issue, the killing of Jamal Khashoggi.

Today, in conjunction with the Department of the Treasury, we put out a statement, as did Treasury, imposing sanctions on 17 Saudi Arabian individuals for serious human rights abuses resulting from their roles in the killing of Jamal Khashoggi at the consulate of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in Istanbul, Turkey on October the 2nd. That action was taken under the authority of Executive Order 13818, which implements and builds upon the Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act. As a result of that action, all of the individuals' assets within U.S. jurisdiction are blocked. U.S. persons are generally prohibited from engaging in transactions with these individuals.

At the time of Jamal Khashoggi's killing, these individuals occupied positions in the royal court and at several ministries and offices of the Government of Saudi Arabia. The United States Government goes on to list the names of those sanctioned individuals. If someone has not received this notice, you can certainly contact our Press Office for this or the Treasury Press Office.

Global Magnitsky Act empowers the United States to take significant steps to protect and promote human rights and combat corruption around the world. Our action today is an important step in responding to Jamal

Khashoggi's killing. The State Department will continue to seek all relevant facts. We will continue to consult Congress and work with other nations to hold accountable those who were involved in his killing.

QUESTION: Very brief, last one from me.

MS NAUERT: Yeah.

QUESTION: But can you say that you're satisfied that the – in terms of the seniority of officials that it stops where it stops and – or is it still an open question? It could still – those to be punished or to be sanctioned could be higher level than what has already happened? Is that –

MS NAUERT: So let me respond to your question this way, because the Saudi Government made an announcement today. We regard the announcement that they made as a good first step. It's a step in the right direction. It is an initial investigation finding. It is important that those steps continue to be taken toward full accountability. We will continue to work diligently to ascertain the facts. The Secretary has talked about the importance of gathering data from various sources. That's something that the U.S. Government continues to do. That data will then help inform the decisions that we end up making and taking in the future, and that's in part how we arrived in conjunction with Treasury at the Global Magnitsky sanctions of those Saudi individuals.

QUESTION: Thank you.

QUESTION: Heather, (inaudible) a follow-up –

MS NAUERT: Okay. Michel, go right ahead. Hi.

QUESTION: Are you satisfied with the findings of the Saudi prosecutor –

MS NAUERT: Well, that's why I say that this is an important first step and that this is also an initial finding of its investigation. We expect that the investigation will continue, not only in Saudi Arabia but in Turkey as well, as we continue to develop facts, a fact set, and make determinations from here on out.

Okay. Sorry. Janne, go right ahead.

QUESTION: Thank you, Heather. On North Korea –

QUESTION: Wait, wait, wait, wait. Can we stick with this just for a second?

MS NAUERT: Okay. Go ahead, Gardiner.

QUESTION: Sorry. So this explanation today seems to contradict earlier explanations by the Saudis. Today, they seem to be saying that this was a rendition gone bad. Before, they agreed that it actually was a premeditated murder. The administration even seemed to agree with that

earlier premeditated murder explanation. Where are you on the – is this a rendition gone bad? Was this a premeditated murder? And can you tell us whether –

MS NAUERT: I think it's still too early for us to be able to answer that question. We continue to get the information and we'll analyze and make determinations as we get additional information.

QUESTION: And the announcement today about the sanctions – was that at all coordinated with the Saudis? These two announcements came today within an hour of each other, one from Saudi Arabia about its conclusions, the other from the United States about its sanctions.

MS NAUERT: Sure.

QUESTION: Did – was the timing a coincidence?

MS NAUERT: It was not. It was not. It has been no secret – even though we don't forecast sanctions, it has been so secret because many of you had emailed me all hours of the day asking me when these sanctions would be announced. So the U.S. Government and some officials have spoken to this, so it was no surprise that something of this sort was coming out and would be announced today.

QUESTION: You've explained repeatedly in the past that sanctions take weeks, months, and even years. In fact, we just had –

MS NAUERT: It depends on the level of complexity, and I'm not a sanctions expert, so I'm not going to try to be one. But in having talked to a lot of my colleagues who are more technical experts on this matter – for example, when we talk about CAATSA. CAATSA, very different kind of instrument of sanctions.

QUESTION: Okay.

MS NAUERT: That type of sanction can take a very long time to dig down into all the details, because they can involve very complex, large conglomerates, businesses overseas. Today Treasury and the State Department announced individuals. Individuals – unless there may be an oligarch – can be a little bit easier to drill down onto the facts of their portfolios, their holdings, and all of that. So that is why that may not take as long as when we deal with something like CAATSA.

QUESTION: And one other thing: In a related matter, NBC News reported today that the administration was actually thinking about some sort of getting Fethullah Gulen to the Turks in some way, even though this administration has yet to even start any kind of judicial extradition process. Can you help us understand that?

MS NAUERT: Yeah. So let's back up a little bit.

QUESTION: Okay.

MS NAUERT: Because over the past year and a half, since I've been in this role, we've talked a fair bit about the Turks' interest in Fethullah Gulen, who's in the United States. We have received multiple requests from the Turkish Government, at least over the time that I've been here, related to Mr. Gulen. We continue to evaluate the materials that the Turkish Government presents requesting his extradition.

This is wholly handled out of the Department of Justice, so I'd have to refer you to the Department of Justice for information on that, but I can tell you these issues are unrelated. I've seen some news reports where people are trying to conflate the two, Saudi Arabia and Turkey with Khashoggi and Gulen, and there is no relation. So let's pull those two issues apart and keep them discrete just as they are. Let me also add, because I've spoken to some of my White House colleagues about this, the White House has not been involved in any discussions related to the extradition of Fethullah Gulen.

Okay. Okay.

QUESTION: Heather –

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

MS NAUERT: Michel, I'll come back to you.

QUESTION: Sorry. Discussions with the Turks or interagency discussions?

MS NAUERT: With the Turks. Yeah – with the Turks.

Okay. Yeah, go right ahead.

QUESTION: Thank you very much. On the Palestinian issue, today marks –

QUESTION: Heather, can you say –

MS NAUERT: Michel, I'll come back to you. Let me just try to get around the room a little bit.

QUESTION: Thirty years ago, the Palestinians recognized Israel and its right to exist and as a state, but they have been waiting for Israel to recognize a Palestinian entity of some sort for the past 30 years. And meanwhile the occupation goes on, the settlements go on, the arrests go on, and so on. Don't you think that the time has come for Palestinian self-determination and statehood?

MS NAUERT: I think the time has come for peace between the Israelis and the Palestinians. We have a team that's very hard at work trying to get the two sides together. When we talk about a two-state solution, Said, we need both parties to sit down and have direct negotiations to do that. You can't do this through an intermediary. You can't do this through headlines and fights in the press related to that. You have to sit down and you have to be willing to compromise.

The President has repeatedly said and we've repeatedly said the two sides are probably going to have to give a bit to develop a lasting peace. We hope we are – we hope that we can get to this point. We've got a deal that is still in the works, and when we're ready to announce that deal and unveil that deal, I'll be thrilled to bring it to you, okay.

QUESTION: On this very point.

MS NAUERT: Yeah.

QUESTION: On this very point, today Mr. Jason Greenblatt actually published an op-ed or an opinion piece in my own newspaper. And he talks at length about the need to normalize with the Arab countries and so on, but he hardly talks about whatever points the plan might have and so on. He is not reaching out to the Palestinians. I suggest that you read the whole article. It's a lengthy and very thorough –

MS NAUERT: Yeah, I've taken a look at Jason Greenblatt's editorial. I think it was posted in your paper, right?

QUESTION: Yes.

MS NAUERT: Okay. Well, I'm glad that you ran that. Look, our relationship with Israel is not simply about a peace plan. Israel's relationship with many other countries around the world is extremely broad. They do a lot of great work in the areas of finance, manufacturing, desalination of water – there are a lot of things. It is a broad relationship that they have with a lot of countries. Commerce is in part what Jason Greenblatt addressed in his editorial, and there's nothing wrong with discussing those issues, and not simply every time he writes to talk about Israeli-Palestinian peace, as important as that issue is. So he has other work to do, and that's part of it as well.

QUESTION: He's charged with that.

MS NAUERT: Yeah, yeah.

QUESTION: He's charged with that. And I'm just asking whether you have shifted the fulcrum or the center of your emphasis or your focus.

MS NAUERT: No. I mean, he knows these issues, he knows the country very well, and I'm glad just seeing him put pen to paper and share his expertise with others.

QUESTION: I have another question.

MS NAUERT: And by the way, Said, I know he'll be thrilled that you read it. So I'll be sure to let him know.

QUESTION: Yeah. Last thing. Last week, the Israelis arrested 45 Americans that were planting flowers and so on, and they released them. I wanted to ask you whether you had anything to do with their release so quickly. They were released right after two hours and so on. Or are you

aware of the situation?

MS NAUERT: Yeah, that's one of the situations where there are privacy considerations, so I just can't comment on that due to that, okay.

Hi, Laurie.

QUESTION: Hi. Earlier this month you tweeted that one of the 12 conditions for lifting sanctions on Iran is that the regime, quote, "must respect the sovereignty of the Iraqi Government and permit the disarming, demobilization, and reintegration of Shia militias," end quote. Is that still your position?

MS NAUERT: Nothing has changed with regard to our position on that.

QUESTION: Even though Iraqi politicians have said you're interfering in Iraq's internal affairs?

MS NAUERT: I don't think we're interfering in Iraq's internal affairs. That's something – we take great pains to not do that. We respect the sovereignty of the Iraqi Government. Sovereignty is an important element of what this U.S. administration stands for. You can read that in our National Security Strategy. We have a great relationship with the Iraqi people, but we believe that Iraq is a sovereign nation.

Okay, yeah.

QUESTION: And on Syria's Kurds, last month, Secretary Pompeo said they were, quote, "great partners," and will ensure them, quote, "a seat at the table." Is that still your position?

MS NAUERT: Our position has not changed. Kurds are great partners, and you remember the President up at UNGA – I think you were in the audience there – where he called upon one of – he's not here today, is he? "Mr. Kurd."

QUESTION: "Mr. Kurd," that's right.

MS NAUERT: The bureau chief. And we were thrilled that he then reported – put an article in *The Wall Street Journal*. So our position has not changed.

QUESTION: Mr. Kurd appreciates that a lot and he thanks the President.

MS NAUERT: (Laughter.) Invite Mr. Kurd back, please. We enjoy him. Hey, Laurie – I mean, I'm sorry, Janne.

QUESTION: Thank you very much, Heather. Two questions, quick, on North Korea. North Korean leader Kim Jong-un recently announced that North Korea will rebuild both the nuclear and economy. In this regard, we don't know whether North Korea denuclearized. What do you think about North Koreans' brinkmanship diplomacy? Second question is –

MS NAUERT: I think a lot of these things are negotiating points, and a lot of these are positions that various governments, just as a general matter, will use leading up to negotiations. This is an issue – the denuclearization of North Korea – that President Trump has been intimately involved in. The Secretary, of course, is his personal representative on that – Steve Biegun as well. And they've been hard at work working toward the denuclearization of North Korea.

We've said this before: We have a long way to go. We believe in giving diplomacy a chance. There are plenty of news organizations who like to make fun of us, that we haven't gone far enough, we haven't done enough. We are hard at work at this. President Trump and Chairman Kim came up with four sets and – areas of agreement that they intend to work on. We've been hard at work on those four areas of agreement. We take Chairman Kim at his word that he will work on this with us. And when the President and Chairman Kim are next able to meet, whenever that does take place – we think probably early in the next year – we expect that those four elements of the Singapore summit will be addressed by the two leaders.

QUESTION: But the North Korea has done so in the past, there – it will be breaking of the –

MS NAUERT: There are significant differences between how this administration is handling things and previous administrations have handled things. We won't make the same mistakes of the past. Some of those mistakes of the past included piling on a bunch of different countries that could all weigh in, and you get mired into a lot of bureaucratic battles and can't always get things effectively or efficiently done. We've now stripped that away. We are negotiating leader to leader. You have the President and the Secretary both negotiating with Chairman Kim personally, and that adds an entirely different element to it.

North Korea is seeing a brighter future, I think, ahead. That is something that the Secretary and others in the U.S. delegation have discussed with North Korean officials. We'd like a brighter future for North Korea and think that they would as well. So –

QUESTION: So I'm sorry, when you said that you'd – that past attempts had gotten bogged down in the multilateral process, you're referring to the Six-Party Talks?

MS NAUERT: Yeah, a lot of times, having a lot of parties weigh in on something has bogged down the negotiations, as you can imagine, Matt. You could put six – six people in a room, right?

QUESTION: Children?

MS NAUERT: No, I didn't say that. You put six people in a room and they're going to have disagreements, and things are –

QUESTION: And have seven different opinions –

MS NAUERT: And things are going to take a lot longer to get done. But this is a leader-to-leader negotiation. But the United States, along with many other countries, is backed by the world.

QUESTION: Fair enough. Is that –

MS NAUERT: If you'll look at the UN Security Council resolutions and the unanimous rounds of those resolutions, that tells you a lot about the importance of denuclearizing the Korean – North Korea and the efforts behind it.

QUESTION: Of course, that's also a lot of people in the room.

MS NAUERT: They're backing those Security Council resolutions, yeah.

QUESTION: So does that apply to other negotiations as well?

MS NAUERT: I'm not going to apply the same thing, that, to every other situation because situations are unique. You know that. Okay.

QUESTION: My second question is did Secretary Pompeo meet with the South Korean Unification Minister Cho Myoung-gyon today?

MS NAUERT: Did Secretary Pompeo meet with the South Koreans today?

QUESTION: South Korean Unification Minister Cho.

MS NAUERT: Not to my knowledge. Secretary Pompeo is on a trip to Texas today. I'm not sure where he is in his schedule right now, but not to my knowledge has he met. Nope, I'm getting heads shaking over here, so he's not met with South Koreans today.

QUESTION: South Korean media reported that are you planning for the meeting, any meeting with the Secretary Pompeo and South Korea?

MS NAUERT: We – look, we don't have any meetings on the schedule just yet. Secretary Pompeo is willing and able to meet with his South Korean counterparts. Sometimes he's met with Kim Jong-un, Chairman Kim; not always has he met with them.

QUESTION: South Korea.

MS NAUERT: Oh, I'm sorry. I thought you meant North Korea. I'm not aware of any meetings that we have scheduled.

QUESTION: Is South Korea fake news?

MS NAUERT: Maybe it is. Okay. Hey, Abbie.

QUESTION: Hi. Do you have any information on the death of an American recently, Patrick Braxton Andrew, in Mexico?

MS NAUERT: Yeah, I can only tell you that we can confirm the death of a U.S. citizen in Mexico. Taylor Meyer was his name. He died in Playa del Carmen, Mexico on November the 9th of this year. We would like to offer our deepest condolences to his family and his friends. Our U.S. consulate is providing consular assistance to the family, so we've been in touch with the family to try to support them in any way that we are able to. You know we're limited in terms of what we can say for various privacy reasons and out of respect for the family as well. I can tell you we are coordinating with Mexican authorities. They have the lead on investigation as to what caused his death. And I'll just leave our comments at that.

QUESTION: Unfortunately, this is actually a case of another American. The family just confirmed that the Mexican authorities – Mexican authorities have confirmed his death. He was hiking, from North Carolina. Do you know anything about that American?

MS NAUERT: Oh, I'm sorry. I don't have any information for you on that. I thought you were referring to another case. Let me look into that and get you some information. My apologies.

Okay. Hey, Ben.

QUESTION: Hi. If I could go back to North Korea.

MS NAUERT: Sure.

QUESTION: Vice President Pence gave an interview while in Singapore where he stated that it was absolutely imperative at this next summit that we come away with a plan for identifying all weapons in question, identifying all sites, and allowing inspections and plans for dismantlement. Does the State Department share those goals for the next summit? And with where you guys are in your negotiations with North Korea, are you confident that you can accomplish this at the next summit?

MS NAUERT: You're asking me for a measurement. You're asking me to make a prediction. I'm not going to get ahead of any negotiations that may happen at a much higher level than me between the President, Chairman Kim, or Secretary Pompeo and his counterpart, or our special representative, Steve Biegun and his counterparts. We went into this eyes wide open. We have made, we think, tremendous progress. We will continue to work on that progress and continue to work toward the fully verified – final, fully verified denuclearization.

Okay. Hey, go ahead. Hi there.

QUESTION: Hi. It's reported that President Erdogan said the U.S. has adopted the stance that Turkey must not interfere in Block 10 of Cyprus, exclusive economic zone, where ExxonMobil is drilling, but it is allowed to do whatever it wants beyond that point. So my question is: Is this your position, or do you expect Turkey to respect every single block of

the Cyprus exclusive economic zone?

MS NAUERT: Yeah. Regarding the Cyprus exclusive economic zone, it's something I haven't looked at that information for quite some time. I'll have to check with my colleagues who cover Cyprus each and every day very, very carefully, and I'll get back with you with a response. I'm afraid I don't have anything more for you on that today. Okay.

QUESTION: On Turkey.

MS NAUERT: Go right ahead.

QUESTION: Yes. The president of Turkey is threatening again Greece and Cyprus, and lately included an American company, ExxonMobil. Do you have any comment on this?

MS NAUERT: Again, I –

QUESTION: And can you tell us –

MS NAUERT: Just as your neighbor right there asked me about an issue of Cyprus, it's not something I'm – unfortunately that I've asked my Cyprus experts about today or yesterday, so I will check in with them and get you the latest. I don't want to give you any incorrect information.

QUESTION: Can I ask one thing about –

MS NAUERT: Yes.

QUESTION: You may also have to take this, because I didn't know about it until – well, it didn't come to me as a question until recently, and that is just about –

MS NAUERT: Meaning while you were sitting here, so I have no idea what you're going to ask me about. Go ahead.

QUESTION: No, no, it's not breaking news, necessarily. There is legislation that's pending up on the Hill that's been introduced by Senator Menendez, and it's got some Republican cosponsors as well, that would impose sanctions on Nicaragua for the current situation down there. I'm just wondering if you could take – if you don't have an answer at hand on the current situation in Nicaragua, what the U.S. view is of it, if you could find out what the administration's position is on this legislation? Are you prepared to – they're a part of the –

MS NAUERT: I think it's going to be the same as it always is, that we don't comment on pending legislation.

QUESTION: Well –

MS NAUERT: But if there is something new in the way of our stance regarding Nicaragua and looking at –

QUESTION: Well, it's just that it comes in the light of Ambassador Bolton and the "Troika of Tyranny" comments in his speech about Latin America policy. And so I'm curious to know where you guys stand on going after not just the government in Venezuela, but also the government in Nicaragua. Thank you.

MS NAUERT: Yeah, I'll take a look and see if we have anything new for you on that.

QUESTION: Thanks.

MS NAUERT: We've got to go. I'll just take your last question, Michel.

QUESTION: Yeah. On the sanctions announced by Treasury today, Senator Tim Kaine has said that, "I am disturbed that following repeated Saudi lies about what happened to Jamal, the administration appears to be following the Saudi playbook of blaming mid-level officials and exonerating its leadership." Do you have any reaction to that?

MS NAUERT: No. Typically we wouldn't comment on things that congressional leaders have remarked, nor do we comment typically on what foreign leaders would say about a situation. So I'm just not going to comment on that.

Do you have something else you want to ask? Then we've got to wrap it up.

QUESTION: No, that's it.

MS NAUERT: Okay. All right. Thanks, everybody. Got to go.

QUESTION: Thank you.

MS NAUERT: Thanks.

(The briefing was concluded at 3:54 p.m.)

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