

Press Releases: Department Press Briefing – November 27, 2018

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TRANSCRIPT:

3:23 p.m. EST

MS NAUERT: Good afternoon, everybody. I brought a guest with me today. Great to see you, by the way. Deborah Birx is here. You all know her, I think, from her interest in her work that she's done over the years in PEPFAR. So Ambassador Birx, our U.S. Global AIDS Coordinator and U.S. Special Representative for Global Health Diplomacy, is here to take a few questions and talk with you a little bit about some of the progress that has been made in PEPFAR over the past year. So I'll turn it over to Ambassador Birx. She'll take a couple questions, and then we'll proceed from there.

Ambassador, go right ahead.

AMBASSADOR BIRX: Great. Good afternoon. Hopefully you realize that this year marks the 30th anniversary of World AIDS Day, and of course the 15th-year anniversary of PEPFAR. So it's really a privilege to be here. The Secretary opened an event this morning at the State Department on really engaging faith communities in the response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic in a more and expansive way to really meet the needs of young men and young women who we haven't been finding, who are well and need to be diagnosed.

But he also announced our results. And every year annually we announce our World AIDS Day results. They're quite impressive this year, with 14.6 million men, women, and children on treatment in PEPFAR countries. We did almost 6.8 million children, Orphans and Vulnerable Children's Program; 2.4 million babies born HIV-free. So 17 million people are alive today because of the generosity of the American people.

We also continue to focus on prevention, both prevention for young boys and prevention for young girls. We have now completed 18.9 million

circumcisions. And remember, circumcisions are like a vaccine, except it's good for life. And so decreases the incidence of HIV by 60 to 70 percent, and we're now up to 19 million, primarily in Sub-Saharan Africa.

But critically, and up on the website today, is our DREAMS results. DREAMS stand for Determined, Resilient, Empowered, AIDS-free, and Mentored, and Safe young women. We now can announce that in our 63 DREAMS districts, of those 85 percent still show increasing declines in new infections in young women due to this program. We're very excited about those results. It's a comprehensive structural intervention that's really focusing on the young lives of young girls and ensuring that we're addressing their needs in their communities. And so we're very excited about those results.

But I think you'll also see that we've shown that in our studies in Ethiopia, now our studies in Nigeria, we've shown that Ethiopia truly is achieving an AIDS control and control of their HIV/AIDS pandemic with significant drops in incidence, and we're very excited about new data that will come out in the beginning of the year from Nigeria showing their epidemic is not as large as we had once expected, and that people are thriving and staying on their ARVs and are virally suppressed – both thriving for themselves and ensuring that they're not transmitting the viruses to others.

So I think we've really been able to show now that country by country, community by community, county by county, there is ability to control this pandemic when you focus resources in an accountable way and really translate the American taxpayer dollars into an effective program that's actively monitored in a way so that we both are constantly improving our performance but also monitoring our results for outcomes and impacts. And so we believe we're really delivering on foreign assistance and for the American people, but also for the continent of Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, and Central America, where we work for PEPFAR programming.

So I'll stop there and see if you have any questions about World AIDS Day, the 15-year anniversary of PEPFAR, or the 100th year anniversary of Nelson Mandela, who brought AIDS awareness to all of us and the plight of the continent of Africa.

MS NAUERT: I know you're all a curious bunch. Okay, Nadia.

QUESTION: Some of these countries have been asking for the use of generic drugs. I think South Africa was an example of that. How do you balance between the pharmaceutical companies who want to use their own drugs and using generic drugs to these countries?

AMBASSADOR BIRX: PEPFAR's been very exciting that way. PEPFAR was set up as a new way of doing foreign assistance, like MCC. And from the beginning, the FDA worked with pharmaceutical companies to create waivers. And so all of our medicine that we utilize is generic-based. And so we have drugs that for an entire year, to keep people alive,

about \$75 a year. So from the very beginning, PEPFAR, through the FDA, quality-controlled drugs but delivered in these resource-limited settings at that \$75-80 per year.

MS NAUERT: Nick Wadhams from Bloomberg.

QUESTION: Hi. When you've come up before, we've asked you this question, so apologies for doing so again, but you herald the success of PEPFAR, but then the administration has called for eliminating funding for some countries. So how do you square those two, both the obvious success of this program and its effectiveness versus the administration's own desire to eliminate funding for several countries for PEPFAR?

AMBASSADOR BIRX: Well, as you noticed, we're still in all of the countries, fully supported by this administration and fully supported by Congress. And I think the results speak for themselves. Now, I'm very cognizant of the fact that PEPFAR was set up as an emergency. It was set up in order to have an impact where we would be successful and therefore funding would be able to be decreased in the out years. Ethiopia alone has gone from \$400 million a year to \$100 million a year because of the success of that program. And so now it's us to keep that program sustained at a level that we can maintain our success that we've done in partnership with the country and the communities.

So I think it's a really exciting time for us to be able to show that foreign assistance should have a beginning, middle, and end, and it should have an end because we've been successful both in building the capacity in a sustainable way but also because we've controlled the pandemic in a way that the financial requirements are less and less each year.

MS NAUERT: Final question? Conor, go right ahead.

QUESTION: Just on that point, where in that process would you say that we are now – a beginning, a middle, and an end? A lot of aid groups have warned that there's a sense of complacency at this point, which actually risks allowing the pandemic to explode once again.

AMBASSADOR BIRX: So you all can be part of that solution for the complacency, because part of that complacency comes from the American people or others around the world who don't see any reporting on HIV/AIDS. And so if you ask leaderships of country, they'll say, "Well, that was something in the 1990s. That's not something that's a problem today." So I think highlighting both the epidemic here in the United States and the progress we've made, but what is yet to be done, and also being very clear – just because I talk about the countries that – I was clear on about Ethiopia. For every Ethiopia, there's a Cote d'Ivoire, where we haven't controlled the pandemic.

And so although we have this roadmap, it really requires political will of each of the countries to take on the policy and the policy changes that ensure that everyone has access to these critical services. So if

you are poor and there's fees to access services, you can't get into the clinic, no matter how free we make the HIV test. So there is a definite partnership and leadership that's required in each of these countries. And you'll see the countries that have been highly successful, they combine political will with policies and community engagement. But we will have complacency if people in the – all around the globe with these very severe pandemics don't talk about it, like we do in the United States, we don't talk about it. So young people today don't even know that there's an HIV/AIDS risk still in the communities.

So you can help us by talking about World AIDS Day, talking about the progress, but also caution us to ensure that we keep this on the front burner for everybody. And that's why I'm just so happy Heather let me come over today and talk to you, because I love inserting this good news, but a cautionary note to all of you. And you can really be part of our solution, so thank you.

QUESTION: Thank you.

MS NAUERT: Ambassador, thank you. And World AIDS Day is Saturday, December the 1st. So Ambassador, thank you so much. Thanks for your dedication and your passion for the issue.

A couple announcements, and then I'd be happy to take your questions. First, let's start out with a senior – a U.S. – a trip to Mexico, and that's coming up this weekend. It was announced initially by the White House earlier today. President Trump asked the Vice President to lead the U.S. presidential delegation to Mexico City over the weekend to attend the inauguration of Mexican President-elect Obrador on December the 1st. The State Department will participate in these meetings. Our Assistant Secretary for Western Hemisphere Kim Breier will attend, as well as our Charge d'Affaires in Mexico City John Creamer. The Vice President will lead the trip. Of course, they will be joining as well with other U.S. officials.

The United States enjoys excellent cooperation with Mexico on a broad range of political, security, immigration, and also economic issues. The U.S.-Mexico bilateral relationship is a top priority, and we look forward to maintaining an open dialogue with the incoming Lopez Obrador administration, focusing on advancing our shared priorities that benefit both of our nations.

In addition to that, Secretary Pompeo looks forward to welcoming the incoming Foreign Minister Ebrard here on Sunday at the State Department. We'll have more details for you in the coming days.

QUESTION: Ambassador Bolton said that Secretary Pompeo was flying to Mexico?

MS NAUERT: Mm-hmm. Yeah. He's flying back from Argentina. He will be here at the State Department, where he'll be meeting with him, so –

QUESTION: Oh, okay. So he's not going to see the new foreign minister or secretary in Mexico City. He's –

MS NAUERT: He is unable to do that due to his scheduling with the President down at the G20. But he's going to hightail it back here to Washington, and that's where he will meet with the foreign minister.

Next, let me talk for a few minutes about the G20 summit in Buenos Aires coming up. Secretary Pompeo will travel to Buenos Aires, Argentina to support President Trump's participation in the G20 Leaders' Summit November 30th to December 1st. The President and his team will pursue several administration priorities, including promoting global and domestic economic growth and prosperity; ensuring free, fair, and reciprocal trade and a system of fair economic competition; enhancing cooperation to strengthen financial markets; promoting women's economic empowerment; and increasing access to affordable and reliable energy sources.

While at the G20, the President and the delegation will hold bilateral meetings with the president of Argentina, the president of Russia, the prime minister of Japan, the chancellor of Germany, and he will also hold a working dinner with the president of China. Secretary Pompeo will join the President for his meetings. We look forward to seeing you in Buenos Aires. I'll be heading down, I think tomorrow, and so look forward to seeing some of you down there with us.

Next, our Under Secretary for Political Affairs David Hale arrived in Geneva today to lead a U.S. delegation attending the Geneva Ministerial Conference on Afghanistan. That's where the international community will review the effort to attain a lasting peace and prosperity for the Afghan people.

Just a few hours ago, Under Secretary Hale met with the Afghan President Ashraf Ghani and Chief Executive Dr. Abdullah Abdullah to discuss a wide range of bilateral issues, including government reform efforts, preparations for presidential elections next year, and also the peace process. In Geneva, Under Secretary Hale is joined by our Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary Alice Wells, Ambassador John Bass – he's our ambassador to Afghanistan, and the international community in reaffirming our support for a future of peace and economic development for the people of Afghanistan. The Geneva conference serves as an important opportunity for both to review Afghans' progress and to start planning for that future.

Finally, something that was important to the Secretary here at the State Department today, and that is an awards ceremony that takes place here once a year. It's an incredible day in which the secretary offers the department's annual awards this year to 46 State Department colleagues who have personified American resolve and also American goodwill under trying circumstances abroad. Among the 46 I just wanted to highlight a few of the folks who received those awards.

Anthony Godfrey received the James Baker III Outstanding Deputy Chief of Mission Award. In 2017 he had taken over as deputy when the Russian Federation ordered that the U.S. Mission staff be cut by over 700 positions. There were other colleagues of ours from U.S. Mission in Moscow who have also been awarded this – similar designations today.

In addition to them, Sarah Credon won the Swanee Hunt Award for Advancing Women's Role in Policy Formulation. Sarah helped increase female representation at the UN-led Syria negotiations. She has been described as a pillar of our efforts to produce peace and stability and promote women's rights across the Middle East.

Next, Brendan Mullarkey. He's our consul general in Havana, Cuba. He received the Barbara M. Watson Award for Consular Excellence. Brendan braved months of turmoil that included Hurricane Irma and also consular employees suffering from health attacks in Cuba. As more and more of his colleagues were ordered to leave Cuba, Brendan insisted on staying behind to continue performing his duties.

Next, someone that many of you know, my colleague, former colleague and soon to be colleague once again, Mark Stroh. Mark Stroh received the Ryan Crocker Award for Outstanding Leadership for Expeditionary Diplomacy. What does that mean? Well, he was out in Syria for a long time helping to lead the START team. Those are our teams that facilitate our humanitarian and stabilization responses in Syria. So congratulations to Mark for that.

And finally, this is one that I think a lot of my colleagues will really share an interest in. We couldn't do our jobs here at the State Department without our locally employed staff. I think they, in fact, outnumber the number of Foreign Service and civil servants here at the State Department. These are folks all around the world from those local countries who show up, do their jobs every single day, and some of them in dangerous environments.

This year, one of our locally employed staff also earned an award. His name is Housseini Intifaskiwen, and is receiving the Foreign Service National Award. Secretary Pompeo presented his award to him earlier today for his understanding of violent regions in northern Mali. His work helped combat violent extremism and fight terror groups, including ISIS and al-Qaida.

The 46 award winners today remind us that we ourselves can always do more, we can aim higher, and they remind us of what the United States stands for in every corner of the world. So congratulations to our exceptional team. We couldn't be more proud of the work that you and others do each and every day.

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

QUESTION: No award for you or your staff?

MS NAUERT: We do have a couple Public Affairs people who have received awards too, but I wanted to highlight the work of other people.

QUESTION: Can I ask you a logistical question first before getting into some policy substance?

MS NAUERT: Certainly.

QUESTION: In Buenos Aires, does the Secretary plan to have any separate meetings other – aside – any meetings aside from those that he goes to with the President?

MS NAUERT: At this time, he will just be accompanying the President on the President's meetings. If anything changes, we'll let you know as the schedule evolves.

QUESTION: Okay. And then just then again logistically, on Sunday's meeting with the – he will be the Mexican foreign secretary by Sunday. Is that open? Is it here? What's the –

MS NAUERT: It'll be here at the State Department. We'll get you details as we have all of those things ready to provide.

QUESTION: So continuing on the Mexico theme, yesterday the Mexican government said that it had sent a diplomatic note to you guys asking or perhaps stronger than asking for an investigation into the use of tear gas at the border, American Border Patrol agents firing tear gas into Mexico. And I am wondering if you have responded to that request, even if the State Department's role is simply to hand this note to DHS and say –

MS NAUERT: So I can confirm for you that we did receive that note from the Mexican government. I don't have anything for you beyond that. I don't know if we've responded to it or not, but I imagine this – and among many other things – will be a topic of conversation when we meet with Mexican officials over the coming days.

Hey, Laurie.

QUESTION: Hi. On –

MS NAUERT: Excuse me.

QUESTION: On Mexico.

MS NAUERT: I'll go back to you. Go right ahead.

QUESTION: Okay. Masoud Barzani visited Baghdad and Najaf last week, and it seemed a major step forward in improving ties between Erbil and Baghdad. Was that something that you were involved in, and what's your comment on it?

MS NAUERT: To my knowledge, we were not involved with that. We would

always encourage for the Kurdish government and the Iraqi government to meet together, to sit down and have conversations. We encourage constructive dialogue to take place. But to my knowledge, no, we did not have anything to do with that.

Okay.

QUESTION: Well, last week Iraq began – this I know you were involved.

MS NAUERT: Okay.

QUESTION: Iraq began exporting oil through the Kirkuk pipeline, and now it's a small amount, but the KRG has increased the capacity of that pipeline to a million barrels a day. Would you – since they could – it could export a million barrels a day, and you've got the sanctions on Iran, and Turkey's a big importer of Iranian oil, would you encourage an increase in the amount of oil that's being exported from Kirkuk through that pipeline?

MS NAUERT: Well, I think Iraq is and could be an even more important player in the global oil markets, so that's one thing that we will certainly keep an eye on. In terms of the figures and the stats that you just provided right now, that's something we just can't confirm. We can't confirm that would just refer you to the Iraqi government for that.

Hey, Cindy.

QUESTION: Hi. I've got China and Ukraine, so –

MS NAUERT: Okay. Let's take one at a time.

QUESTION: Okay. On China, State has made clear its position on China's exit ban. Do you have any update on the case involving Victor and Cynthia Liu? And what are your recommendations to Americans who were born in China and naturalized as American citizens when they travel to mainland China?

MS NAUERT: Yeah, I'm glad you asked that question. Earlier this year – and this is important for people who are dual-nationals, Chinese citizens living in the United States, who may want to return to their home country. It's important to know that the State Department put out basically information earlier this year to those individuals. It's called a Travel Advisory.

For those who would travel to China, we suggest that they exercised increased caution while traveling to China. China is known for its so-called exit bans, where sometimes the Chinese government will prevent people from exiting the country if they are trying to sometimes get other members of their family into that country. If they're trying to get someone to pay a fine, for example, they may prevent them from entering the country. Those are just a few examples.

The specific case that you cite is of two American citizens, Victor and Cynthia Liu. I know that the White House has called for their immediate return home. That's something that the State Department is certainly aware of. We've had conversations in more a general sense with the Chinese government about cases such as that, and it remains a concern of ours, so we're continuing to watch it.

Okay. Hi, Janne.

QUESTION: Hi. Thank you, Heather. On North Korea, the United States officially approved the groundbreaking ceremony for the South Korea-North Korea railway connections, or United Nations, they approved, or who approved these railway connections between South Korea and North Korea?

MS NAUERT: Well, I think that would be for the North and South to decide and be involved with. In terms of our participation, I'm not aware of any in regard to that. But if I have anything for you on that, I'll let you know.

QUESTION: What is the exceptional sanctions of this? Like –

MS NAUERT: I'm sorry?

QUESTION: The South Korean government –

QUESTION: Sanctions.

QUESTION: Sanctions. Exceptionally they're using sanctions for South Korea. There are so many times they –

MS NAUERT: Yeah. I don't know if you're referring to UN Security Council sanctions and resolutions under the Security Council or South Korea's own sanctions. I'd have to refer you to the government to answer questions about that.

Hey, Barbara.

QUESTION: Hi. So senators are saying that Secretary Pompeo along with Secretary Mattis are going to be briefing the all-Senate on Saudi policy or Saudi developments tomorrow. One, could you confirm that that is the case? Because it hasn't been officially announced to my knowledge.

And two, Senator Sanders' bill on – asking for a withdrawal of U.S. support for the Yemen war will probably come up for a vote this week or very soon. In March when it first came up, Secretary Mattis sent a letter urging against support for that and I'm wondering, given that – now that Secretary Mattis and Secretary Pompeo have called for a ceasefire and have stopped the refueling of the aircraft, whether the State Department is taking any position or giving any advice in any way with regards to that bill and whether that will come up in the briefing that Mr. Pompeo will be giving on Wednesday.

MS NAUERT: Well, I don't know if the senators will bring it up. I can confirm that Secretary Pompeo and Secretary Mattis will be on the Hill tomorrow. They will be testifying in a classified setting. It's an all-Senate-members briefing that will take place at 11 o'clock tomorrow. So I can confirm that that will take place. In terms of legislation that may or may not be developed and addressed and brought forward, I just would – never would comment on that anyway, so – and I wouldn't get ahead of that either.

QUESTION: The State Department – right. The State Department hasn't sent any sort of letter or advice or position to senators on that?

MS NAUERT: Not that I'm aware of, but again, I'm not going to get ahead of the briefing that they hold tomorrow on the Hill.

Hey, Nick.

QUESTION: Just to go back quickly to the G20, is the Secretary planning for the possibility of a meeting with the crown prince of Saudi Arabia?

MS NAUERT: No, don't read too much into it. I said to you that the Secretary will be participating in the meetings with the President. We do not have any additional meetings set up. We're not looking to set up any additional meetings at this time. If anything changes, I will let you know.

QUESTION: So are you ruling it out?

MS NAUERT: That is not a question that I have asked. I just know we do not have anything on the schedule. The Secretary will be mirroring the President's schedule and looks forward to backing the President at the President's meetings.

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

MS NAUERT: Hold on.

QUESTION: Can I also ask about Ecuador? Did the Secretary, in his conversations with the Ecuadorian foreign minister yesterday, discuss Julian Assange and whether the United States would like Ecuador to have him leave the Ecuadorian embassy –

MS NAUERT: Yeah. We put out a readout of the Secretary's meeting with the Ecuadorian foreign minister. I'd be happy to read it for anybody who missed it.

Secretary Pompeo met on November 26 with the Ecuadorian Foreign Minister Jose Valencia and the Finance Minister Richard Martinez. They affirmed – reaffirmed their commitment to expand bilateral cooperation on a number of political and economic issues, including through the recently relaunched U.S.-Ecuador Trade and Investment Council. Secretary Pompeo confirmed U.S. support for Ecuador's efforts in strengthening democratic institutions and President Lenin Moreno's commitment to democratic

reforms. He also recognized Ecuador's significant support to Venezuelan refugees and migrants and welcomed further Ecuadorian cooperation on a democratic solution to the manmade crises in Venezuela and Nicaragua. That's all I have for you on that.

QUESTION: So you don't – you can't say whether they discussed Julian Assange?

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

QUESTION: Do you know or –

MS NAUERT: Do not take it as a yes, because I don't have any information on that, okay?

QUESTION: Right. But I mean, it's a fairly significant case.

MS NAUERT: It is.

QUESTION: Have you asked the – could you ask the Secretary, take the question?

MS NAUERT: There are plenty of significant cases going on around the world, as I can – as you can imagine. We've been heavily involved in watching the situation as it unfolds in Ukraine, Saudi Arabia, a lot of other issues that we've been heavily focused on as well, but the Secretary had a good meeting yesterday.

QUESTION: Yeah, but there's only one country in the world that is housing a person who has been apparently charged by the U.S. Justice Department in – for publishing classified information, and that would be Ecuador.

MS NAUERT: And that is a very serious matter. I am just telling you I don't have any information on that as to whether or not that came up in the meeting. I just read you the readout. I can read it for you once again.

QUESTION: Could you take the question?

QUESTION: No, because it doesn't answer – we don't need you to read it again, but it would be nice if we could find out an answer to the question. Because while it is true there is a lot going on in the world –

MS NAUERT: I will – Matt, I will certainly ask. Some of these would be private diplomatic conversations which we wouldn't always necessarily read out. You know that. Okay?

QUESTION: Well, right, but have you – this is a –

MS NAUERT: I don't have anything more for you on that so I'm going to move on.

QUESTION: I get that, but it's –

MS NAUERT: Said, go right ahead.

QUESTION: It's a significant – a significant case and it's – the jockeying for attention with these other things that you mentioned rightfully are important.

MS NAUERT: I heard – I take your point.

Hi, Said.

QUESTION: Yes, hi, Heather. Last week the President met with Secretary Pompeo and National Security Advisor Bolton and his peace team – Greenblatt, Kushner, and Ambassador Friedman. Could you share with us any outcome, any calendar, any timetable as far as a peace plan or the release of this peace plan?

MS NAUERT: Yeah, as soon as it is ready to be presented, they will present it. I know that isn't a very satisfactory answer. A lot of folks, yourself included, have been waiting for that peace plan to be presented, and we will do so just as soon as they're ready to do that. They had a good meeting last week with Mr. Kushner, Mr. Greenblatt. The Secretary was there as well, also the Vice President and Ambassador Bolton. They discussed the President's vision for a comprehensive peace between the Israelis and the Palestinians. We remain committed to sharing our vision for peace with Israel and Palestinians and other regional and international stakeholders. We'll share that information just as soon as we can.

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

MS NAUERT: Yeah. Hold on, hold on. Go ahead.

QUESTION: Just a quick follow-up on the Palestinian issue. Today the Israelis issued order for demolishing 16 homes in Shuafat – it's a neighborhood in Jerusalem – there's been dozens of arrests of Palestinian officials – in fact, officials that you have trained in security and so on – in Jerusalem. Is – does Israel have a green light or are you looking the other way while all these things go on? I mean, I don't want to name all the things that happen on daily basis, but there is a – we're seeing a more heavy-handedness, so to speak, in the conduct of the Israeli occupation against Palestinians. And I wonder if you have a comment on that.

MS NAUERT: Yeah. This is what we would typically say about cases of such a nature, and I can't confirm those particular cases nor can I confirm the individuals that you mentioned, that you said were allegedly involved in that. We're not going to be able to respond to every single news report on a very complicated and emotional matter, such a sensitive subject. I know that's not very satisfying to you, but we would encourage both sides to create an environment that's conducive not only to negotiations, but also to a comprehensive and enduring peace. So back

to the peace plan, we look forward to presenting that just as soon as we can.

Okay. Go ahead, Nadia.

QUESTION: Two follow-ups. One, since the hearing is classified tomorrow, do we expect any statement by the Secretary after the hearing in Congress?

MS NAUERT: We'll see. We're still fully working out our schedule tomorrow, but as of now the Secretary's planning on doing that briefing. What comes after that, we're not sure just yet.

QUESTION: Okay, and on Yemen, seems to be a renewed effort to end the war in Yemen. How much is the U.S. involved and why this new round of talks in Sweden is have better chance of succeeding than all the previous ones?

MS NAUERT: Well, I think the important thing that the United States government and many other governments right now are focusing on is supporting Martin Griffiths, our UN special envoy. And it is obviously a very difficult and complex and tragic situation that has unfolded for far too long in Yemen. It's something that we care about a lot. The thing that we are focused on – I don't want to say the most right now, but one of our top things that we're focusing on – is supporting the work that Martin Griffiths is doing right there. He has a process in place; we believe that he's making progress. He has some commitments, not only from the Yemeni government but also from the Houthi rebels, to sit down and have conversations and we think that's a good place to start. Any time that you can have two sides that have been fighting so fiercely for such a period of time sit down together is certainly progress. We think that that's critical and we're focused on that and look forward to bringing you any new information that comes out of that.

Okay. Hi, Conor.

QUESTION: Last week, the top Republican and Democrat on the Foreign Relations Committee sent a letter to the administration triggering an investigation under the Global Magnitsky Act into whether or not the crown prince was involved in the murder of Mr. Khashoggi. Have you received that letter and then begun that investigation? There's a 120-day window.

MS NAUERT: Yeah, I believe that the letter you're referring to is a letter that was sent to the White House. I don't believe that that was sent to the State Department, but I can double check and look into that for you.

Okay.

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

QUESTION: You would be part of that investigation though, right?

MS NAUERT: Again, I have not seen this letter, so I would hesitate to respond to that part in particular. I believe this letter was sent to the White House, so we wouldn't necessarily have received that, but I'll look into it and see if that's something that State Department is involved with.

Cindy, I'll come back to you and then – go ahead.

QUESTION: Russia has rejected the idea of direct talks with Ukraine. What is the U.S. doing? Is the U.S. concerned that this might escalate out of control?

MS NAUERT: Yeah, I mean, I'm not going to comment on a hypothetical, but obviously what happened over the weekend was a serious escalation. It's a dangerous escalation on the part of Russia's continued aggressive behavior against Ukraine. The United States continues to support Ukraine's territorial integrity. The Secretary and the President both have a very strong relationship with the Government of Ukraine, President Poroshenko in particular. Some of you may be aware the Secretary spoke with President Poroshenko yesterday, offering our support, expressing our concern over that dangerous, aggressive act on the part of Russia.

The Secretary's heading to NATO, as many of you know, in the coming days. I would imagine that that would be a big topic of conversation. NATO issued a very strongly worded statement earlier today. I would encourage you to take a look at that.

Among the things that the U.S. government is doing – you saw Ambassador Haley's comments yesterday at the United Nations. The Secretary then had a call with President Poroshenko. We put out a statement ourselves, and we're continuing to have conversations not only with NATO but with the OSCE and other multilateral organizations who share our concerns.

Now, one of the things I think you'll be seeing in the days and weeks ahead are additional conversations that the U.S. government is having with our European allies. And one of the things that we would like to see take place is our European allies doing more to assist Ukraine. The United States government has taken a very strong position in their support, in support of Ukraine. We would like other countries to do more as well. That is something that's enshrined in our National Security Strategy, encouraging other countries to help one another around the world so that the United States isn't completely – I don't want to say shouldering the burden, but so the United States isn't handling these issues chiefly alone.

Now, you may ask what can European governments do. Many governments have imposed sanctions on Russia for its actions in Crimea, in Ukraine. Not all of those sanctions, as I have been told and our experts have explained to me, have been fully enforced. So that is one thing that we can look for European countries to do more when we talk about doing more.

Also something we've talked about a fair amount but perhaps not enough is Nord Stream 2. Nord Stream 2 is snaking through many of these countries, and I think that's a question European countries have to ask themselves: Is Nord Stream 2 something that they want to continue with, because it helps the Russian government, and is that the kind of support that they want to provide the Russian government with, continuing to back Nord Stream 2 at this time?

QUESTION: So Ukraine didn't sneak into NATO over the past three – two weeks without anyone noticing, did they? (Laughter.) I'm just curious as to why you kept mentioning –

MS NAUERT: Matt, I think this is a – it's a shared concern.

QUESTION: You just kept mentioning – I understand –

MS NAUERT: And I just mentioned that NATO put out a very strong statement –

QUESTION: I know that.

MS NAUERT: – about its concerns. And so I think this is a issue that many countries around the world are concerned about.

QUESTION: Yes, I get that. But the point of my lead-in to the question is are you envisioning – even though Ukraine is not a member of NATO – that there would be a step, something that NATO could do in – as an alliance –

MS NAUERT: I think it is important any time –

QUESTION: – on behalf of Ukraine?

MS NAUERT: – any time that countries come together and express their serious concern. It was the Ukraine Commission. They have something – NATO does – that's called the Ukraine Commission, and they held an emergency session yesterday, which they largely condemned Russia's actions in Ukraine.

QUESTION: Right. But I mean are you saying that –

MS NAUERT: I can't speak for NATO. I can't speak for NATO.

QUESTION: No, I'm asking –

MS NAUERT: But I can tell you that a lot of these countries are concerned as their – as allies.

QUESTION: I'm asking you if the U.S. government is pushing a NATO response to the incident over the weekend, even though Ukraine is not a member of NATO.

MS NAUERT: Matt, I don't have any information for you on that, okay?

QUESTION: India?

QUESTION: Is the U.S. pushing this response at G20? Is this going to be a message to the G20 of pressuring – more action to bring pressure on Russia –

MS NAUERT: Yeah, I'm not going to get ahead of anything that the President may or may not discuss when he's at the G20. We look forward to being there in support of the President, and I'd just refer you back to the White House for anything on that, okay.

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

MS NAUERT: Yeah. Go ahead, sir.

QUESTION: Hi.

MS NAUERT: Tell me your name again.

QUESTION: Jackson Richman.

MS NAUERT: Jackson, hi.

QUESTION: Hi. From Jewish News Syndicate, jns.org.

MS NAUERT: Yeah.

QUESTION: Considering Secretary Pompeo's most recent statement on the Khashoggi affair, will the incident affect if the U.S. wants Saudi Arabia to help forge a peace agreement between Israel and the Palestinians?

MS NAUERT: Saudi Arabia has taken steps really in the right direction in quite a few key areas. And it wasn't that long ago that we would highlight, right, how Saudi Arabia has taken steps in helping to further empower women. Do they have a longer way to go? The answer, of course, to that is yes. They have also taken steps in the right direction in conversations with Egypt, Israel as well. I'm not going to speak on behalf either of those governments, but I would just include that in sort of the basket of taking steps in the right direction.

I'm going to have to wrap it up in just a second.

QUESTION: India?

MS NAUERT: Ben, go right ahead.

QUESTION: Yeah. Thank you. South Korean media is reporting that the U.S. had tried to set up a meeting with North Korea for the 27th. Obviously that didn't happen. I was just wondering if you confirm that –

MS NAUERT: For the 27th, as in today?

QUESTION: As in today.

MS NAUERT: Yeah, I'm not going to be able to comment on every South Korean news report, because there are a whole lot of them. I don't have anything for you on that. There was no meeting of any sort that I'm aware of.

QUESTION: Are you still trying to set up a high-level meeting before any second summit?

MS NAUERT: Well, we are in frequent contact with North Korean officials. That's not changed. We have our Special Representative Steve Biegun who's leading those conversations. We have those types of conversations, meetings at various levels, from the Secretary level to Steve Biegun's level to the working level. So those conversations continue.

QUESTION: Has he actually had any meetings with the North Koreans?

MS NAUERT: He's been in the meetings with Secretary Pompeo and has been a key, key part of those meetings with Secretary Pompeo and North Korean officials in Pyongyang not that long ago.

QUESTION: Right. Yeah, yeah, but I'm asking if he – because he was supposed to be – remember there was the invitation that was issued for the North to send people to Vienna that would meet with Steve Biegun. Have any of those meetings – has he had any separate meetings with North Korean counterparts or any official?

MS NAUERT: We continue to have conversations with North Korean officials. Whether it's a face-to-face sit-down meeting, that's one thing, but we continue to have conversations and we think we're in a good place with that. Do more need to take place? Yes, certainly they do.

QUESTION: So he has been in contact even if it's not been face-to-face?

MS NAUERT: Oh, yes, absolutely, we've been – and that's why I say we remain in frequent contact with the North Korean officials.

And I'm going to take it – go to Abbie, and then I have to go. Yeah.

QUESTION: Well, let me just ask one brief unrelated question that has to do with the ambassador to Poland.

MS NAUERT: Okay.

QUESTION: Actually, a related question, just quickly?

QUESTION: Yeah.

QUESTION: The CIA confirmed that Andy Kim is departing at the end of the year. He's obviously been integral to the Secretary in his efforts. Is there any response from the Secretary to his retirement?

MS NAUERT: Andy Kim is fantastic. Andy Kim has been a great partner of

Secretary Pompeo not only at the agency – and I can't speak for them – but certainly here at the State Department as well. We have our Special Representative Steve Biegun who is firmly in place, and Andy has been a great partner. I can't confirm whether or not Andy is retiring. I've not heard that from any officials. But if he is, we certainly look forward to thanking him for his service.

QUESTION: One more on Andy?

MS NAUERT: Okay.

QUESTION: I just want to ask you if you have any –

MS NAUERT: And then Abbie, and then I've got to go.

QUESTION: – response or explanation to this letter that Ambassador Mosbacher wrote to the Polish prime minister which has upset a lot of Poles because she apparently misspelled his name, got his title wrong, as well as misspelled the name of the interior minister. And the tone of the letter apparently was not appreciated by the Poles. I'm just wondering if you guys have any –

MS NAUERT: Well, I'd say Ambassador Mosbacher does a great job of representing the State Department and the United States government in Poland. She's of Polish descent, as a matter of fact. She also represents our ideals and values. Those values include freedom of the press, all of those things that I know you all hold near and dear. In terms of allegedly leaked letters, what you refer to, I'm just not going to comment on that beyond saying she does a great job representing us.

QUESTION: Well, just being of Polish descent doesn't make it any easier to spell some Polish names, so I'm not –

MS NAUERT: You said it, not me, so – (laughter) –

QUESTION: Yeah, but I'm just – so you don't have any – you don't have any explanation for –

MS NAUERT: No, I'm not going to comment on that, just thank Ambassador Mosbacher for her continued good work over there.

Abbie, last question. I gotta go.

QUESTION: One more? Yeah, so just following up, actually, on what my colleague asked about Andy Kim retiring. Does the Secretary –

MS NAUERT: I can't confirm it. I'd refer you to the CIA for any information about his alleged retirement. It's a news report. But he is a terrific guy.

QUESTION: They confirmed it. But – okay.

MS NAUERT: Okay, they did. Okay.

QUESTION: But then also on that, there have been a lot of reports, or there has been some reporting out today going back to this idea of North Korea allowing inspectors in for concessions by the U.S. Have there been any further developments in that or discussions?

MS NAUERT: I'm not aware of any of that, but that's something that the Secretary and Chairman Kim had agreed to and had spoken about when the Secretary was in Pyongyang about a month and a half ago or so. So that's something that they agreed to, and we look forward to Chairman Kim fulfilling his commitments.

QUESTION: One on India?

MS NAUERT: All right. See you guys. I gotta go. Bye-bye.

(The briefing was concluded at 4:02 p.m.)

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