

Press Releases: Department Press Briefing – October 9, 2018

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TRANSCRIPT:

3:12 p.m. EDT

MS NAUERT: Hi, everyone. Good afternoon. Nice to see you all. Okay, a couple announcements to start before we're able to take a few questions today.

First, I'd like to address the earthquake and tsunami in Central Sulawesi in Indonesia, and I'd like to say that the United States is coordinating closely with the Government of Indonesia to respond to the earthquake and tsunami that struck there. Since I spoke to you last week, the United States, through USAID, is now providing a total of \$3.7 million in assistance through our partners to deliver essential relief items, including shelter kits, blankets, hygiene kits, solar-powered lamps, and other lifesaving aid. USAID is also airlifting heavy-duty plastic sheeting to Indonesia to provide for emergency shelter needs of up to 110,500 people. USAID has deployed a team of disaster experts to coordinate our humanitarian response efforts and is supporting a U.S. Forest Service emergency operations expert who's on the ground providing technical support to the Government of Indonesia's disaster response.

The Department of Defense has provided three C-130s and has already transported nearly 30 – 63 metric tons of disaster relief supplies into the affected areas. The U.S. Government has also provided advanced technologies to help the Government of Indonesia map the disaster area.

In addition, American companies have also mobilized to respond with financial donations, heavy equipment, transportation, and other humanitarian supplies. The U.S. citizens we were aware of in the affected areas have been evacuated. We have no reports of U.S. citizens who have been injured or killed by the earthquake or the tsunami, and we urge any additional U.S. citizens in the affected areas to contact their loved ones directly and update them on their social media status. If

you're in the affected area and need emergency services, please contact the local authorities.

Next, I want to address something that the Secretary raised last week because nothing has changed. There are still 65 State Department nominees sitting in the United States Senate. That's over a quarter of all the senior-level confirmable positions that the United States Department of State is tasked with using to achieve its diplomatic outcomes. There is bipartisan agreement that a fully staffed State Department is critical to American national security. The State Department has been criticized for having gaps in leadership positions, but now we've done our part to fix that; now the Senate needs to do its part.

As the Secretary has said, these candidates are quality candidates. They're not sitting on the Senate floor because of objections with respect to their quality, their professionalism, or their excellence and ability to deliver American foreign policy. The Secretary had addressed this last week, and he said we have members of the Senate for whom partisanship has now driven delay and obstruction of getting America's diplomatic corps into every corner of the world. What Senator Menendez and other members of the Senate are doing to hold back American diplomacy rests squarely on their shoulders.

And with that I'd be happy to take your questions. Anne, you want to go ahead?

QUESTION: I wanted to ask about Jamal Khashoggi.

MS NAUERT: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: Have you received any response from Saudi Arabia since Secretary Pompeo registered concerns regarding his disappearance?

MS NAUERT: Sure. Let's start out – first, I'd like to say I imagine that most if not all of you saw the statement that we put out last night. You probably also heard the President's comments about it yesterday and also the Vice President's tweet that he put out yesterday.

From the Secretary on down, we have been engaged in this matter. This is something that we've been following. I understand that the President intends to speak with the Saudis, so I'm not going to get ahead of that conversation that the President may be having.

In the Secretary's statement, he said that we've seen conflicting reports about his status. We're not going to make any judgments about what had happened to him. The United States is certainly concerned about his whereabouts. Senior officials at the State Department have spoken with Saudi officials through diplomatic channels about the matter. We call on the Government of Saudi Arabia to conduct a thorough and transparent investigation.

QUESTION: It was nearly a week between his – first reports of his

disappearance and that statement from Secretary Pompeo. Why was there such a delay between those two events?

MS NAUERT: So are you assuming that taking time to put out a statement means that the State Department has not been doing anything? Is that your assumption?

QUESTION: What was the State Department doing before the statement came out?

MS NAUERT: The State Department was engaged at the highest levels and also at the working level and having conversations with Saudi Government officials, and I'll leave it at that.

QUESTION: And then so what was the reason behind that delay in the statement coming out?

MS NAUERT: I wouldn't – I wouldn't call it a delay. The United States Government, as we handle situations in other countries as well, sometimes we decide to conduct our conversations and to conduct our diplomacy more privately than publicly because we feel that that could have the best outcome, and I'll leave it at that.

Okay. Hi, Lesley. Go ahead.

QUESTION: Hi. Welcome back.

MS NAUERT: Thank you.

QUESTION: You must be exhausted, having just arrived.

MS NAUERT: Kylie is here, I'm here, so we're doing okay for so far.

QUESTION: Just arrived last night. Yes.

MS NAUERT: Yes.

QUESTION: Has the U.S. seen any evidence that Jamal might be alive?

MS NAUERT: We don't know what has happened to him. We don't have any information on that. That's why I want to say we don't want to make any judgments about what happened, and we call for a thorough and transparent investigation.

QUESTION: You've called for a thorough and transparent inspection from the – investigation from the Saudis, but what about the Turks? Have you asked them for their evidence, if they've seen –

MS NAUERT: I don't have any information on that. I think that would be in the FBI's lane and local investigators' lane.

QUESTION: But you said you – they – that on these diplomatic channels you've spoken to the Saudis, but what about the Turks?

MS NAUERT: I don't have any information on that. I would imagine that through the course of our conversations with the Turkish Government – we have many conversations with the Turkish Government – that this has certainly come up.

QUESTION: But that would be – that would be P, yes?

QUESTION: Did the Secretary –

MS NAUERT: Just hold on. Hold on.

QUESTION: On Friday, I saw on the Public Schedule that Mr. Hale had a meeting with the Turkish ambassador here at the State Department.

MS NAUERT: I was out on Friday, so I don't recall what was on his private – on his public schedule. I'd have to just double-check on that, okay?

QUESTION: Okay. So –

MS NAUERT: I'm not saying it didn't happen. I'm just not aware of it if it did. I was out on Friday.

Go ahead.

QUESTION: Since this happened on Turkish soil, wouldn't speaking to the Turks and being part of their investigation be absolutely key to –

MS NAUERT: I did not say that we have not spoken with the Turkish Government. I just don't have any information on it at this moment. Okay? If I have anything in addition for you, I'll let you know.

Hey, Carol.

QUESTION: Hi. Can I ask a follow-up on Jamal Khashoggi?

MS NAUERT: Sure.

QUESTION: So the UK foreign secretary has said that if the reports are correct, "We will treat the incident seriously." I wanted to ask why can't – or why has not Secretary Pompeo said that if the reports are true and the Saudis, our allies, turn out to be cold-blooded killers, that there will be repercussions?

MS NAUERT: I think that would be entirely a hypothetical question, and so if the Brits decide to comment that way, they're more than welcome to do so. But we're going to wait until the facts come out, and we call again for a thorough and transparent investigation.

QUESTION: Will there be repercussions?

MS NAUERT: Carol, I'm not going to get ahead or assume that anything happened. We're calling for a thorough and transparent investigation. And again, let me say this one more time: I'll leave it at that. I don't

have anything more for you on this today.

QUESTION: Can you just confirm if it was Pompeo?

QUESTION: Does the Secretary plan to speak himself with his counterpart in Saudi Arabia, and did he raise this question when he spoke with the crown prince last week?

MS NAUERT: I can confirm –

QUESTION: There was a readout –

MS NAUERT: I can confirm that the Secretary has had phone conversations, but I don't have any of the details. And some of those would just be private diplomatic conversations, which I will not be able to read out. Last time I'll say this: I don't have anything more for you on this today. If and when I have more, I will bring it to you. Okay?

Go right ahead.

QUESTION: On the Palestinians.

MS NAUERT: Yes.

QUESTION: Two quick –

QUESTION: Is it okay? Can I have one more follow-up on Khashoggi, please?

MS NAUERT: Sir, I don't have anything –

QUESTION: It's in relation to what you just said.

MS NAUERT: I don't have anything more for you on that.

QUESTION: Let me just –

MS NAUERT: When I do, I would be happy to give it to you.

QUESTION: Let me just ask my question, and you decide if you don't want –

MS NAUERT: Okay, I've not met you before, but go right ahead. Welcome to the State Department. And tell me your publication.

QUESTION: Fadi Mansour with Al Jazeera. I've been covering this place for 10 years now, thank you very much.

MS NAUERT: Pardon me?

QUESTION: I've been covering this place for 10 years. I don't come every day because I cover other places.

MS NAUERT: Okay. Well, it's nice to meet you. You're welcome anytime.

QUESTION: Yes. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to ask questions. So –

MS NAUERT: Go right ahead. And this will be the last question on this. Go ahead.

QUESTION: Thank you. So the fact that you called on the Saudis to carry an investigation, is the State Department assuming that Saudi Arabia is responsible for the whereabouts of Khashoggi?

MS NAUERT: We're not assuming anything. Only because it was their consulate, we're asking them to conduct an investigation.

QUESTION: Thank you.

MS NAUERT: Said, go right ahead.

QUESTION: Yes, very quickly, U.S. envoy Mr. Greenblatt said that the Trump plan, the deal of the century, is heavily focused on Israeli security. Does that mean that you guys are giving up on the two-state solution, or you see the – you don't see any, like, contradictions between focusing on Israeli –

MS NAUERT: This is something that we have talked about for a very, very long time. We support that if both parties –

QUESTION: And this was –

MS NAUERT: – if both parties can agree to it.

QUESTION: Right.

MS NAUERT: That hasn't changed.

QUESTION: But this was only yesterday. I mean, he went out of his way to say that it is focused on Israeli security. What does that mean to you?

MS NAUERT: I'm not going to parse his words. I'd just refer you back to his comments. But our position has not changed. As the President has laid out, as he did not too long ago at the UN General Assembly, that we support a two-state solution if both sides can agree to that.

QUESTION: And one quick question on a young American student who has been detained in Israel for the past five days because she supports BDS. Are you – can you share with us if you've done anything? Has she contacted the American embassy, or are you in touch with her? Do you know her whereabouts?

MS NAUERT: We are aware of her case. Our embassy is providing consular access, as we would to all American citizens. We value freedom of expression. You and I have talked about this many times.

QUESTION: Right. Many times.

MS NAUERT: Also in cases where people don't agree with local policies or even the United States policies. Ultimately, it is up to the Government of Israel to decide who it wants to let into the country. I don't have anything more for you on that.

QUESTION: But she – this young woman, Lara Alqasem, she has a visa. She was accepted at the Hebrew University. She was going there to study and so on. She – all of the stuff that she should have done was already done. Are you not concerned about that?

MS NAUERT: Said, it's ultimately up to the Government of Israel, or any country for that matter, to decide which individuals, which Americans, it wants to let in. Okay?

Hi.

QUESTION: Heather, the issue is not that she wasn't allowed in. It's that she's being detained.

MS NAUERT: Excuse me. Or being detained. I don't have any information beyond that. Okay?

Laurie, go right ahead.

QUESTION: Hi. Nadia Murad, the Yezidi woman who was captured by ISIS and help captive, just won the Nobel Peace Prize, as probably everyone knows, and she spoke yesterday. And she did note one positive point, the start of de-mining in Yezidi areas, which I assume is related to Secretary Pompeo's announcement in July at the Religious Freedom conference of extra money for de-mining in the northern Iraq religious minority areas. So they're very happy with that, but overall it was a grim picture, and among her complaints was no justice for Yezidis. And you and others, including the UN, have recognized ISIS's assault on the Yezidis as genocide, but the Iraqi Government hasn't. Are you prepared to put any pressure on them to do so?

MS NAUERT: I'm not familiar with her remarks. Of course, I'm familiar with who she is. She was one of the guests at our religious freedom ministerial that was held over the summer, and we were so proud to have hosted her here. My understanding is that the Vice President is meeting with her – I believe it's today. The Secretary and I had a brief exchange about her becoming one of the co-winners of the Nobel Peace Prize, and we're really proud of her. She's a very heroic woman, who's done so much to advance the cause of not just religious freedom but also freedom for women, especially freedom from sexual crimes.

I don't have her comments. I don't have those remarks, so I'm just not going to comment on it beyond that.

QUESTION: How about her call for an international criminal trial for those members of ISIS who have committed these crimes against Yezidis?

MS NAUERT: I'm afraid I just don't have anything for you on that today.

Okay?

QUESTION: South Asia?

MS NAUERT: Okay, hi.

QUESTION: Heather?

MS NAUERT: How are you?

QUESTION: Thank you. Welcome from (inaudible).

MS NAUERT: Thank you.

QUESTION: Okay, on North Korea, this trip – has Kim Jong-un submitted a list of nuclear facilities, or you got anything from him for evidence of nuclear list?

MS NAUERT: We sure did. We made a lot of progress. As you know, we just got back last night from three – four countries in I think it was three days. So it was a very busy time. The Secretary and Chairman Kim discussed the four pillars of the Singapore summit. That was something that was important for them to do. They spent considerable time together. The Secretary and the President, of course, have referenced that since – the Secretary just over at the White House, speaking about this.

Among the things they also discussed was an upcoming second summit that would be attended by our President and also Chairman Kim, and we look forward to working on all of the details of that. They also agreed to instruct their respective working level groups, led by Steve Biegun, our special representative, and also his counterpart who was named in North Korea, to start intensifying discussions on some of those four pillars that were laid out in the Singapore summit.

As you know, Chairman Kim had invited inspectors to visit the Punggye-ri nuclear test site to confirm that it's been irreversibly dismantled. We were pleased with that. And President Trump looks forward to continuing to build upon the trust that was first established at the Singapore summit.

So we view it as making a lot of progress. We're pleased with that.

QUESTION: But North Korea has already destroyed Punggye-ri nuclear site and Tongchang-ri missile site. They –

MS NAUERT: I think we can say this: We can affirmatively say that they invited a group of journalists out to watch something take place. Inspectors have not been there yet. So inviting inspectors to join, to take a look, and do their work is entirely different from what we've seen already.

QUESTION: Is that happen for denuclearizations?

MS NAUERT: I'm sorry?

QUESTION: Is this have for the denuclearizations, for what you – U.S. exactly needed to, but –

MS NAUERT: That would be a positive step forward, and Chairman Kim agreed to that, to have inspectors at that site.

QUESTION: Follow up on –

MS NAUERT: Okay. Go ahead. Let's just – hold on, I'll come back to you. Hi.

QUESTION: So you've made progress on a Trump-Kim summit. Do you have any idea of, like, the timing on that? Like, will it be before the end of the year or sometime afterwards?

MS NAUERT: Well, as the President has said – and I'm not going to get ahead of the President, of course, but the President has said he looks forward to seeing Chairman Kim soon. As you all remember, when we were planning for the Singapore summit, that takes time. There are a lot of details that are involved in pulling together a summit of that magnitude. We need to find a place that both countries can get to. We have to compare schedules – Chairman Kim's schedule, the President's schedule, the Secretary's schedule, probably National Security Advisor Bolton's schedule – a lot of schedules. We also have to identify a place that has the infrastructure that is needed to accommodate 5,000 journalists. I believe there are 5,000 that were accredited last time.

So there are a lot of things that come into play here, and so we are hard at work at that. I know Steve Biegun looks forward to having follow-on conversations with his counterpart about some of those details that go into the summit. And as soon as we have something for you, we'll let you know. Okay.

QUESTION: So would you say that the – what you're waiting for to announce even a time or a location for that, is it all just logistical, then?

MS NAUERT: Well, Michelle, as I just said, and I'll repeat it again: A lot goes into this. We start with –

QUESTION: I heard that. Yeah. You don't have to repeat it.

MS NAUERT: We start with comparing schedules.

QUESTION: You don't have to repeat it.

MS NAUERT: Okay.

QUESTION: I'm trying to save you some time. So are you saying that it's all logistical before you announce a date and time, or are you waiting for North Korea to do something?

MS NAUERT: We are looking forward to having our second summit. The President is looking forward to doing that. The timing of that will ultimately be announced by the White House. It'll be a White House led meeting. And when we're ready to announce that, we will.

QUESTION: But the question is –

MS NAUERT: Yeah.

QUESTION: – since you listed all the logistics involved, are you simply waiting for logistics, or are you waiting for North Korea to do something related to denuclearization?

MS NAUERT: We have not said anything about waiting for North Korea to do anything more –

QUESTION: Okay.

MS NAUERT: – in order to have that summit. Okay. Nick.

QUESTION: And when you say a lot of progress, since Punggye-ri is by many accounts an aging facility that's already been destroyed, by allowing inspectors to come there and see this, which is not necessarily key to North Korea's current and future nuclear program, why would you characterize that as a lot of progress?

MS NAUERT: Michelle, I think that's a very good step. I'll go back and say it one more time. What you have seen were a bunch of journalists brought out to that site and you saw some sort of an explosion. Sending in inspectors to take a look around is an entirely different step and a step in the right direction, and we think that that's progress, along with the other things that were addressed in the meeting.

Nick, go ahead.

QUESTION: Just as a follow-up to that, I think one of the big questions is what exactly the administration, Secretary Pompeo, President Trump, actually want to achieve from this summit. What's the main – the headline goal for –

MS NAUERT: I'm not going to get ahead of the President. The Secretary firmly believes – and I know that this is much to your dismay, to reporters' dismay – that our negotiations are best handled in public, so I'm not going to get – negotiate it here with all of you from the podium, and I'll let our experts do the negotiating and do their work and not get ahead of that.

QUESTION: Heather –

MS NAUERT: Hi.

QUESTION: Follow-on on that. The first summit was about general commitments, complete denuclearization by Chairman Kim. Do you expect

from the next summit to achieve broader agreement with the ways and –

MS NAUERT: I'm not going to get ahead of what is being discussed at that summit, okay.

QUESTION: Not what is being discussed, but what you expect.

MS NAUERT: My job is not – my job is not to lay out what our policy will be.

QUESTION: Because we see your goal; we don't see your method. So –

MS NAUERT: And – okay, so that's a fair point. You see our goal, but you don't see our method. That is something –

QUESTION: Do you want to do it – work in progress, step by step, or do you want to have a deal –

MS NAUERT: That is something that we will discuss –

QUESTION: – with everything inside?

MS NAUERT: We will discuss that with the North Koreans and not the broader public, not the media, because we believe that negotiations – some of these complicated negotiations – are best handled between our country and theirs. And our objective is to get to the fully, final, verified denuclearization of North Korea. We are working hard toward that goal. We think we've made progress and we'll continue working toward that goal.

QUESTION: Ambassador Haley –

MS NAUERT: Hi. Go ahead. Hi.

QUESTION: India.

QUESTION: Welcome back.

MS NAUERT: Thank you.

QUESTION: So Secretary Pompeo did not meet with the Chinese President Xi Jinping on Monday. Could you please shed some light on what happened? And what is – what was the reason given – provided by Chinese Government? Because it's a understanding that arrangements were being made for this meeting to happen.

MS NAUERT: We never announced any specific meetings ahead of our trip to China. Is it not every time that the Secretary would go to any given country that he would be meeting with the president of that country. Sometimes he does; sometimes he doesn't. And so that was just a reflection of this trip, but I know the Secretary had good, constructive meetings with his Chinese counterparts that he met with yesterday.

QUESTION: Ambassador Haley –

QUESTION: Has the U.S. asked to such meeting to happen? Has the United States asked China – ask Chinese Government to arrange a meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping?

MS NAUERT: Not to my knowledge. Anything going forward, we'll let you know when we have that planned.

QUESTION: Would you characterize U.S.-China relationship as a strategic competitor?

MS NAUERT: Well, look, they're certainly a competitor. It's a complex and broad-based relationship that we have with China, as you all saw in the comments and exchanges between the Secretary and his counterparts. We have areas of common interest. North Korea is one of them. Working to combat illegal narcotics is another area where we work well together. We also have areas of disagreement and areas where we have challenges, and we'll keep working together on that. It's obviously an important relationship that we need to work hard to maintain. Okay.

QUESTION: Ambassador Haley –

MS NAUERT: Yeah. Yes, go ahead.

QUESTION: Ambassador – very quickly. Was the Secretary surprised that Ambassador Haley resigned? Does he have any comment? Could you share with us what was his reaction?

MS NAUERT: Well, I think the Secretary addressed that from the White House today, in which he talked about what a great partner Ambassador Haley has been. The Secretary and Ambassador Haley have worked very well together since the beginning of this administration, but I would say more closely once he became Secretary of State. At the working level, from my level, her team and Ambassador Haley have been wonderful to work with. Sorry to see her depart. This happens, of course, in administrations. The Secretary, I think, is sorry to see her depart as well.

I'm not going to get into who knew what when and all of that. What is ultimately important is that the President knew about her decision well in advance. They had those conversations. I'm not privy to those conversations, so I'd have to refer you to the White House for that. We're sorry to see her go and thank her for all her incredible service that she's done on behalf of the U.S. Government and on taxpayers at the United Nations.

QUESTION: May I just follow up?

MS NAUERT: Okay. Okay.

QUESTION: A follow-up?

MS NAUERT: Last question. I'm going to have to go.

QUESTION: So we saw the exchange of rhetorics when Secretary Pompeo was in China. Would you say those tensions now between United States and China would spill over to your cooperation on North Korea at this very critical time?

MS NAUERT: We don't think so, because China again and again has said to us, publicly and privately, that they are committed to the denuclearization of North Korea. They understand that; they recognize that. They recognize the importance of that matter. We don't think they're backing away. What we do say, though, is that countries including China and Russia can always do more. They can do more, but they are also one of the countries that had voted for UN Security Council resolutions, and so we expect those to uphold those.

I'll do one last question. Nazira, hi.

QUESTION: Welcome back.

MS NAUERT: Were you at the White House earlier today?

QUESTION: Yes.

MS NAUERT: Did I see you?

QUESTION: Yeah.

MS NAUERT: I thought I saw your yellow over there.

QUESTION: Yeah.

MS NAUERT: She gets around.

QUESTION: Okay. Thank you.

MS NAUERT: Thank you.

QUESTION: Heather, I have two question, one question regarding Afghan delegation. Dr. Abdullah was here. What is their – do you think that they have any achievement? Do they meet any high officials, U.S. authority?

MS NAUERT: I'm afraid I don't have any information if – as to whether or not Dr. Abdullah was here at the State Department or here in Washington. I can look –

QUESTION: He was in New York. I'm asking about General Assemblies at the – New York.

MS NAUERT: Oh, he was in – oh, at the General Assembly.

QUESTION: Did he have any meeting with the Secretary of State or either President Trump?

MS NAUERT: I don't recall that. It seems like that was a year ago even

though that was only two weeks ago, so I'm so sorry. My apologies.

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

MS NAUERT: I will have to check – double-check to see if he had any meetings with U.S. officials.

QUESTION: Two weeks ago.

MS NAUERT: Okay. I'll check on that for you.

QUESTION: Yeah. The next question, Ambassador Khalilzad.

MS NAUERT: Yes.

QUESTION: He is in Afghanistan and he traveled to Pakistan. Do you think that useful for Afghanistan, Khalilzad mission?

MS NAUERT: I think it's extremely helpful to have Ambassador Khalilzad out on travel. This is part of our team on the field, having our people do what they do best, and that is going out and conducting American diplomacy around the world. He is leading an interagency delegation to Afghanistan, to Pakistan, to the UAE, to Qatar, and also to Saudi Arabia. It's a fairly lengthy trip. His mission there is to coordinate our U.S. efforts to bring the Taliban to the negotiating table. This is still Afghan-led, Afghan-owned. Our policy has not changed in any way. But we're proud and pleased to have him out there advocating on this behalf and we'll be working in close coordination with the Afghan Government.

I've got to go, guys. We'll see you again real soon. Thanks.

(The briefing was concluded at 3:37 p.m.)

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