

Press Releases: Department Press Briefing – September 11, 2018

Heather Nauert
Spokesperson

Department Press Briefing
Washington, DC
September 11, 2018

Index for Today's Briefing

- [DEPARTMENT](#)
- [SYRIA/REGION](#)
- [IRAN](#)
- [DEPARTMENT](#)
- [MIDDLE EAST PEACE](#)
- [IRAN/IRAQ/REGION](#)
- [MIDDLE EAST PEACE/DEPARTMENT](#)
- [DEPARTMENT](#)
- [CHINA/REGION](#)
- [DPRK](#)
- [CUBA/DEPARTMENT](#)
- [DOMINICAN REPUBLIC/EL SALVADOR/PANAMA/CHINA/REGION](#)
- [TURKEY/DEPARTMENT](#)
- [BRAZIL](#)
- [IRELAND](#)
- [DOMINICAN REPUBLIC/EL SALVADOR/PANAMA/CHINA/REGION](#)
- [AFGHANISTAN](#)
- [EGYPT](#)

TRANSCRIPT:

3:46 p.m. EDT

MS NAUERT: Hi, everybody. Hope you're all well today. A couple of announcements to begin before I take your questions.

Hey, John. Welcome. We see you on the White House press briefings all the time, so nice to see you here in person. Welcome.

QUESTION: Thank you for having me today.

MS NAUERT: Yeah, thanks. I'd like to start out by calling attention to 9/11 today. We have two somber anniversaries here in the United States today, of course affecting many other countries as well.

Seventeen years ago today, nearly 3,000 Americans were killed by terror attacks. We watched today as the President went to Shanksville, Pennsylvania as our colleagues at the Department of Defense honored those who lost their lives who were killed in the terror attack on 9/11, and as the names were called out, were read out once again at the World Trade Center in New York.

Here at the State Department, we mourn our own losses here, not just with regard to what happened on 9/11 seventeen years ago, but also what happened to our colleagues six years ago. Ambassador Chris Stevens, Glen Doherty, Sean Smith, and Tyrone Woods were killed in an attack in Libya. We remember all of the lives taken on this day and we appreciate the outpouring of support that we received from our allies and partners across the world.

After September 11th, 2001, those terror attacks, U.S. embassies and consulates received flowers, candles, so many personal notes, drawings, and memorials of all different types to let U.S. citizens know that we were not alone in our pain. If you have the time, I want to urge you to visit our diplomacy center. They are set up, they are arranged there; that'll be in position for the rest of the week. It's a collection of

some of those memories and mementos from the outpouring of support that we felt after 9/11.

In addition, I'd like to highlight the Secretary's statement that he released last evening and mention that we want to remember the victims of 9/11. He said, "Those who were lost will never be forgotten. We continue to pray for guidance," for "wisdom and" for "protection for the men and women in uniform who fight each," and every "day to guard the world against terrorism, and we pray for the unity of our nation and the world in times of peril and peace."

I'd also like to recognize my colleagues, many of whom joined the State Department in the years following 9/11. I have spoken with countless numbers of colleagues since I joined here more than a year ago who, in part, joined the State Department because of 9/11. That inspired them to want to promote peace, prosperity, and security around the world. So I'd like to thank my colleagues who joined the State Department and recognize 9/11 today.

Next, I would like to announce the start of an operation to eliminate ISIS territory in eastern Syria, a very different kind of topic. Today the Department of Defense announced the Syrian Democratic Forces, with support from the D-ISIS global coalition, launched the final phase of Operation Roundup to eliminate ISIS's hold on territory in eastern Syria. We welcome this initiative as we continue to support our SDF partners to achieve the enduring defeat of ISIS. While the final phase will be difficult and will take time, the SDF has proven that it is a capable and effective partner in this fight, and we are confident that they will successfully liberate the remaining areas ISIS controls along the Syrian-Iraqi border. The campaign to defeat ISIS has liberated nearly eight million Syrians and Iraqis from ISIS's barbaric rule and denied it the ability to use this territory to recruit, to train, to equip, to finance, to inspire, to plan, and to execute attacks in the region and around the world.

The enduring defeat of ISIS is a top priority of this administration. The State Department will continue to work closely with our Department of Defense colleagues to ensure success of this operation while working in parallel with coalition partners to support stabilization initiatives that enable Syrians to voluntarily and safely return to their homes to prevent the re-emergence of this terror threat.

Next, and this is also related to Syria, I'd like to highlight this: The Assad regime and Russia continue to falsely accuse the White Helmets through a massive disinformation campaign, leaving its volunteers at significant risk. Many of you are familiar with the good work that the White Helmets has – that they have done and that they continue to do. The White Helmets are a humanitarian organization that has saved thousands of lives and continues to save civilian lives after bombardments by Russian and regime military forces. The United States and the international community continue to support their heroic work.

Lastly, I'd like to turn to Iran. The United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention has now concluded that the Government of Iran has no legal basis for the arrest and detention of Princeton University graduate student Xiyue Wang. The UN further notes that Iran committed multiple violations of his right to a fair trial and that his deprivation of liberty is arbitrary and that he should be released immediately. The safety and security of U.S. citizens will always be a priority for the United States Government. As we have said repeatedly, the allegations against Mr. Wang are baseless and his detention demonstrates that the Iranian regime does not respect the rule of law. We call on the Iranian regime to release Mr. Wang. Iran must also immediately release U.S. citizens unjustly detained and missing in Iran, including Siamak Namazi, Robert Levinson, and to respect all of its applicable international obligations and commitments.

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

QUESTION: Thanks, Heather.

MS NAUERT: Matt, you want to start?

QUESTION: Yeah, please. I want to ask you about some comments that National Security Advisor Ambassador Bolton made yesterday –

MS NAUERT: Okay.

QUESTION: – about the International Criminal Court. I'm sure there'll be other questions about the Palestinians too, but mine are about the ICC. In his speech at the Federalist Society, Ambassador Bolton said that if they – meaning the ICC – come after us, essentially – I'm paraphrasing here – we'll go after them. He said that the U.S. would impose sanctions on ICC employees, prosecutors, judges, even bring charges against them in the U.S. And I'd like to know what legal authority does the administration think it has to do such a thing, to either freeze assets or impose travel bans or even prosecute?

MS NAUERT: Well, Matt, as you well know, we don't get ahead of announcements or some decisions or deliberations that the U.S. Government may be making or may be taking in the future. So I'm not going to get ahead of anything that the administration may or may not be doing, and I would just have to refer you over to Ambassador Bolton's – his communication staff to answer your questions on that in particular.

QUESTION: He said if they come after us we're going to go after them.

MS NAUERT: I can speak about our concerns about the International – the ICC.

QUESTION: I think that we heard plenty of the concerns yesterday from Ambassador Bolton.

MS NAUERT: Well –

QUESTION: He outlined them quite clearly. I don't think we need to go through those together again. But what I do want to know – this is not a hypothetical question. He said that this would happen, that the U.S. will impose sanctions on individual ICC employees as well as prosecute them. And I want to know where does he and the rest of the administration, presuming the rest of the administration signed off on this – where does the administration think that it gets the legal authority to do something like that?

MS NAUERT: Matt, once again – I will say it again and one last time – I'm not going to forecast any potential sanctions or actions or activities that the U.S. Government may take in the future, okay.

QUESTION: I'm not asking for forecasting. No, I'm asking you what authority the administration thinks it has to do something like that.

MS NAUERT: And for any additional information on that, I'd have to refer you to Ambassador Bolton's staff.

QUESTION: So does that –

MS NAUERT: I can tell you, however, that here in the United States, the Constitution, the U.S. Constitution, is our highest legal authority and our highest judicial authority.

QUESTION: That's wonderful.

MS NAUERT: And that is – I'm sorry, maybe you don't care to hear that, but maybe there are others out there who do.

QUESTION: I –

MS NAUERT: The administration – and my job is to help discuss U.S. policy and our beliefs here at the State Department as a part of this administration. Yeah.

QUESTION: So Ambassador Bolton didn't discuss his speech with any – the State Department doesn't know what the legal jurisdiction is?

MS NAUERT: Nope, we are fully aware and fully informed of the speech. But for the specifics, if you're interested in jumping ahead and looking at what actions we may or may not take in the future –

QUESTION: I'm interested in what the legal basis is for a threat like that.

MS NAUERT: – then I'd refer you to Ambassador Bolton's office.

QUESTION: I don't think that's a very difficult thing for the State Department –

MS NAUERT: And I'd be more than happy to put you in touch with his people.

QUESTION: – which runs American diplomacy, or did, for it to answer a question that is pretty – should be pretty easy to answer or, I mean, I just – I don't get it. Because if –

MS NAUERT: Okay. Thank you for your opinions, Matt. I'll go over to Michelle. Hi, Michelle.

QUESTION: Hi. Thanks. And by the way, Jennifer Hansler is our new producer to the bullpen, so you'll be seeing her around a lot.

MS NAUERT: Hi, Jennifer. Welcome. Thank you.

QUESTION: Bolton also said that he thinks that it can take away from a country's maturation if others are prosecuting their war criminals, and it prevents them from making the tough decisions. And later in his speech he – he said the same thing when he was pressed by reporters. Does the State Department share that view? Because the ICC is only supposed to work – its purpose is when an individual country's justice system isn't set up or working properly.

MS NAUERT: I think the preference is always for other countries to have a strong and independent judicial system. That is why we do not adhere to the International Criminal Court, because we have such a strong and independent judicial system here in the United States, not only for our U.S. service members but obviously for United States citizens as well. The preference is always for other countries to have that same type of model. Unfortunately, there are some countries that don't have that type of model, where in certain instances – and it's different. Every situation is different. If you're looking at Burma, it's a different type of situation. If you're looking at tragedies that have happened in Rwanda, that's a different type of situation. Sometimes tribunals are applied; sometimes other types of systems are applied as well.

QUESTION: Could I just –

MS NAUERT: Hang on.

QUESTION: When Ambassador Bolton said that countries who would cooperate with the ICC on inquiries on Americans or Israel or other allies, and then today countries like Germany and France said that they will continue to cooperate with the ICC, would that mean that those countries, close allies of the United States, would face consequences for cooperating?

MS NAUERT: I'm not going to get ahead of any decisions or any steps that the United States Government may take. But one of the key principles of this administration – and it's laid out in our National Security Strategy as well – is sovereignty and that each country has its own sovereign rights, including our own. And encompassed in our own sovereign right is the fact that we have a fair and independent judiciary. We feel that that fair and independent judiciary more than backs up and takes care of any judicial issues that would confront –

that would be in front of U.S. citizens and also U.S. service members.
Okay.

QUESTION: Would you say that even close allies of the United States that would cooperate with the ICC would face consequences, sanctions, or –

MS NAUERT: Again, you're asking me to forecast sanctions, and I'll say –

QUESTION: He did this yesterday.

MS NAUERT: – I think this is the fourth or fifth time – if Ambassador Bolton wants to say that, that's certainly his right to do so. I don't speak for Ambassador Bolton, and we're in obviously very different positions. Very different positions in government.

QUESTION: The impression that you're leaving, Heather, is that the State Department doesn't know what Ambassador Bolton's talking about.

MS NAUERT: Well, Matt, you're flat-out wrong, okay? You're flat-out wrong. Okay.

QUESTION: Well, then you should be able to explain it.

QUESTION: Can I –

MS NAUERT: Okay, I don't need – I don't need you –

QUESTION: With respect, Heather, you should be –

MS NAUERT: – yelling at me today.

QUESTION: You should be able to explain what exactly his threats and warnings were about and what they're based in.

MS NAUERT: And I think that's why I say – and I will say this one last time – we are not going to forecast actions, activities, sanctions, and other steps. And I will leave it at that. Said, go right ahead.

QUESTION: Can I follow up?

QUESTION: Thank you, Heather. I have a very quick question for you. Over the weekend, the United States Government cut off aid to six Palestinian hospitals in East Jerusalem. On what basis – I mean, what was the reason for cutting that off? Because these hospitals have always operated by Lutheran church groups and so on. They provide chemotherapy for children that otherwise don't have that kind of care. What is the justification behind that?

MS NAUERT: Yeah. So there was a – for lack of a better term, a pot of money, sort of a piece of money, if you will, that was set to expire this fall, that was set to expire September 30th. The decision was made to reprogram that money. We will evaluate the situation in the future as we go forward, and I'd just have to refer you to the White House for any

additional details on that.

QUESTION: I understand, but when you say “reprogram that money,” is that – is it going to go to the same hospitals, or it – it will not go to any of these hospitals?

MS NAUERT: Well, some of this money – and we had spoken earlier about assistance funding – that had been reprogrammed as well.

QUESTION: Right.

MS NAUERT: And the decision was made on the part of the U.S. Government to reprogram that money, to put it to other types of programs not in the region – not just in the region, but also around the world – programs that we find to be, in some instances, more effective, more efficient, better – more necessary at this time, and to protect U.S. tax dollars.

QUESTION: Because they are licensed by the Israelis. I mean, the Palestinian Authority does not have any control over them or any authority over them. This is a strictly Israeli-controlled area. So did you coordinate with the Israelis before cutting off this aid?

MS NAUERT: We have close conversations with many governments around the world. I’ll leave it at that.

QUESTION: One last question. There is –

MS NAUERT: And then I’ll go to Laurie.

QUESTION: Okay. Very, very quickly. The – your European allies have complained that the Israelis are about to demolish a small Palestinian Bedouin hamlet in the West Bank called Khan al-Ahmar. I wonder if you have any comment on that issue.

MS NAUERT: Yeah. So we’re certainly familiar with the story and the situation there. We’ve been tracking that, the evacuation of that Bedouin residence, Khan al-Ahmar. My understanding is that it follows a lengthy legal process that has been underway for quite some time. It’s also our understanding that all appeals have been exhausted at this time. We understand that Israel is offering land, which includes access to water, electric, infrastructure, schools, and necessary things of that sort to the incoming residents, and I’d have to refer you back to the Government of Israel for any further information on that.

QUESTION: But you don’t approve removing these people by force, do you?

MS NAUERT: I was telling you that we have been following this, that we’ve been tracking it. We understand that it’s gone through a lengthy legal process. And beyond that, I’d just have to refer you to the Government of –

QUESTION: Wait a second, the incoming residents? What about for the outgoing residents?

MS NAUERT: Excuse me, did I – I meant the – you know what I meant, Matt. The residents.

QUESTION: No, I mean, are you talking about the people who are – the Jewish families who are going to move in?

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

QUESTION: Or the Palestinian families that are going to get thrown out?

MS NAUERT: I'm talking about the Bedouin families who would be moved.

QUESTION: Oh, all right. Okay.

MS NAUERT: Laurie, hi.

QUESTION: Can I just ask – can we go back to the Bolton statements?

QUESTION: Hi. Yesterday –

MS NAUERT: I'll get you, just a second.

QUESTION: – Vice President Pence condemned the Iranian missile strike on Iraqi Kurdistan, the Iranian strike that targeted Iranian Kurds. Do you have a response as well to that?

MS NAUERT: I think when we look at the situation that seems to be unfolding in Iraq right now, it's important to point out what a bad actor Iran has been in the region, around the world, and in that country in particular. Iran continues to meddle; Iran remains a bad actor in the region and in Iraq as well. And that recent attack that you're referring to is clearly another effort to destabilize that country, that government, and destabilize the region. We condemn, as we did over the weekend in a statement, recent rocket attacks, including the one in Koya. It's obviously a clear violation of Iraq's sovereignty and Iraq's rights. Iran continues to be a bad actor in the region, and we continue to support Iraq's sovereignty. We expect Iran to fully respect the sovereignty of Iraq and other regional states and to stop this destabilizing behavior.

QUESTION: And what about – the Iranians demanded today that the (inaudible) Kurdish leadership be handed over to them and their bases closed. What's your view of that? Is that more intervention?

MS NAUERT: Laurie, I would hesitate to respond to that because I've not heard that statement myself. But we support Iraqi sovereignty and the Government of Iraq. And Iraq should be making those decisions, not Iran.

QUESTION: North Korea?

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

QUESTION: Can I stick in Yemen –

MS NAUERT: Yeah, hold on one second.

QUESTION: I want to do the Middle East.

MS NAUERT: Hold on. We've got a lot of stuff going on. Go ahead, Nick, and I'll come back to you, Michelle, since we already talked.

QUESTION: I just wanted to follow up on –

MS NAUERT: Your question is about?

QUESTION: On the PLO and the –

MS NAUERT: Okay, okay.

QUESTION: – Bolton speech, the ICC. In his speech, he also said that one of the reasons why the PLO office in Washington was shutdown was because the Palestinians had advocated for the ICC to investigate Israel. That wasn't mentioned in your statement yesterday. Is that a – was that a factor according to the State Department? I mean, how do you explain that discrepancy?

MS NAUERT: Well I think the concerns about the PLO office were that we had enabled the PLO office to remain open through a waiver back in 2017. And that waiver allowed for the Palestinians to take steps to advance and start a dialogue with the Israelis for some – to take steps toward a meaningful negotiation with Israel to advance the cause for peace. We have not seen that taking place. The operations that they were supposed to conduct at the PLO office here in Washington, D.C. were not advancing the cause for peace. We want them to talk about and work toward a better future for Israelis and Palestinians. They've rejected – the Palestinians have – a peace plan that they've not even seen yet. I'd like to highlight that. They continue to take hostile steps and hostile rhetoric toward the United States and other parties, and we don't see that as a path to peace. The office could reopen in the future. They could, but we would certainly like them to take some meaningful steps in that direction of advancing peace.

QUESTION: So just to get a yes or no answer, if I could, was the Palestinians' advocacy for the ICC to investigate Israel part of the – did that factor into the decision to close the PLO office?

MS NAUERT: Some of their rhetoric has been a long time concern of the United States Government. I think that's been clear for quite some time.

QUESTION: Heather, but they – if I could clarify that.

MS NAUERT: Hold on. Let me just – let me try to get – let me try to get around the room, Said.

QUESTION: Okay.

MS NAUERT: Go ahead. Hi, Barbara.

QUESTION: I'm next.

QUESTION: Just a – hi. Just a question about Yemen because today is the deadline for the administration to certify whether the UAE and Saudi Arabia have met human rights provisions – congressional, in law. So are you going to be doing that? Do you know whether the State Department is going to be issuing that certification, and if so, what are – what the outcome will be?

MS NAUERT: Certainly. So I'm not going to get ahead of any announcements or determination that the Secretary would be making, but we have followed that closely, our requirement that the Secretary certify under this year's NDAA. The Secretary intends to comply. The State Department intends to comply with Section 1290 of the NDAA. I'm not going to discuss some of the internal deliberations that have gone on with regard to that decision making or some of the factors that have weighed in to that decision. We will comply with the congressional briefing, as is required, and we will be doing that in the near future. Okay.

QUESTION: So do you know whether that – that's happening today? Because it is the deadline.

MS NAUERT: Today/tomorrow is the deadline and we will be getting – we will comply with it and we will get that information up to Congress, as is required under the NDAA.

QUESTION: And can I quickly ask you about China as well? The – any update on what's on the table with regards to a response to the Uighur, the Chinese actions towards the Muslim Uighurs?

MS NAUERT: Yeah. I – this is something that we have talked about on numerous occasions here at the State Department. Some of you may have – may recall that I invited a group of Uighur reporters here to the State Department back in the spring, and acknowledged them for their hard work, the good work that they do, and recognize the very difficult position that their family members, many of their family members have been put in in China. That remains a tremendous concern of the United States Government, in particular the State Department. We're deeply troubled by the worsening crackdown, not just on Uighurs, Kazakhs, other Muslims in that region of China. There are credible reports out there that many, many thousands have been detained in detention centers since April 2017, and the numbers are fairly significant from what we can tell so far. Some of those disproportionate controls on ethnic minorities – expressions of their cultural and also their religious entities – have the potential also to incite radicalization and the recruitment of violence.

We use a variety of tools to press for progress on human rights. Part of that is outlined in our Human Rights Report as well and our Religious Freedom Ministerial. Some of you may recall that we did have some

Uighurs represented here at our Religious Freedom Ministerial conference and I recall sitting in one of our very large rooms as some of these defenders of their religious freedoms, who have obviously gone through so much as a result just of their religion and their identify, to stand up in front of this room of so many delegations – and it was incredible to see some of those brave men and women be recognized by so many individuals from around the country, and there was a Uighur woman who was one of them.

QUESTION: But just to confirm whether there's any thought of sanctions against certain – U.S. officials as Congress – as some of the lawmakers have –

MS NAUERT: Yeah, so we can certainly acknowledge that we received a note, a letter from Congress regarding that. We have a lot of tools at our disposal but I'm not going to get ahead of any potential activity that the U.S. Government may take. It's the old standard line on sanctions, that we're not going to preview any sanctions that may or may not happen.

Okay. Let me – okay, trying to get around the room. Hi, Janne.

QUESTION: Thank you, Heather. Two questions for you on North Korea.

MS NAUERT: Okay.

QUESTION: Last weekend Kim Jong-un, the North Korean leader, sent a letter to President Trump.

MS NAUERT: Is that so?

QUESTION: Yes. Yes, you know that.

MS NAUERT: I think I heard that somewhere.

QUESTION: You know already – that. Have you – have you received any details, list of denuclearizations, from Kim Jong-un has mentioned this?

MS NAUERT: I'm afraid you're not going to like the answer that I give, and that would fall under private diplomatic conversations. I can confirm that the State Department did receive a letter. The President has obviously been briefed on that letter. Some of those conversations will be, of course, between the Secretary and the President. We don't read out those conversations between the Secretary and the President and the national security team. But then the letter was addressed to President Trump, and so that would certainly be for the White House to disclose the contents of that letter or for Chairman Kim and his government to disclose the contents.

QUESTION: But will the Secretary Pompeo prepare to visit North Korea again?

MS NAUERT: We have no preparations, no plans to hop on a plane anytime

soon, but I can tell you Flat Stanley he's burning a hole in my pocket and he really wants to go. (Laughter.)

QUESTION: Okay. Thank you.

QUESTION: On North Korea?

MS NAUERT: Yeah. Hey, Michelle.

QUESTION: Just quickly, I have two quick questions on discussions. A couple of weeks ago – I think it was two weeks ago or so – you mentioned that the U.S. and North Korea have dialogue at – every day or every other day, nearly daily.

MS NAUERT: Frequent dialogue, you're right.

QUESTION: Is that still happening?

MS NAUERT: Yes. Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: Okay. And –

MS NAUERT: Yeah, we continue to have conversations with the North Korean Government at different kinds of levels. As many of you know, we issued a readout – excuse me, not a readout – a media note about our North Korea new Special Representative Steve Biegun's trip to the region – he is not in North Korea, just want to make that clear – but South Korea, Japan, and then also China to have conversations with our partners and allies in the region about this very topic.

QUESTION: And speaking – speaking of dialogue, what kinds of conversations would you say the State Department has had with Russia over their possible role in the health attacks on diplomats in Cuba and China?

MS NAUERT: Okay, we're switching gears here significantly.

QUESTION: Can we just – do you have – do you have anything to say about Biegun's travel so far?

MS NAUERT: We will – he has had some good meetings, some positive meetings. Hold on one second, I do have a couple pieces of information on that and we'll get a full readout from him upon his return, and then, Michelle, I'd be happy to go over to the issue of Cuba.

QUESTION: Sure.

MS NAUERT: Steve sent me a note earlier today and he said we have some hard work to do, we also have a tremendous opportunity. We need to do everything that we can to make the most of this moment. The beginning – the beginning half is done and this is just the beginning, so what we need to do is continue finishing the job. Obviously, a lot of work left to be done and we're thrilled to have Steve Biegun in the region

handling that right now.

QUESTION: Where did he – wait, this was after his meetings with who?

MS NAUERT: I believe this was – I'll double-check on that for you, okay?

QUESTION: Okay. And he is where right now? I'm sorry.

MS NAUERT: He left Seoul and I believe he is in – let me double-check. I –

QUESTION: China.

MS NAUERT: He is in China now.

QUESTION: Okay.

MS NAUERT: Okay.

QUESTION: Okay. But you can find out where he sent that from?

MS NAUERT: Correct, yes. I will find that.

QUESTION: And Heather, did he meet with any North Koreans on the trip at all?

MS NAUERT: Not to my knowledge, no. Our –

QUESTION: Okay.

MS NAUERT: My understanding is that our meetings were just with the Chinese Government, with the North – excuse me – the South Korean Government, and also the Japanese Government.

QUESTION: And one thing: Can you just explain to us why the White House is considering right now another meeting between Trump and Kim Jong-un when just a few weeks ago you said now is not the time for a meeting like that –

MS NAUERT: Well –

QUESTION: – with the Secretary of State?

MS NAUERT: – that was just a couple weeks ago, right?

QUESTION: Well, what's changed?

MS NAUERT: And things change over time. Conversations happen, dialogue happens, those types of things occur. And so clearly between then and now there has been some change in our posture and position. I think Sarah Sanders addressed this yesterday, and so I would just leave it at that. I think she handled that and explained it fairly well.

QUESTION: And are you seeing different messages coming from Kim Jong-un

versus his diplomats who are meeting with U.S. officials?

MS NAUERT: I can't speak to that. I can't speak to that today.

Hey, Conor.

QUESTION: Just one quick follow-up on that.

MS NAUERT: Yeah.

QUESTION: If it's now appropriate for the President to meet again with Kim Jong-un, would it – why not – why wouldn't it be appropriate for Secretary Pompeo to head to Pyongyang again as well?

MS NAUERT: For him to what?

QUESTION: To go back to Pyongyang.

MS NAUERT: I'm just saying we don't have any trips, any meetings to announce at this time, so we'll let you know if and when that changes, okay?

Hey, Carol.

QUESTION: Hey, Heather. Say, on Cuba and the mystery ailments for the diplomats, is there any sort of new evidence – any sort of new evidence that has elevated Russia as a suspect, or –

MS NAUERT: No.

QUESTION: – is it just continuing, it's on the list? Is there anything that has changed?

MS NAUERT: So thank you for asking that question. We have seen a – sort of a firestorm of reports out there today assigning blame to the Russian Government according to some unnamed U.S. Government officials. I would caution you all to be very skeptical of those officials' statements right now. As you should be aware, the investigation continues into what has caused what we have – what we have called health attacks on our State Department employees who have been working in Cuba. There is no known cause, no known individual or group believed to be responsible at this time. We are looking into it. Our position has not changed. The investigation is ongoing. We have not assigned any blame and we continue to look into this, so I want to be very clear about this.

QUESTION: Is it still considered an attack?

MS NAUERT: We still consider it to have been a health attack in Cuba, yes.

QUESTION: Has the State Department had conversations with Russia about this?

MS NAUERT: I – Michelle, I don't know about that offhand. I'd have to go

back and double-check. We have lots of conversations with the Russian Government and many other governments about all kinds of issues, but I just don't – I don't have an answer for you on that one, okay?

Hey, Ben.

QUESTION: Hi. Can I ask you – recently you put out a statement saying the State Department called back ambassadors from Dominican Republic, El Salvador, and Panama. Could I ask, was this related to – at all to those governments cutting off ties with Taiwan? Why did you call them back? What did you want to discuss with them?

MS NAUERT: We made the decision to call back three ambassadors – you're correct about that – Dominican Republic, El Salvador, and also Panama, to the United States, to Washington for consultations relating to recent decisions – and this gets to the answer of your question – decisions to no longer recognize Taiwan. Those chiefs of mission will meet with U.S. Government leaders to talk about ways in which the United States can support strong, independent, democratic institutions and economies throughout Central America and also the Caribbean. They'll be in Washington through September the 14th.

And if I could just make a quick mention of something: that we see Taiwan as a democratic success story. It is a reliable partner to the United States and a force for good in the world. The United States will continue to support Taiwan as it seeks to expand its already significant contributions to addressing global challenges and as Taiwan resists efforts to constrain its appropriate participation on the world stage. And I think I'll just – I'll leave it at –

QUESTION: Do you have any sort of concerns of China trying to influence these countries that have official ties with Taiwan?

MS NAUERT: I think we recognize overall the importance worldwide of development and infrastructure and the need to improve infrastructure all over the world, whether it's on the African continent, in South America, you name it. We like to emphasize to all countries that they have a sovereign right to develop on their own terms, to seek loans on their own terms that benefit those countries. This falls into sort of the sovereignty category, that they have a right to choose that, but one thing that we certainly caution other countries around the world – we believe that those terms need to be transparent and fair.

QUESTION: Heather?

MS NAUERT: Hey, John. Go right ahead.

QUESTION: Can I follow up on the same question?

MS NAUERT: Go ahead. No, go ahead. That's okay.

QUESTION: John.

MS NAUERT: Yeah.

QUESTION: Thank you, Heather. Thank you for the nice recognition. I have three brief questions.

MS NAUERT: I just want to see the glasses thing.

QUESTION: Okay

MS NAUERT: Yeah.

QUESTION: Here you go.

MS NAUERT: Yeah. Yeah, that, that. (Laughter.) I've always wanted to see that. Okay.

QUESTION: All right.

MS NAUERT: In real life. Okay, go right ahead.

QUESTION: I'll give you an exclusive performance later. (Laughter.)

MS NAUERT: I look forward to that.

QUESTION: Three questions.

MS NAUERT: Yes.

QUESTION: The State Department would be involved with any kind of meeting that the President has with President Erdogan when the UN opens its session. Is there any discussion so far of a meeting between the President and President Erdogan of Turkey?

MS NAUERT: That would be for the White House to announce if that were the case. I will be having some meetings in the coming days to learn more about what our agenda and our schedule will be. If I can get anything for you on that, I'll be sure to let you know. Today I don't have any information on that, though.

QUESTION: Yesterday, Sarah told us at the White House that while the President himself has not yet called Jair Bolsonaro, the presidential candidate in Brazil who was stabbed, other administration officials have reached out to Mr. Bolsonaro and his family to express their feelings and wish him a speedy recovery. Has anyone from the State Department called or –

MS NAUERT: I would certainly think we would have. I'm afraid I just don't have any information for you on that today, but I can look into it and get back to you with an answer.

QUESTION: Would you do that?

MS NAUERT: Yes, I'd be happy to.

QUESTION: Yeah.

MS NAUERT: (Inaudible) just take that question.

QUESTION: And finally, there's been some confusion about the President's trip to Ireland. Ireland says it is over, or so it sounded in its official statement. The White House said it's a matter of working out some scheduling glitches that are there. Is there going to be a trip to Ireland?

MS NAUERT: I'm not aware of that if there is or if there is not. What's our address here? 2230 C –

QUESTION: 2201.

MS NAUERT: 2201, there we go.

QUESTION: Right.

MS NAUERT: So I'm not at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, so I can't answer some of those questions.

QUESTION: Okay.

MS NAUERT: My apologies. If I get anything for you on that, I'll be sure to let you know. Okay?

QUESTION: Okay.

MS NAUERT: And I'm going to have to wrap it up. Last question, go right ahead.

QUESTION: Thank you very much. So on Taiwan, the United States cut official ties with Taiwan in 1979. So now, why countries like El Salvador should be punished or be warned because – to cut the official ties with Taiwan for the same reason the United States did in 1979?

MS NAUERT: I think – let me just go back to saying we have a relationship with Taiwan. We see it – we don't see it as particularly advantageous to revise a set of practices that have caused us to – that have enabled us, excuse me, to maintain close unofficial relations with Taipei and develop relations with Beijing. Basically, short answer is this is the kind of relationship that works for us. It doesn't necessarily work for every other government.

QUESTION: Is this something that the Chinese vice foreign minister came to State Department and discussed with Secretary Sullivan yesterday?

MS NAUERT: I don't have any readouts on that meeting now for you. Okay.

QUESTION: Heather, I need to get in two quick ones.

MS NAUERT: Sure.

QUESTION: You can't just wrap this up after half an hour. There's been a lot going on.

MS NAUERT: Oh Matt, oh Matt.

QUESTION: It's a lot of people that – look, one, there are some Taliban folk talking – well, I don't know about "folk" – there's some Taliban guys talking about a second meeting, having a second meeting with U.S. officials and discussing any number of things from – ranging from, one, prisoner exchanges to possibly power-sharing agreements. Is this something the U.S. would be interested in, having a second discussion with them?

And then my second one is about aid to Egypt.

MS NAUERT: Okay. Let me take your second question first. I don't have – I –

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

MS NAUERT: About – actually, I'll come back to Egypt. In terms of meeting with the Taliban, as you suggest that that is something that they had floated, we have no meetings to announce. We have no – nothing scheduled to announce for you at this time. We're ready to work with the people of Afghanistan, the Government of Afghanistan, and to talk to the Taliban all together to bring an end to the conflict. As I addressed at the top of this, we've been engaged in Afghanistan for 17 long years. The United States has made serious efforts, contributions, has experienced loss of life, of course, with so many service members having served their country very nobly in Afghanistan. That doesn't compare to the number of Afghans that have been lost in 17 years of war there. It is important that any peace conversations, any peace talks remain Afghan-led and Afghan-owned. Our role is to support the Government of Afghanistan.

QUESTION: And then on Egypt real quick. On Friday, you guys informed Congress that you were planning to obligate 1.2 billion in foreign military financing and military aid for Egypt. On Saturday, an Egyptian court sentenced a whole raft of people to death and extremely lengthy prison terms for taking place in protests, including an American citizen. And I'm wondering how you square the two. I mean, was the U.S. – did the U.S. know or have any idea in advance that these convictions were going to be coming? Because this kind of assistance had been held up in the past due to human rights concerns, and it would seem to me that these convictions would be a human rights concern. And it would seem to me that, at least on the face of it, unless there's some deal going on behind the scenes, that this is kind of a slap in your – slap to your face.

MS NAUERT: Well, among the convictions that you're speaking about – you had a citizen – Moustafa Kassem is one of them. And we are deeply concerned about his conviction and his sentencing. He's a U.S. citizen.

His case has been raised repeatedly with the Egyptian Government. We remain in communication with Mr. Kassem and his attorney about his case. The Department of State takes very seriously its responsibilities to assist U.S. citizens abroad. He, of course, is among those, and we will continue providing appropriate consular services and continue our conversations with the government about that case.

QUESTION: But you – so there's no link between this aid – this assistance being released and – again, you don't see a link between the two?

MS NAUERT: Matt, I don't have any updates for you on the aid issue. Okay? Thanks, everybody. Great to see you.

(The briefing was concluded at 4:23 p.m.)

DPB # 45

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