

Press Releases: Press Availability at the Second U.S.-Mexico Strategic Dialogue on Disrupting Transnational Criminal Organizations

Press Availability
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Deputy Secretary of State

Secretary of Homeland Security Kirstjen Nielsen, Attorney General Jeff Sessions, Mexican Foreign Secretary Luis Videgaray Caso, Mexican Secretary of Interior Miguel Angel Osorio Chong, and Mexican Acting Attorney General Alberto Elias Beltran
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DEPUTY SECRETARY SULLIVAN: Good morning. Thank you for being here. I'm glad

to participate in this second Strategic Dialogue on Disrupting Transnational Criminal Organizations, or TCOs. Secretary Tillerson and I, together with our colleagues, our new Secretary of Homeland Security, Secretary Nielsen, and Attorney General Sessions, are grateful to our friends from Mexico for making the trip to Washington to discuss this important topic this morning.

The threats we face today are increasingly complex and require a closely coordinated response, particularly given the 1,900-mile border shared by the United States and Mexico. Today's conversations build upon the very productive meetings Secretary Tillerson had in Mexico in February and in Washington in May on broadening our security cooperation to confront TCOs. It's clear that we have a reliable partner in Mexico. We continue to advance our shared goal of developing new ways to disrupt TCOs and the networks of criminal activity they perpetuate. We are strengthening cooperation with Mexico to interdict illegal transports, find and punish criminals involved in these organizations, and cut off their sources of funding.

This is a grave problem that our countries share. Deaths related to TCOs and from the drugs they peddle affect communities on both sides of our border. According to preliminary figures, more than 64,000 Americans died from drug overdose last year. The death toll from synthetic opioids alone claimed more lives than both heroin and prescription painkillers. Many of our Mexican neighbors have fallen victim to drug-related violence as well. Close collaboration is the only way we can tackle a problem that has no regard for international borders.

Today, our two countries have one of the most extensive bilateral law enforcement relationships in the world. Eleven U.S. law enforcement agencies are represented in the U.S. embassy and consulates across Mexico to work closely with their Mexican state and federal counterparts. And through the Merida Initiative, we're helping to build the capacity of Mexican law enforcement and judicial institutions. For example, we're providing Mexico with the tools to more effectively eradicate opium poppy and support enhanced border security. Our continued support for Mexico's judicial reform is bringing criminals to justice and making communities more resistant to TCO recruitment.

We've also enhanced cross-border communications to work more effectively and efficiently together. We share more information related to migration and border security, enabling us to better identify criminal threats, analyze migration trends, and reduce human smuggling on both sides of the border. And through Merida, we have provided inspection equipment, canine units trained in fentanyl detection, as well as mentorship and training for border officials.

Through this collaborate strategy, we are seeing progress. In 2016, Mexican law enforcement seized more than 13,000 kilograms of cocaine and more than 26,000 kilograms of methamphetamine destined for the United States. In addition, the Mexican Government has successfully destroyed over 136 clandestine drug laboratories. Our cooperation is making citizens on both sides of our border safer.

Today, we're discussing the ways in which we can accelerate interdiction efforts and improve our ability to measure progress in disrupting drug trafficking at every point along the way, including production, cross-border distribution, and sales. In particular, we are exploring ways to more effectively disrupt the revenue streams of TCOs. TCOs exploit a wide array of illicit activities as a means to make money, including through narcotics, smuggling, kidnapping, extortion, human trafficking, and fuel theft.

We must also go after the middlemen who benefit from these illegal activities, not just the producers at the beginning and the consumers at the end. Our respective law enforcement agencies and judicial authorities are committed to cutting off their sources of revenue. To do this successfully, we must implement new approaches that seek to improve information sharing and legal cooperation, ultimately denying revenue and seizing the assets of TCOs. TCOs are far less effective at carrying out illicit activities when their sources of revenue are dismantled. By cutting off these funding mechanisms, TCOs will lose their ability to corrupt institutions, buy sophisticated weapons, and maintain their criminal infrastructure.

Finally, we recognize that we must reduce the demand component of the drug problem here at home in the United States. As long as we continue to provide a thriving market, TCOs will keep coming to the United States. This administration refuses to ignore the problem. The United States will no longer turn the other way or sweep this issue under the rug. That is why President Trump has made a commitment to fight the opioid epidemic that has destroyed the lives of so many individuals and families throughout our country. The President has instructed agencies across the U.S. Government and even the American people themselves to do their part in curbing this tragic epidemic of addiction that continues to claim the lives of so many.

Last spring, the President created a commission to better understand and address the federal response to this epidemic and determine the most efficacious way to move forward. To facilitate these efforts, the administration has committed more than \$1 billion so that we can battle addiction and fight the opioid crisis here at home. By drying up the market for illegal drugs, we will more effectively fight TCOs and the industries that prop them up.

The United States is grateful for the strong bilateral relationship we share with our neighbors to the south. We will continue to maintain and grow our strong partnership with Mexico on this critical issue, as on so many others.

Thank you.

FOREIGN SECRETARY VIDEGARAY: Thank you very much. (Via interpreter) Thank you, Under Secretary Sullivan and Secretary Tillerson. Thank you, Attorney General Sessions, Secretary Nielsen, and of course, Secretary Osorio and Attorney General Elias and the entire teams from both countries who are working on this shared effort.

Mexico and the United States face a significant challenge and we face it together. This is a common problem. TCOs work regardless of borders, with no

acknowledgment of jurisdictions. They carry out criminal activities and cause death on both sides of the border. Thousands of Americans die due to overdoses. Thousands of Mexicans die due to the violence generated by illegal drug trafficking. And we will only be able to solve this problem by working together. This is the vision that we agreed upon here in Washington, in May of this year. And today, we are here to follow up on that vision to continue to work together in that direction.

In May, we agreed that in order to work together, we must overcome this tendency, this – the blame game that we have both assigned mutually where Mexico traditionally has blamed the U.S. for drug demand, and the U.S. blames Mexico for drug supply. We must overcome this dynamic, this mutual blame game. In order to do this, we need trust. We need hard work. It means we need effective actions, and that is what we are doing here today.

We had a working session with specific goals in mind in order to comprehensively deal with the entire business model of TCOs, from supply and production out in the fields to the financial and distribution retail networks in the United States. Only by attacking this chain at every point along the way will we be successful in eliminating this scourge which is harming both countries.

We must be speedy. We must be specific. We must have analytical abilities that are data-based, based on shared, reliable data. In the end, the idea is to trust each other in order to deal with a common problem.

I would like to thank you – I would like to thank many groups for their tireless work. These groups are not necessarily out doing their work in public, but they are doing their work every day, different agencies from both governments, who work every single day in order to get results. The effort required is huge, but we are working in that direction with a shared vision and especially with shared responsibility.

This effort must not only be based on impeding the flow of drugs from south to the north. That's a part of the fundamental effort, but it also requires that we impede – stop the illegal flow of weapons from north to south, the flow of cash. We must go after the assets of organized crime. We must stop other kinds of crimes that these organizations unfortunately commit. For example, illegal human trafficking. This effort, then, is comprehensive and we are working on this based on the premise of trust and shared responsibility.

Thank you very much.

SECRETARY NIELSEN: Good morning. It is my honor to join today with leaders from the Government of Mexico in taking on this TCO threat in the Western Hemisphere. I'd like to thank Secretary Tillerson and Deputy Secretary Sullivan for hosting us and this very important discussion.

Today we are talking about TCOs, and specifically continuing the work that we have begun in the spring to address this growing threat. TCOs are responsible for some of the gravest threats to our homeland security today, and the

Department of Homeland Security takes this very seriously.

TCOs move drugs, weapons, counterfeit goods, and traffic and smuggle people, throughout their dark and dangerous networks. These TCOs are also responsible for devastating violence on both sides of the border, as you've heard in the previous remarks. I was at the border in Texas just yesterday and was briefed on the very violent chaos that occurs on both sides of our borders due to the networks and our inability currently to completely stop their activities.

But we must stop them, and together we will. We are mutually committed. We have discussed that this morning so far, and I look forward to continuing discussions as the day goes on. Detecting, deterring, and dismantling these TCOs continues to be of utmost importance to the Trump administration. As you see here, we have multiple departments committed to working with the Government of Mexico towards this end. It's certainly a priority for me.

The United States is proud to call Mexico its partner in targeting this threat in production and distribution networks not only throughout Mexico and the United States, but throughout Central America. Together we can be leaders in the entire region to combat this threat.

Today, I am proud to say that Secretary Osorio Chong and I will sign a memorandum of cooperation to fully implement the Criminal History Information Sharing Program. Through this program, our U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement will be able to provide Mexico with the U.S. criminal history of repatriated Mexicans. The agreement we will sign today will transition to a biometric-based platform so that ICE can share biometric data, notice of more than 350 conviction codes, and any known gang affiliations with our Mexican counterparts and partners.

By sharing information and resources and increasing detection and the interdiction of illegal goods, we are combatting the TCOs that threaten the security of all of our communities. Secretary Tillerson, the Attorney General, Deputy Secretary Sullivan, and I are committed to continuing this work to strengthen and expand our efforts, and to make our nations more secure.

I thank you all for your time today and for being here for this important discussion. And particularly, our partners from the Government of Mexico for joining us today. Thank you.

INTERIOR SECRETARY OSORIO: (Via interpreter) Good morning, everyone. Thank you to our hosts. Under Secretary of State, I would like to congratulate again the Secretary of DHS, the U.S. Attorney General, our minister of foreign affairs, our attorney general, and the delegations of both countries, as well as representatives from the media.

As has been mentioned before, today we are here again to meet in order to evaluate and analyze our efforts when it comes to fighting against TCOs. This is possible due to the work that has been done in the last few months by our government departments and our agencies in order to strengthen cooperation mechanisms while we face common security problems. We have been able to,

first of all, come together in a space of agreement and make progress based on this agreement, and I mean the need to have a more comprehensive, equitable approach.

Just as in any dialogue, there are many different proposals and viewpoints exchanged. But I must say that when it comes to our bilateral agenda, there is more that unites us than what divides us. The security of our people is the higher good for both administrations. This is how, for decades now, Mexico and the U.S. have worked together in order to build a more stable, secure region. And in that regard, we do have shared experience and much knowledge.

Today is clear that it is not only via the use of force and punitive measures that will allow us to put an end to organized crime and drugs; rather, this is an extremely complex problem with economic, social, financial, and logistical aspects involved that call on us to strengthen our efforts as governments. And doing this together is the only way we can coordinate our actions and be more effective. As those who spoke before me have said, it is a matter of creating more responses from a market-based perspective, restricting financing, and the weapons of criminal organizations. It is also a matter of reducing their logistical capacity and bringing down considerably the level of drug use from a public health perspective.

As for Mexico, Mexico reaffirms its strong commitment to continue in these efforts in order to strengthen institutions, especially at the local level, as a path forward in order to find lasting security. This fight has been especially difficult and painful for Mexico. We cannot forget the victims that this scourge has left behind. There has been a tremendous amount of sacrifice and effort, especially on behalf of our soldiers, our navy, our police officers. And we must not let our guard down, and we must especially not allow for impunity because there can be no peace where there is no justice, and there will be no justice unless this is in a sphere of legality.

In that regard, we have been able to design solutions to the problems that we face as a region. In order to do this, we might – we must act as sovereign countries, but we also must be good neighbors, and we must work on a basis of shared responsibility based on dialogue and international cooperation. And we must always think of the wellbeing of our societies. This is our higher interest and this is what must be held above any other interest today.

It is a pleasure, again, to participate in this dialogue, and we hope that there will be positive outcomes from this dialogue between our two countries. Thank you very much.

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Thank you. Now, does it work?

I am pleased to be here today. I am thankful that Secretary Tillerson and Secretary Nielsen have set this meeting up. They had a previous one in Mexico. I would note that Secretary Nielsen hits the ground running in her new position. She was at that meeting because she was Secretary Kelly's chief of staff and remained that in the White House. So she fully understands the challenges that we are facing and the importance of the Department of

Homeland Security that she leads.

We are facing a unprecedented drug crisis in America, perhaps the entire world. We have never seen the deaths that we are seeing today. 64,000 people died last year from drug overdose deaths. We've never seen those numbers before, or anything like it. The fastest part of that, the growing part of that, is heroin and fentanyl, the synthetic opioids. And we are taking strong action throughout our United States Government to confront that. President Trump has declared that we face a national emergency, and this government will not accept these trends. And we are determined to reduce these trends.

I had the privilege of being in Mexico for a trilateral – excuse me – in Colombia last week at a trilateral discussion of these problems – Colombia, Mexico, and the United States. Attorney General Elias from Mexico represented Mexico at that delegation. We know we can do better. And as the Secretary Videgaray mentioned, it's an attack – it must be an attack on the entire distribution network, from the production to the manufacture to the distribution to the actual sale in our communities and on our streets. All of that, if done effectively, can begin to reverse these trends.

We're seeing in the United States greater availability of drugs, lower prices for drugs, and greater purity of the drugs that we see. That makes them more addictive and more attractive. People talk about demand and supply; demand can create a supply, and supply can create a demand. I think we are heading in the wrong direction on both of those issues.

So it is a pleasure for me to be here. We discussed, under the leadership of Secretary Kelly and Nielsen and our Mexican colleagues, some concrete ways that we can make this better. And that's what we intend to do. Our Drug Enforcement Administration, our FBI, our ATF, and our entire team at Department of Justice are committed to this effort. And I believe that we can and will be successful. Actually, the President sent us three executive orders when I became Attorney General; one of them was to dismantle transnational criminal organizations, and that's what we intend to do.

MR ELIAS: (Via interpreter) Good morning. And to Secretary Sullivan, Secretary Nielsen, Attorney General Sessions, Secretary Videgaray and Osorio, good morning. We obviously are facing a problem from TCOs in both countries, but in order to combat this phenomenon, it is quite obvious that we must attack it in all its business model, as mentioned by our foreign minister. But to do so in an effective manner, we have to destroy its financial structures. This must be achieved by a clear sharing of information, informalized information, so that we can speedily identify all the points in the organization's value chains to affect and impact their financial structures.

It is therefore important for the Department of Justice and the Office of the Attorney General share through efficient working groups the information needed to be able attack the structures. We not only need to look at the financial aspects, but we should expand this to look at the enterprise model used by the TCOs to move their assets and resources. How can we do this? It will be by the sharing of information and data between the two countries.

This will give a major blow to these organizations, something that is needed by the societies of both of our countries. Thank you very much.

MS NAUERT: Good morning. We'll now take some reporter questions. We have one question per principal, please; we don't have time for follow-ups. We'll start with Nike Ching from Voice of America, and Nike, if you could please address your question to the principal. Thanks.

QUESTION: Sure. Thank you very much. My question is addressed to both sides, that if the ongoing strategic dialogue to disrupt TCO has any implication on the NAFTA talks. Specifically, has President Trump's promise to build a border wall and threats from the administration to pull out of NAFTA had a negative impact on joint security efforts? Thank you very much.

DEPUTY SECRETARY SULLIVAN: Well, the NAFTA renegotiations are ongoing, as you know. Round 6 of the negotiations is scheduled for January in Montreal. And I know our negotiators have been working diligently with their Canadian and Mexican counterparts to make progress.

The United States is committed to a comprehensive negotiation process that will upgrade our agreement and establish 21st century standards. But the NAFTA negotiations and the agreement itself are only a part of the enormous relationship between the United States and Mexico. I've spoken about this with Foreign Secretary Videgaray in Mexico City two months ago. Our relationship with Mexico – the United States relationship with Mexico – is so broad. We have a common history, a shared border, a long history of shared culture. The volume of our trade is enormous, almost – \$600 billion a year, last year. That's \$1.6 billion a day. We're working hard to upgrade and improve NAFTA, which is an important part, but only part of our relationship with Mexico.

MODERATOR: (Via interpreter) I now give the floor to Armando Guzman of Television Azteca.

QUESTION: Secretary Videgaray, I'll ask you in English and also repeat briefly in Spanish. The cooperation between the two countries in this matter has been long and high for many years. But now there is a talk because the two countries are friends and are partners. But now there is talk on this side of the border of building a wall, and also there is a talk of canceling the long partnership about NAFTA. And I wonder if this situations will affect directly this high cooperation between the two countries, and if that has been talked between the participants on this meeting, and if that has been clear for both sides of this meeting as well.

(Via interpreter) I am briefly repeating in Spanish there is great friendship and partnership between the two countries and trade relations are also important between the two. But now, with talks about building a wall and ending NAFTA, I'd like to know if this could have an impact on the partnership and the way in which these two friends and partners address the problem. Thank you.

FOREIGN SECRETARY VIDEGARAY: (Via interpreter) Thank you, Armando. Let me be

absolutely clear on the matter. Mexico cooperates with the United States when it comes to security because that is in Mexico's best interest. We work together with the United States to combat TCOs, defending the security of Mexicans, because that is in Mexico's interest. Therefore, cooperation occurs, not as part as a barter or an exchange between economic aspects or security or anything else; we do it with the clear conviction that this is in the interest of Mexico and the Mexicans.

That is why we are here. We are here while the commercial negotiations are ongoing and the leadership of the secretariat of commerce – while this takes place, we are also meeting here. We are here to defeat these TCOs that on a daily basis threaten the lives of thousands of U.S. citizens and thousands of Mexicans. In Mexico it can be the army, navy, soldiers, but also many young people involved in organized crime. We are convinced that this is a transnational phenomenon, that we can only vanquish definitively if we work together as a team with shared trust and vision with the Government of the United States.

MS NAUERT: Next question to Luis from the Associated Press.

QUESTION: Thank you. Good morning. I'm Luis Alonso with the AP. Thank you for this opportunity. I would like to ask the U.S. side how the U.S. evaluates Mexican efforts to fight illegal trafficking of fentanyl that you particular mention it. What percentage of the U.S.-bound fentanyl come from Mexico? And also in a more general sense, I would like to get your opinion because it seems that violence related to organized crime is rising this year in Mexico. Is the strategy working? What changes need to be made?

(Via interpreter) What I asked of the United States is how they assess Mexico's efforts to combat illegal fentanyl. I don't know if you would also like to touch on that topic. And in general terms about the strategy there, indicators that seem to show that organized crime violence has increased this year. What changes are needed to the strategy to revert that trend? Thank you.

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Well, fentanyl is – originally started mostly from China. It's being sent in by mail directly to the United States. A considerable amount has been shipped to Mexico and then enters across the border in some fashion from Mexico. We are also seeing precursor chemicals in Mexico and manufacturing labs begin to develop in Mexico. So one of the priorities I would like to see us do is to nip that in the bud, stay very intensely focused on those laboratories, and make sure that it does not become a big problem in the future.

The fentanyl is so deadly, as you probably know. The biggest increase in deaths in the United States is from the fentanyl. Just the slightest miscalculation in the amount of fentanyl a person consumes can result in death and is resulting in death, so I believe we can make real progress there.

And the second part of your question?

QUESTION: The general strategy. The violence is continuing to rise.

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Yeah.

QUESTION: What needs to be adjusted?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Violence is a product of wealth, it's a product of power that comes with it, the ability to be outside the law. It threatens whole nations and the ability of those nations to function in a sovereign way. I think it's all of our responsibilities to do all we can to reduce this threat that comes from these cartels. They cannot go to court to enforce their decisions. They do it by the barrel of a gun, and death and destruction always arises from more and more powerful cartels.

MODERATOR: (Via interpreter) We now have a question from Jose Lopez Zamorano from Notimex.

QUESTION: (Via interpreter) Thank you. I have a question for the secretary. The U.S. Congress has approved the bill 336 showing that Mexico is a partner for the United States, but we also see it in the concerns in these countries about the impact it may have on cooperation for security if the United States decided – decides to abandon NAFTA. There are also reports that the United States is also going to shift funds – for instance, payment to the DHS agency and from technology, and to use it to build the wall. What impact will this have on the bilateral impact if the United States go ahead – goes ahead with the plan for the wall and if it eventually drops NAFTA?

INTERIOR SECRETARY OSORIO: (Via interpreter) From the beginning of the presidency of Enrique Pena Nieto, one of his objectives and priorities was security. There is no collateral circumstance that can impact this seeking of peace and calm in our country. As the foreign minister pointed out, we are here to continue building on communication, on coordination, on joint efforts that go beyond the aspects of our relationship with the United States. We always do this thinking about the security of Mexican citizens, as must be done likewise in the defense of U.S. citizens by this country. Therefore, it will not have an impact on our effort or on our work and what has been started by this administration, and we will continue on this path.

Now, obviously, it is important to continue with collaboration and cooperation. Why would Mexico or the United States only think about eradication or shutting down laboratories if our countries were to continue having problems in the transfer and transport of drugs and its consumption? It would be pointless for Mexico to pursue a process to identify and capture criminals if we don't have any information on the financial and logistic chains of the criminal groups here in the United States. Both sides are interested in obtaining information and data, so over and above any other interest, we must always place the security of the people we serve, and we will continue forward with that basic goal and objective for the government of the republic.

MS NAUERT: Dave Clark from AFP.

QUESTION: Good morning. Thank you very much. It's a question primarily for the U.S. side. Last week, Mexican journalist Emilio Gutierrez Soto was arrested in Texas. He's now in El Paso and he's going – his asylum has been denied. He's facing expulsion. Obviously, the TCO, as you're talking about today, find the activities of a free press annoying. Otherwise, they wouldn't have killed 11 Mexican journalists this year and many more in years previous. What can be done to protect journalism and civil society? And are you confident that if you go ahead with this expulsion and others that these journalists will be safe as they carry out their work? Thank you.

SECRETARY NIELSEN: Thank you. I would just start by saying that border security is a full system of systems, and the security of both our nations is in both of our interests. I think what we've talked about today are all of the things that can not only cross the border, but because of that, the violence that is caused, how it can affect other parts of both of our societies including the media, the social press, and the nongovernmental organizations who try to help combat these threats.

What we've talked about today are ways that we can further share information. We'll continue to do that. As I mentioned earlier, the agreement on sharing criminal information specifically is meant to help both sides better understand that threat picture, and perhaps to understand who is targeted by that violence coming out – emanating from the TCOs. So we will continue to work together; it's certainly top of mind, all the various parts of our communities that are affected by this TCO threat. And I look forward to working on further agreements to do just that.

MODERATOR: (Via interpreter) I now give the floor to Jose Diaz-Briseno from *Reforma*.

QUESTION: (Via interpreter) Good morning. Attorney General, the United States have indicated that Mexico has a record of poppy production for heroin. Has any specific agreement been reached as how the U.S. can help eradicate poppy? And they have also said they are not satisfied with the eradication achieved by the armed forces in Mexico. Has any agreement been reached?

(In English) And for Deputy Secretary Sullivan, do you have any concern regarding human rights in Mexico, considering that the Mexican congress is about to pass a very controversial domestic security law?

MR ELIAS: (Via interpreter) Thank you very much. In principle, there has not been a complaint or comment by the U.S. authorities regarding what our armed forces are doing in Mexico to eradicate the poppy fields. Quite on the contrary, we're working together on eradication. The armed forces in our country eliminate more than 44 percent of the crops. This is an important figure; we have shared it with the U.S. authorities. In addition, the law enforcement and the criminal investigation department has also focused on shutting down clandestine laboratories that can create this substance of fentanyl. We have really struck hard at these organizations, especially in Guerrero, or the Golden Triangle – the states of Chihuahua, Durango, and Sinaloa.

We continue collaborating, we continue working to identify these crops, and also to be able to assess the results achieved jointly by both the Mexican authorities and the U.S. forces. But I insist we have to work together to combat all this phenomenon of TCOs and also to hit them hard in the poppy growing. We have to hit all the organizations at all the levels of the chain. But this also has an impact in the United States. We must share information, therefore, to understand what organizations are doing in the United States so as to really achieve the dismantling of these entities. Thank you.

DEPUTY SECRETARY SULLIVAN: Thank you. Yes, on human rights, human rights is an issue that we in the United States Government discuss with our partners in the Mexican Government quite frequently. In fact, just earlier this month we had our annual dialogue with Mexico on human rights. So our relationship includes frank conversation about advancing human rights, the rule of law. That's a major part also of our Merida Initiative, is enhancing the rule of law, strengthening criminal justice and enforcement. But human rights is an important component of that, particularly press freedom and freedom for journalists. Freedom of the press is an indispensable component of a functioning democracy. And so we're concerned whenever we hear reports of journalists being targeted.

But on human rights, we have had an ongoing dialogue with our partners in Mexico on this, and we look forward to continuing that. Thank you.

MS NAUERT: And thank you, everyone. Thank you for your questions.

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