

Press Releases: Press Availability in Manila, Philippines

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Secretary of State

Sofitel Hotel
Manila, Philippines
August 7, 2017

SECRETARY TILLERSON: Good morning. Good morning, all. How's everybody's jet lag? Well, I thought I'd take a few minutes out of the series of events and give you a little bit of an oversight of what has already occurred and kind of what's coming.

Obviously, high on the agenda in the time that we've been here has been the situation with the DPRK and North Korea. And I think the strong UN Security Council resolution unanimously approved, working in coordination with China and Russia both to put out a statement from the Security Council that I think is quite clear in terms of there being no daylight among the international community as to the expectation that North Korea will take steps to achieve all of our objectives, which is a denuclearized Korean Peninsula. I think there should be no question in anyone's mind as to the common view held by everyone on that Security Council as that being the ultimate objective.

I think we also – as you well know, ASEAN released a – what I consider to be a very strong statement as well demonstrating their commitment as well to support a denuclearized Korean Peninsula – I think a statement that's probably stronger than any we've ever seen from ASEAN in terms of a view on this particular issue.

So I think two very important actions taken to hopefully send a strong message that North Korea understands the expectation of the rest of the international community going forward.

So the next steps obviously are to see that the Security Council resolution sanctions are enforced by everyone. We will be monitoring that carefully and certainly having conversations with any and all that we see who may not be fully embracing not just the spirit of those sanctions but the operational execution of those sanctions.

And we hope, again, that this ultimately will result in North Korea coming to

the conclusion to choose a different pathway, and when the conditions are right that we can sit and have a dialogue around the future of North Korea so that they feel secure and prosper economically.

We had also some very constructive conversations with our ASEAN colleagues in the U.S.-ASEAN meeting yesterday, I think, again, just continuing the strong commitment from both an economic and security standpoint but also continuing the cultural and people-to-people exchanges that exist today through a number of educational programs and other efforts that we think are important for drawing our peoples closer together.

I did have the opportunity yesterday for an exchange of views with our Chinese counterparts, and we really went through a bit of reflection on the relationship since the first summit between the two presidents at Mar-a-Lago, the creation of the four high-level dialogues between our two countries, two of which are already actively meeting – the Diplomatic and Security Dialogue and the Economic and Trading Dialogue. Both of those are very active. The two remaining dialogues that we hope to convene in the next several weeks are the Law Enforcement and Cyber Security Dialogue and the Cultural or People-to-People Dialogue. I think all four of these dialogues, which are conducted at a very high level, are really advancing our two countries' understandings of the nature of this relationship between the U.S. and China and how we should strive to strengthen this relationship so that it benefits both of our countries from an economic prosperity standpoint but also benefits the world in terms of maintaining a secure world absent of conflict.

I also had the opportunity to sit and exchange views with our Russian counterparts, Sergey Lavrov. We discussed several issues during the course of that meeting. We also had some exchange of views about the nature of the relationship between our countries, and a lot of work, obviously, that has to be done in that regard. I told the foreign minister that we had not made a decision regarding how we will respond to Russia's request to remove U.S. diplomatic personnel. We had – I asked several clarifying questions just to ensure I understood kind of their thinking behind that diplomatic note we received, but told him we would respond by September the 1st.

Later today we'll be attending, of course, the East Asian Ministers Meeting, and I intend to outline steps we'd like to see the region take on a number of emerging issues, most particularly the fight against terrorism, counterterrorism, and the recognition now of the emergence of ISIS fighting forces in the region, most particularly here in the Philippines. I think there are a number of areas of cooperation in terms of information sharing so we can track individuals, border security so that hopefully we can keep these individuals from returning, cooperation around extremists and terror financing networks and creating safe havens for terrorists. So I think, again, a significant amount of work to do within the East Asian Ministers discussions as well.

We'll also be calling for adoption of a maritime cooperation pillar within the East Asia Ministerial Meeting, and this is really to better coordinate maritime activities in this region both from the standpoint of security, but again, border patrols in areas of illegal fishing and ensuring that we're

coordinated in terms of ensuring that fishing regulations and norms are being followed, and then an environmental effort around the significant amount of plastic debris, obviously, that litters the oceans and how we can better coordinate a response to that challenge as well.

I do want to express my appreciation to the Philippines, the Government of the Philippines, for hosting this series of ASEAN meetings and the opportunity for some very useful and productive bilaterals. Again, I think these annual sessions serve a really important platform for all of us to convene here in Southeast Asia and the Pacific and exchange views on a number of issues, obviously, of mutual interest.

So let me stop there, and I'm happy to take questions.

MODERATOR: Josh.

QUESTION: Thank you, Secretary Tillerson, for doing this. On North Korea, I'm wondering if you can discuss more specifically what the exact preconditions are for the U.S. to engage in the type of talks that you said we'd ultimately would like to have with them. And given that these new sanctions are going to take a while for them to have a desired economic effect and we're under a time crunch with North Korea's rapid development of this technology, how can you be confident that these sanctions will change North Korea's calculus before it's too late?

SECRETARY TILLERSON: Well, the best signal that North Korea could give us that they're prepared to talk would be to stop these missile launches. We've not had an extended period of time where they have not taken some type of provocative action by launching ballistic missiles. So I think that would be the first and strongest signal they could send us is just stop, stop these missile launches. Obviously, we have other means of communication open to them, to certainly hear from them if they have a desire to want to talk.

In terms of these most recent round of sanctions, I think your point is well taken that when do these actually have a practical bite on their revenues. I think perhaps the most – the more important element of that is just the message that this sends to North Korea of how unacceptable the entire international community finds what they're doing to be. And I think also it sends a strong message to two parties that we think can have some influence on how the North Koreans come to grips with the reality of what they're facing, that being China and Russia. So I think their – again, their support for the Security Council resolution itself I think also sends a message. But I think the world is also expressing a view to China and Russia that we do have an expectation that you will do everything you possibly can to help North Korea understand the reality of the future as well and bring them to the negotiating table.

MODERATOR: Carol.

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, you've been very supportive of the talks with Russia saying two nuclear-powered superpowers must work together. How would you respond to critics who say that you are appeasing the Russians and despite

their past attacks and ongoing attacks on Western democracy and you are seeking cooperation instead of deterring it?

SECRETARY TILLERSON: Well, it's a combination of both. And I think the question, in our view, is one of, again, being very pragmatic about the situation where you have the two largest nuclear powers in the world that do have a number of issues between us, obviously. And Russian meddling in the elections is – was certainly a serious incident. We talked about it in the discussion we had with Minister Lavrov yesterday and trying to help them understand just how serious this incident had been and how seriously it had damaged the relationship between the U.S., the American people, and the Russian people, that this had created serious mistrust between our two countries and that we simply have to find some way to deal with that.

Now, having said that, we also have very important national security interests in the Middle East, in Syria. We have important national security interest in Afghanistan and that region of the world. And we have serious needs to begin to address the situation in Ukraine. The Russians have indicated some willingness to begin to talk with us about a way forward on Ukraine. As you well know, we've appointed a special envoy to engage with Russia but also coordinating with all of the parties so that this is full visibility to all the parties, that we're not trying to cut some kind of a deal on the side that excludes their interests in any way.

So I think we're just – we view the relationship from a very pragmatic point of view. And the fact that we want to work with them on areas that are of serious national security interest to us while at the same time having this extraordinary issue of mistrust that divides us, that's just what we in the diplomatic part of our relationship are required to do. And so I don't think it is useful to just cut everything off over one single issue. I think, again, these are two very large countries, and we should find the places that we can work together. Let's try to work together. The places we have our differences, we're going to have to continue to find a way to address those.

MODERATOR: Kylie.

QUESTION: Secretary, you said earlier to Josh that preconditions for North Korea would be stopping missile launches. So how long do they need to stop those missile launches for in order to have conversations? And do they need to dismantle – say that they're going to dismantle their nuclear program?

And then one question on the Philippines here. You have said that you support the Philippines in fighting ISIS, but how do you do that without endorsing the human rights abuses of President Duterte in his war on drugs?

SECRETARY TILLERSON: With respect to the North Korean missile launches, we'll know it when we see it. We're not going to give someone a specific number of days or weeks. This is really about the spirit of these talks, and they can demonstrate they're ready to sit with a spirit of finding a way forward in these talks by no longer conducting these missile tests. So this is not a give me 30 days and we're ready to talk. It's not quite that simple. So it is all about how we see their attitude towards approaching a dialogue with us.

With respect to the assistance we're providing the Philippines Government to respond to ISIS, there is – there really is no, I think, contradiction at all in the support we're giving them in the fight down in Marawi and Mindanao. As you know, most of what we're providing them is information, some surveillance capabilities with some recent transfers of a couple of Cessnas and a couple of UAVs to allow them to have better information in which to conduct the fight down there. We're providing them some training and some guidance in terms of how to deal with an enemy that fights in ways that is not like most people have ever had to deal with.

So it is – it's a tragic situation down there. We think they are beginning to get that situation under control, but the real challenge is going to come with once they have the fighting brought to an end how to deal with the conditions on the ground and ensure it does not re-emerge. And so I think our – bringing our knowledge of having dealt with this enemy in other parts of the world is useful to them, and I think that is also in our national security interest as well. But I see no conflict, no conflict at all in our helping them with that situation and our views of other human rights concerns we have with respect to how they carry out their counternarcotics activities.

MODERATOR: Our last question, Dave.

QUESTION: Thank you very much, Mr. Secretary. On the situation in Afghanistan, obviously, the administration is reviewing its policy. Where are we on that now?

SECRETARY TILLERSON: We've had now three sessions within the National Security Council exploring a full range of options. And when I say a full range of options, I mean the entire landscape. And I think it's – I think this is reflective of the deliberations that we want to undertake. The President is asking, I think, some very, very pointed questions, and they are good questions. They were the right questions that he should be asking, and perhaps these are questions that no one's been willing to raise in the past.

And so with his – with the questions that he's asked us, we want to give him good, thorough answers and good, thorough analysis to go with that, a very clear-eyed view, a very realistic view of what the future is likely to look like. And I think that's a lot of what the President and the Vice President – and I want to – I also want to acknowledge the Vice President has taken a very active role in these discussions as well with the Security Council, and he'd been very helpful in helping the Security Council navigate what are some really tough questions that have been put to us.

And I think we want to take the time to do the analysis, a fully integrated analysis from the Intel Community to the military planners to the diplomatic channels as to how does this all play out and where does this go. It's one thing to say we're just going to keep fighting because we're – there is no other option. There are always other options.

And so that's what the President has asked us to fully explore, and I think the fact that we're taking our time to try to come to a solution that is realistic, is – takes a clear view of what we're dealing with on the ground,

and being very honest with ourselves about expectations of the future, I think that is – that serves the American people's interest well. This is a very, very – as you know, a tough area, 16 years, 17 years we've been at it now. To just say we're going to keep doing what we've been doing, the President is not willing to accept that, and so he is asking some tough questions, and the Security Council is working diligently to give him the best answers we can.

MODERATOR: Thank you, everybody. Thank you very much.

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