

Press Releases: Previewing Secretary Pompeo's Participation in the 2018 Australia-U.S. Ministerial Consultations

Special Briefing
Senior State Department Official
Via Teleconference
July 19, 2018

MODERATOR: Thank you, and thank you, everyone. Good afternoon. Thank you for joining our second call today. We are very pleased to have with us a senior State Department official to discuss Secretary Pompeo's participation in the 2018 Australia-U.S. Ministerial Consultations in Palo Alto. For your reference purposes only and not for reporting, our speaker today – and we welcome him – is [Senior State Department Official]. From this point forward we'll refer to him as a senior State Department official. He will have brief remarks at the top, and then we'll take questions from you. As a reminder, this call is embargoed until the end of the call.

So with that, I'll turn it over to our speaker. Thank you.

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: Thank you. And thanks, everybody, for listening in today. We will be holding the U.S.-Australian Ministerial meeting in Palo Alto, California on the 23rd and 24th of this month, next Monday and Tuesday. The Secretaries of State and Defense will be hosting Australian Minister of Foreign Affairs Julie Bishop and Minister for Defense Marise Payne for this two-day program.

This is an annual event held in alternating capitals depending on the year. We are host this year. We picked San Francisco not just because it's a little change of pace but, in fact, it is the location where the ANZUS Treaty was signed in 1951. So there's a certain symbolic gesture there, and it's a fitting reminder of what close alliance partners we've been for all these years since 1951 and what a tremendous contribution we've made as partners in this alliance to the peace and stability of the Indo-Pacific region.

So of course, this year there have been a number of major kind of policy statements that have been issued. We put forth a National Security Strategy and our Indo-Pacific Strategy, and on the Australian side, of course, they issued their Foreign Policy White Paper back in November. And this event on Monday and Tuesday provides us with an excellent opportunity to just

coordinate with Australia all of the relevant policies and programs that we will be using over the coming years under these programmatic guidelines to promote the rules-based order, effective governance, free and fair reciprocal trade, high-standard principles, infrastructure in the region, encouraging private-sector-led growth, and ensuring that we have appropriate development and connectivity projects throughout the region that meet high international standards.

Of course, we'll be discussing issues including the DPRK and ongoing talks that we have with the DPRK. We'll be discussing China, where, of course, we are seeking to advance a very pragmatic but principled relationship with China that takes into account their helpfulness on certain core international issues, including the DPRK, while still holding Beijing to account for violations of international law and norms when that occurs. We'll continue to be talking about how we promote trade that is free, fair, and reciprocal, specifically with regard to China, and make sure that we can do our best to ensure that China aligns itself with these fundamental principles that we have.

Again, there is always a fairly large security element to the discussions that we have, and we will be looking at both threats and opportunities throughout the Indo-Pacific region and globally as well. So of course, with Australia, close alliance partners, we've been working closely in Iraq and Syria for some time now, where we seek the total defeat of ISIS. And we're going to use AUSMIN to coordinate closely on policies that can help us defeat that radical group and other means to intercept foreign terrorist fighters, counter violent extremism, at the same time while we work to help rebuild and stabilize vulnerable areas such as Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan.

So I think with that kind of general start, maybe we'll open it up for questions and see what we can do to elaborate a little bit.

MODERATOR: Thank you very much, sir. We'll now move to our first question.

OPERATOR: Just a reminder, it is *1 if you'd like to queue up.

First up we have Conor Finnegan of ABC News. Your line is open. Mr. Finnegan, you may want to check a mute button.

QUESTION: Hey, yeah, I apologize. I was actually on the other call that I had dialed in. Sorry about that.

MODERATOR: Okay. We'll go to the next question, please.

OPERATOR: We have Lalit Jha of PTI. Your line is open.

QUESTION: Hi, thank you for doing this. So I have a question about the quad. What aspects of quad you expect to be discussed during this ministerial?

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: I think it will publicly come up in the course of the discussions. We've been encouraged by the two quad meetings that have taken place at the assistant secretary level to date, and we look forward to continuing holding these meetings. We believe it's a constructive

way for likeminded nations in the region to have a chance to share views and to coordinate to the extent possible to ensure that we reach our mutual objectives in the region.

And as I said, you know that our fundamental objectives are laid out in our Indo-Pacific strategy, and I think whether it's Australia, the United States, Japan, or India, we all have some very close-held, very similar views on the fundamental importance of maintaining a rules-based system and international norms, our commitment to free and open markets, all these things. So naturally, we'll have a chance in the course of the bilateral to discuss a way ahead on continuing to ensure that the quad discussions remaining very useful and productive.

MODERATOR: Thank you. We'll move to the next question.

OPERATOR: Thank you. Once again, it is *1 to queue up here for us. Next we go to Cameron Stewart of *The Australian* newspaper. Your line is open.

QUESTION: Hi, [Senior State Department Official]. Thanks for doing this. I wanted to ask you a bit more about China and trade, please, because obviously you talk about the free, fair, and reciprocal trade. Australia is not a fan of the tariff tensions currently at the moment. Where do you see a sort of meeting of the minds on this issue?

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: Well, I think the meeting of the minds is that at the fundamental analytical level of what the problem is, and the fundamental problem with regard to China, is that it's kind of a neo-mercantilist approach. You can see it in its drive for creation of excess capacity which therefore flows out into the rest of the world and distorts the markets and creates significant problems for market-based systems. I think there is shared views on the importance of getting China to stop its theft and forced transfer of intellectual property and to get it to adhere to higher standards for the protection of intellectual property. This is a core concern for any advanced country, and it's certainly a core concern for Australia and the United States.

MODERATOR: Thank you. We'll take the next question.

OPERATOR: We have Owen Churchill of South China. Your line is open.

QUESTION: Hi there, [Senior State Department Official]. Thanks for this. I wanted just to follow on from that last question, whether or not there will be, on the subject of resuming the talks with China with regard to the trade standoff, whether that will be addressed in next week's meetings.

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: Could you repeat that, please?

QUESTION: Hi there, yes. My question is just following on from the previous question regarding whether or not the subject of resuming trade talks with China will be addressed next week during the meetings.

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: I don't think we're specifically addressing trade in an in-depth way. We don't have trade ministers attending. So that –

probably a more detailed discussion on that will probably be – take place between USTR and the relevant trade minister, Minister Ciobo. A separate event.

MODERATOR: Thank you. We'll go to the next question now.

OPERATOR: Certainly. Again, *1 if you have any questions for us. Next we have Peter Mitchell of Australian Associate. Your line is open.

QUESTION: Hi, yeah. I was wondering if we can expect an announcement on the U.S. ambassador to Australia at AUSMIN next week.

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: Thanks for that question. I don't believe there will be an announcement. I'm not aware that there will be an announcement. What I can assure you is that the White House and the Department of State are working very assiduously on identifying an appropriate candidate for that position, and it's one of the top positions that the administration is focused on, on making sure we have the best candidate possible to fill that post as soon as possible.

MODERATOR: All right. Well, with that, I think we will conclude. There are no more questions in queue. And we thank you very much for joining us today. Thank you to our speaker, and the embargo is now lifted. Enjoy the rest of your afternoon. Thank you.

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