

Press Releases: Previewing Secretary Pompeo's Upcoming Trip to Kuala Lumpur, Singapore, and Jakarta

Special Briefing
Senior State Department Official
Via Teleconference
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MODERATOR: Thank you very much, and good morning everyone. Thank you for joining us for today's background call on Secretary Pompeo's upcoming trip to Kuala Lumpur, Singapore, and Jakarta. We're pleased that we are joined today by [Senior State Department Official]. For purposes of this call, he will be referred to as a senior State Department official. As a reminder, today's call is on background and will be embargoed until the conclusion of the call.

So with that, I'm happy to turn it over to our senior State Department official for some brief opening remarks, and then we'll take your questions. Sir.

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: Good morning. Delighted to talk to you all about Secretary Pompeo's imminent travel to Southeast Asia. He is going out to the region this week for a series of bilateral and multilateral meetings to advance the security of the United States and the region, underscore our support for the rules-based order, reaffirm our commitment to friends and allies, and demonstrate our robust engagement in the Indo-Pacific region.

Yesterday, the Secretary gave a speech at the Indo-Pacific Business Forum right here in Washington laying out the administration's economic vision for a free and open Indo-Pacific rooted in respect for sovereignty, the rule of law, and sustainable prosperity. Secretary Pompeo will echo those themes while on this trip.

A key destination for the trip is Singapore. Singapore is the 2018 chair of ASEAN, and in that capacity plays a convening role for four separate multilateral gatherings, annual gatherings, that Secretary Pompeo will attend with his foreign minister counterparts from across the Indo-Pacific.

First, the Secretary himself chairs the Lower Mekong Initiative Ministerial Meeting, at which he will reinforce our partnership on transboundary cooperation with the five Lower Mekong partner countries. These include Burma, Cambodia, Thailand, Laos, and Vietnam. The discussions include many topics, as well as water resource management, which is quite timely, given

the recent dam tragedy in Laos and severe flooding in Burma. And we, of course, offer our condolences to the peoples of both of those countries.

Next, in a ministerial meeting with the 10 member-states of ASEAN, Secretary Pompeo will co-chair a meeting and underscore the importance of our strategic partnership with ASEAN, highlight our commitment to this entity and ASEAN centrality, and address various regional security and partnership economics.

Next, in the East Asia Summit, or EAS ministerial, Secretary Pompeo will meet his 17 counterparts to address the region's most critical security challenges, including the denuclearization of the DPRK, the contested South China Sea, terrorism, maritime and cyber security, and the crisis in Rakhine State, among other topics. Both this U.S.-ASEAN meeting and the EAS meeting help advance respective summits at the leaders level that will take place in Singapore in November.

Finally, at the ASEAN Regional Forum, Secretary Pompeo will work with his 26 counterparts from across the region to establish practical cooperation to address nontraditional security threats, including cooperation on humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. Also quite timely, given several natural disasters recently in Southeast Asia.

During the period of August 3rd through the 4th – Friday and Saturday in Singapore – Secretary Pompeo will also have the opportunity to meet with his hosts, Singaporean Prime Minister Lee and Foreign Minister Balakrishnan, to reinforce our bilateral strategic partnership and discuss shared security and economic priorities, including our longstanding cooperation to build capacity across the sub-region.

On his way to Singapore, Secretary Pompeo will stop in Malaysia to meet on August 3rd with Prime Minister Mahathir, following his historic election and a peaceful transition of authorities in Malaysia recently. This will bolster our comprehensive partnership with Malaysia on many shared interests, including trade and counterterrorism.

On the return trip, Secretary Pompeo will stop in Indonesia to meet with President Jokowi and Foreign Minister Retno to reaffirm our Comprehensive Strategic Partnership and our multidimensional bilateral relationship with the world's third-largest democracy. Indonesia also assumes a role on the UN Security Council in January 2019, and we look forward to discussing mutual interests in the United Nations while in Jakarta.

With that, I would be delighted to take questions.

MODERATOR: Thank you very much. We'll go to our first question now.

OPERATOR: Thank you. And just a reminder, if you wish to ask a question, please press * then 1. And our first question comes from the line of Matthew Lee with Associated Press. Please, go ahead.

QUESTION: Hi there. Thank you. I've got two very brief ones. One is that ever since the President's comments yesterday about he's willing to speak with the Iranians and the Secretary's meeting with the Omani foreign minister, whose

country has been a liaison or a facilitator of U.S.-Iran talks in the past, and the fact I guess also that Zarif is going to be in Singapore, is expected to be there, any plans for a meeting there? And secondly, other than the talk of the East Asia ministerial on North Korea, are there any – is there any North Korea component to this trip that you have not discussed yet? Thank you.

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: Thank you, Matt. Iran is not a member of any of the multilateral gatherings that I have described, so there are no plans for any engagement with Iran. Related issues, of course – terrorism and proliferation – will be discussed at several of these meetings.

As for the DPRK, DPRK North Korea is, in fact, a member of the ASEAN Regional Forum. That gathers 27 countries, so they'll be in the room, and there will certainly be discussions about denuclearization of North Korea, as there traditionally are at these gatherings. Thank you.

MODERATOR: Thank you. And go on to the next question, please.

OPERATOR: Thank you. And our next question comes from the line of John Hudson with *Washington Post*. Please, go ahead.

QUESTION: Hi. Thanks for doing the call. As you know, the ASEAN Regional Forum has sort of historically – not since 10 years – starting in 2000, it's been a forum to meet – have ministerial meetings with the U.S. and the North Korean foreign minister. I think it's happened four times since 2000. Is the U.S. seeking a meeting with the North Korean foreign minister?

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: Thank you, John. As I noted, the DPRK is a member of this grouping, the ASEAN Regional Forum, which is terminal at the ministerial level, if you will. There are activities throughout the year, workshops, work streams and the like, and it culminates with this ministerial in Singapore. So DPRK will be in the room for that meeting, but I think it's a good opportunity for me to emphasize that our goal vis-a-vis North Korea remains the same, and that is to achieve the final, fully verified denuclearization of the DPRK, as agreed to by Chairman Kim in Singapore just a short few weeks back. And our policy from before the Singapore summit remains the policy after the Singapore summit. The only difference is that the chairman has committed to our mutual goal.

So with all of these countries in the room – they all are also members of the United Nations and have an obligation to implement UN Security Council sanctions. So there will be reminders of those obligations for those participants. Beyond that, I have nothing more to announce about any bilateral meetings there in Singapore. My focus today is on the four multilateral gatherings.

MODERATOR: Thank you very much. We'll go to the next question, please.

OPERATOR: Thank you. And as a reminder, please press * then 1 for any questions or comments. And our next question goes to the line of Lesley Wroughton with Reuters. Please, go ahead.

QUESTION: Yes, hi. Let me try this again. So we know that Iran is not part of ASEAN or anything but what about a meeting on the sidelines or something informal? That would be number one, because that would be the natural question, is: Would there be just a meeting, an informal meeting on the sidelines? The other one was when you – when – on China and trade, are there any decisions to meet with the Chinese officials to discuss the trade dispute between the U.S. and Beijing? And then while we're about it, there are reports that the Secretary could be meeting with the Turkish foreign minister in Singapore, not part of ASEAN but on the sidelines. Can you confirm that?

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: I think it'd be helpful to describe generally in terms of who's there in Singapore. The official meetings culminate in the largest gathering, the ASEAN Regional Forum, which includes 27 countries. Any other senior officials in town would be there as guests of the chair for other business. So I don't have any information to offer today on bilateral meetings, but some of the countries you cited are not part of those gatherings and so there are no plans to engage them.

With regards to any trade issues, in the context of the East Asia Summit, the U.S.-ASEAN Ministerial, and the ASEAN Regional Forum, there are certainly discussions about various countries' desires to see a region that is transparent, where trade is free and fair, and all countries have respected sovereignty and foreign policies. That's the core of our Indo-Pacific strategy. So in that regard, certainly Secretary Pompeo will be underscoring the importance of these economic and commercial elements. But the ASEAN Regional Forum and the East Asia Summit are also important gatherings to talk about security matters, and that tends to be quite prominent at those gatherings.

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

OPERATOR: Thank you, and our next question comes from the line of Nick Wadhams with Bloomberg News. Please go ahead.

QUESTION: Hi, [Senior State Department Official], thanks very much. Can you talk about whether the Secretary is concerned by this finding that North Korea may be working on new ballistic missiles, ICBMs, in a research facility in the country, and if that's something he would raise?

And then just to try to put one more point on it, you mentioned with Iran there are no plans for any engagement with Iran at this summit, but on the issue of North Korea, so you had nothing to announce about a bilateral meeting. So are you not ruling out the possibility of a bilateral with North Korea's foreign minister? Thanks.

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: Thank you, Nick. First, on any reports that you've referred to in the press recently about missile technology and pursuits, I don't have any comment, in particular no comment on matters of intelligence.

With regards to the potential encounters in Singapore, let me make a distinction. The DPRK is in the room as a member of the ASEAN Regional Forum

among these 27 countries. So there will be discussions that are inclusive of North Korea. Iran is not a member of any of these four gatherings that I've described today. So I am in a position to say there are no plans for engagement with Iran.

With regards to potential encounters, pull-asides, bilateral meetings, all of those are possible with members of the ASEAN Regional Forum, the East Asia Summit, the U.S.-ASEAN gathering. I don't have any announcements today, but it's natural to get a lot of business done, and there are chance encounters, there are sometimes planned encounters, but we're not there yet for any announcements.

MODERATOR: Thank you very much. We'll go on to the next question.

OPERATOR: And our last question comes from the line of Abigail Williams with NBC News. Please, go ahead.

QUESTION: Yes, thanks so much. My question was actually asked, but following up on my colleague's question, do you have specific concerns regarding North Korea? A lot of different reports have been coming out about violations, the transferring of fuel, the missile facility. Are there specific concerns that you hope to address with the ASEAN counterparts regarding North Korea while you're there?

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: Thank you, Abigail. I think it's a good opportunity to reiterate, from our perspective, all UN member states are required to implement UN Security Council sanctions, resolutions, and we expect them all to continue doing so. I think that will be a point that will be addressed during these gatherings as we all strive for the ultimate goal, and that is the final, fully verified denuclearization of the DPRK, as agreed to by Chairman Kim.

With regards to some of the concerns that you've raised, we too remain concerned about the scale of North Korea's illicit procurement, in particular of refined petroleum products via UN-prohibited ship-to-ship transfers. And we use these meetings as opportunities to remind all countries of their obligations and adherence of UN Security Council resolutions. These gatherings that will take place in Singapore are a very good opportunity to do that, and we will plan to do so. Secretary Pompeo will plan to do so.

MODERATOR: All right, thank you very much. Thank you all for joining us today. As a reminder, this call is on background. We will refer to our speaker as a senior State Department official. One more thing? Sorry.

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: Just in conclusion, [Moderator], if I could, I want to remind our journalists who are participating today this is not the first time for Secretary Pompeo to travel to Southeast Asia as Secretary of State. He's been to Singapore with the President and to Vietnam as Secretary of State recently. But this trip comprises three countries, very important partners, and I've already underscored the strategic opportunities presented by the multilateral gathering.

So we really look forward to all of these meetings to advance our Indo-Pacific strategy and recommit to the importance of regional cooperation. There's a lot of multilateral structure in the region. These ASEAN-centered meetings are particularly important. There's more of course – APEC and other institutions – but they are the cornerstone of a free and open region. So we'll be working with our partners bilaterally and multilaterally to create an Indo-Pacific that is secure, peaceful, and prosperous. Thank you.

MODERATOR: Thank you, sir, and thank you all for joining us. Again, this call is on background, and we will refer to our speaker as a senior State Department official. The embargo is now lifted. We wish you a wonderful afternoon. Thank you.

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