

# Press Releases: Previewing Secretary Tillerson's Participation in the Conference on Prosperity and Security in Central America

Special Briefing  
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Via Teleconference  
June 12, 2017

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**MS NAUERT:** All right. Good morning, everyone. Thanks for joining us for today's background call on Secretary Tillerson's upcoming travel to Miami. He'll be participating in the Conference on Prosperity and Security in Central America. The conference is hosted by the United States and Mexico. It will take place on June 15th and 16th, and bring together a diverse group of government and business leaders from the United States, Mexico, Central America, and other countries to address the economic, security, and governance challenges, and also opportunities, in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras.

The Secretary will attend the first day of the conference, which will focus on prosperity and economic growth. For a deeper dive into the objectives of the conference, we have two senior State Department officials with us. We're joined by John Creamer, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Cuba, Mexico, Central America, and Western Hemisphere Regional Economic Policy and Summit issues. We're also joined by William Brownfield, Assistant Secretary for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs.

Today's call will be on the record, but we're going to ask to embargo the call until just after the conclusion of that call.

And with that, I'll turn it over to our speakers, who first have some comments, and then we will take your questions.

**MR CREAMER:** Good morning. This is John Creamer, and I'd just like to provide a little bit more detail on the two days of the conference, then discuss our objectives, and then pass it over to my colleague, Assistant Secretary Brownfield.

As mentioned, day one of the conference will focus on discussing ways to improve the business climate and economic conditions to promote prosperity and job growth in the Northern Triangle countries. Day two will focus on regional security cooperation and improving citizen security and the rule of law.

Vice President Pence will deliver the keynote address on June 15th, and has stated that he looks forward to affirming the administration's support for the Northern Triangle countries, and to calling on our partners, governments, businesses, and development organizations to redouble their efforts towards achieving this common goal. Vice President Pence will also participate in bilateral meetings with President Salvador Sanchez Ceren of El Salvador, President Juan Orlando Hernandez of Honduras, and President Jimmy Morales of Guatemala.

As mentioned, Secretary Tillerson will attend the first day of the conference on June 15th. Secretary of Homeland Security John Kelly will participate in both days of the conference, and deliver remarks on day two, which focus on the security challenges facing the region. Secretary of Treasury Steven Mnuchin will also join for the first day of the conference, where he and Mexican Secretary of Finance Jose Antonio Meade will lead an economic discussion focused on the Northern Triangle countries. Their discussion will focus on tax reform, infrastructure financing, and the role of the private sector.

And in this regard, the cohosting of the conference by Mexico is crucial, since Mexico is an invaluable partner with a shared interest in improving conditions in Central America. Mexico cohosting is reflective of our close cooperation on a broad array of political, economic, and security issues.

In terms of the goals of the conference, there are four primary goals. The first is to underscore our commitment to the Northern Triangle and recognize that it will take strong leadership from the United States, Mexico, and other partners to tackle the economic, security, and governance challenges facing the region. The conference is also an opportunity for our Northern Triangle partners – Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras – to demonstrate their commitment to creating conditions that promote sustainable economic growth and improving security and governance. Through their plan of the Alliance for Prosperity, our Northern Triangle partners have made important strides on this path, and we encourage them to take further concrete action in support of these efforts.

The third goal is to identify policies to jumpstart investment in the region, promote economic growth, and improve conditions for U.S. companies operating in the Northern Triangle. This includes solutions to improve infrastructure, integrate regional energy markets, simplify and reform taxation and customs processes, and facilitate business development. The U.S., Mexican, and

Central American private sector will be an important part of these discussions, and business leaders from throughout the region will be key as we seek to identify and overcome the obstacles to economic growth.

Finally, we want to mobilize the international community to demonstrate its commitment to confronting the shared challenges we face in the region. We've invited participants from Belize, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, the European Union, Nicaragua, Panama, and Spain. The Inter-American Development Bank, International Monetary Fund, and the World Bank will also attend. Together, we are combating the root causes of instability, which has tangible benefits for U.S. security and economic interest.

I'd now like to turn it over to my colleague, Assistant Secretary Brownfield, who can address the security component of the conference in greater detail.

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY BROWNFIELD:** Thank you, Dr. Creamer. And to be brief, so as to let you all put your questions more emphatically and robustly to us, may I note that on the security day, which is Friday, we expect to have representatives at presidential and ministerial level of the three Northern Triangle governments – Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador – representatives, obviously, of the two hosts – the United States and Mexico – ministerial representatives from the other four Central American nations, as well as representatives from Canada, Chile, Colombia, the European Union, and Spain, in alphabetical order.

The agenda for the discussions focuses on three basic areas: transnational organized crime and regional cooperation; citizen security; and rule of law and justice institutions. Our starting point, ladies and gentlemen, is actually not a bad one. We have had a robust program called CARSI, the Central America Regional Security Initiative, since the year 2009, which has provided in excess of \$1.5 billion to the Central American region to address security and law enforcement issues. The United States and Colombia have, since the year 2012, cooperated in training and capacity-building through most of Central America, where Colombian national police, navy, and in some cases air force trainers provide, with U.S. support, capacity-building and training through the region. The rates of homicide, violence, and aerial – we call them air tracks for airborne drug trafficking are down in Central America and particularly the Northern Triangle over the past 12 to 24 months. And we find that our programs for place-based strategy, whereby my part of the State Department, INL, and USAID work together to attack in a holistic manner, community by community, the problems that create the root causes for out-migration from Central America are beginning to produce realities on the ground in the Northern Triangle.

What are our hopes from the security day and discussions on the 15th? First, I would say a broader partnership. It is not surprising that the European Union and Spain are participating in this conference. We have statistics that suggest that much of the product that is flowing through Central America today in trafficking routes makes a right turn and heads to Western Europe rather than proceeding north into North America.

Second, we would hope to see greater integration within Central America on

security-related issues. The three Northern Triangle governments have made a good start. They cooperate and coordinate between their attorneys general, their security forces. There are other areas where we would hope to see greater coordination and integration.

Third, we hope to see stronger and better integration of security and economic and social development issues in the Northern Triangle in the years ahead.

And fourth and finally, you can't have a conference without allowing people to offer up ideas for new or better strategies to attack the problems that have, in fact, been tormenting Central America for years and years, and we obviously are open to any suggestions that would improve what we are doing and how we are doing it.

That's my summary for day two, and with that, I turn it back to Dr. N.

**MS NAUERT:** (Laughter.) Okay, thank you. Thank you, gentlemen. We'll start with Matt Lee from the Associated Press. Matt, go ahead.

**QUESTION:** Hi, thanks a lot, guys. I have a question about the elephant in the room here, which is Cuba, particularly given the speculation about changes in policy towards that. If, Assistant Secretary Brownfield, you're right that the product that comes out of Central America turns right and goes – heads to Europe, that would put it – make it go right through Cuba. Can I ask why – recognizing this is a Central American and not a Caribbean thing, but why not invite them as an observer?

And secondly, I just want to make sure – Secretary Tillerson will only be there for the Thursday portion, is that correct?

**MS NAUERT:** Matt, let me get back to you on the Secretary's schedule.

**QUESTION:** Okay.

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY BROWNFIELD:** And Matt, I'll take the drug-related question that you have posed, which is the only basis upon which I will express a view on Cuba. The – at the end of the day, Cuba, along with most of the other nations in the Caribbean – in fact, all of them, I believe – is not participating in this Central America conference, I presume for the same reason that the other 14 or 15 Caribbean nations are not participating and the other 12 South American nations are not participating. It's not a Western Hemisphere conference. It is a Central America conference and specifically a Northern Triangle conference.

**MR CREAMER:** No, I mean, that's exactly right. The focus is on the three Northern Triangle countries and supporting them in their efforts. And in that sense, it's key players who have been engaged in Central America or who are likely to be engaged. Mexico certainly faces their shared challenge both in terms of trans-shipment of drugs as well as the issues with irregular and illegal migration from the region. They've been engaged with the Northern Triangle countries. Colombia has been engaged in terms of supporting their security efforts. Canada has been engaged, Spain, the European Union, and

then obviously the other countries in Central America beyond the Northern Triangle. So that is what basically guided the participation list in terms of the event.

**MS NAUERT:** Okay. CBS, Kylie Atwood, please.

**QUESTION:** Hey there. Thanks for doing this. I have a follow-up question on – Secretary Tillerson and Secretary Kelly made an announcement at the State Department a few weeks back regarding a comprehensive drug reduction program in the U.S. I’m wondering if we’ll get any more details on what they were thinking specifically on that and talking to partners in Central America about that.

And my second question is regarding the rate of homicide, violence, and airborne drug trafficking that you guys referenced has gone down. Do you have any statistics on those rates, just so that we specifically understand how those numbers have changed over the past year or two? Thanks.

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY BROWNFIELD:** Kylie, I’ll take a bite at both of those – this is Bill Brownfield, INL – since they both fall in my mission set.

First, several weeks ago – in fact, it was shortly after the meeting between Secretaries Tillerson and Kelly with their Mexican counterparts, Foreign Secretary Videgaray and Secretary of Government of Mexico Osorio Chong – as they offered their summary of the results of the discussion, they did talk about a new cooperation and a more cooperative approach between the governments of the United States and Mexico to the drug trafficking problem that affects both countries. And all four of these cabinet members – two U.S. and two Mexican – announced, reaffirmed, and recommitted to cooperation based upon the assumption, the correct assumption, that this is a shared problem between two countries; and both countries accepted their responsibility for it, and both countries will cooperate to address their shared problem.

At the end of the day, what Secretaries Tillerson and Kelly were talking about from their end was a commitment to address and work cooperatively with the issue of U.S. demand for drug product in the United States of America and its role in producing the drug trafficking that affects both nations.

Good question and a perfectly valid request in terms of statistics on homicide rates, violence rates, and aerial drug trafficking rates in Central America. I do hereby commit to getting you some statistics, I hope before the sun sets over the city of Washington this self-same day.

**MS NAUERT:** Okay. Thank you. Nick Wadhams from Bloomberg.

**QUESTION:** Hi, thanks. Just to go back to the elephant in the room, as Matt put it, Cuba. And there are a lot of reports out there that President Trump will announce a new Cuba policy on Friday. And John, Cuba is one of your areas, so can you talk a little bit about State’s involvement in the review process on Cuba policy? Do you anticipate a change in U.S. policy toward Cuba, and what’s your recommendation on that score? Thank you.

**MR CREAMER:** I would just note that we have been involved in a policy review

since early this year. A policy review continues. Once we have the policy review completed, the President will announce the policy at the time and place of his choosing. But right now, the review is still underway and I don't want to talk about the specifics of the review or try and prejudge its outcome.

**MS NAUERT:** Okay, thank you. VOA. Nike, please.

**QUESTION:** Thank you very much for this call briefing. A quick question on the schedule. Do you have anything on Secretary Tillerson's bilateral meetings?

And separately, I understand the 2018 budget proposal has a significant cut on the assistance to the Northern Triangle countries. Given that, how do you expect them to take the U.S. commitment to the region seriously? Thank you.

**MR CREAMER:** In terms – I mean, I think as a – in terms of U.S. engagement and support in the region, the fact that we have a conference of this magnitude involving the Vice President, three U.S. cabinet members, and numerous other U.S. Government agencies and U.S. officials shows our continued commitment to Central America and working with the Central Americans on the issues of governance, security, and development, which are critical to addressing the issues of illegal migration and criminal activity in the region, all of which adversely impact the United States. If you look at our assistance over the last two years, we've committed \$1.3 billion. In FY '17 there was an additional \$650 million. So we're talking about \$1.9 billion. The request in – for 2018 is 460 million; it's still a substantial sum of money that will be committed to working with the region.

At the same time, I would note that the emphasis, certainly, on day one of the conference is actually heavy emphasis on creating the conditions that will enable the private sector to invest more and play a role in advancing our objectives, and I think that that is critical in the medium to long-term sustainability of the efforts the Central American countries are making to address these issues. And so continued high-level U.S. engagement, continued financial support and assistance, but then also an important private sector role – we continue to take this integrated, holistic approach towards the issues in the region.

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY BROWNFIELD:** And if I could add a bit from the security side – this is now Bill Brownfield again – at the end of the day, the purpose or one of the purposes of this conference is to establish better and broader partnerships, by which I mean other governments and other countries which are, in fact, suffering some of the consequences of the security situation in Central America becoming partners in efforts to address the underlying causes; that is to say, spreading more broadly those who are prepared to contribute support and be donors in these sorts of problems – these sorts of programs.

Secondly, the effort to have a more integrated and regional approach, which, speaking as the head of a program bureau, means finding a way to get a greater and bigger bang for your buck rather than having to support seven different nations in terms of specific programs; to be able to work in a more

coherent and comprehensive fashion with all governments together, whether all seven Central American governments or the three principal Northern Triangle governments. From my perspective, this is what programming is all about. From my perspective, you all hold me accountable for getting maximum value for the dollars that are entrusted to my bureau for foreign assistance programs overseas. And your view at this stage I hope would be, "Brownfield, we hope to hear how you're going to get even greater value from the dollars that are made available to you for these programs."

**MR CREAMER:** And actually, just on the Secretary's bilateral program, he will have some bilateral meetings, but we're not in a position yet to confirm those meetings.

**MS NAUERT:** And this is Heather here just to note we can confirm that as of this time, the Secretary is planning on being there one day. That is on Thursday. Matt had asked that earlier.

Okay, let's go to Reuters. Arshad Mohammed.

**QUESTION:** Yeah, two quick questions. One, do you have any expectation, even if the Cuba policy review is still ongoing, do you have any expectation that that will be completed by the end of the week?

And secondly, to go back to the question on money, Assistant Secretary Brownfield, who – what, if any, other countries do you expect to provide additional resources to, perhaps, in part compensate for the diminution in the resources that the President's budget would entrust to you for these purposes? Who else is going to step up to the plate, do you think? Thank you.

**MR CREAMER:** The Cuba one's easy. I'm not going to speculate on whence policy review will be completed. It's already – it's gone on for a couple of months now, and it will finish when it finishes.

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY BROWNFIELD:** That's – that puts me in a position not being able to say something that simple in terms of funding, and Arshad, I am not, obviously, here in a public forum going to identify specific governments and suggest that they pony up. Instead, being a trained diplomat who has been in this business for decades – far more decades than I care to contemplate – I will offer a bit of logic and common sense: Who else might the statistics suggest are suffering from the consequences, particularly of the trafficking of illicit product, through Central America? The northern part of North America is receiving some of that trafficking, and may want to take a look at their own efforts in this regard. As I suggested, much of this product takes a right hand turn after it passes through Central America, crosses the Atlantic, and goes into Western Europe. As Heather noted early on, or maybe it was John, the European Union will participate in this conference as will the Government of Spain.

And finally, just speaking esoterically, other bits of this product tends to take a left hand turn after it has transited through Central America, crosses the Pacific, and reaches countries in East Asia and the Southwest Pacific. And this might suggest, perhaps, an interest among some of those countries in

terms of these programs, these strategies, and these efforts to address Central American security and law enforcement issues. I am not suggesting any country specifically; I am just suggesting that as a matter of common sense, there are a number of other countries that should logically have an interest in how successful these strategies and these programs are in the Northern Triangle of Central America.

**MS NAUERT:** Thank you. Just time for two more questions. *LA Times*, Tracy Wilkinson.

**QUESTION:** Hi, thank you. My money – my question was also about money. You mentioned, John, the \$460 million requested for 2018. Just to clarify, that's only for Northern Triangle? And is that part of the Alliance for Prosperity or is that program essentially over with the last administration?

And then my other question, I didn't hear any mention of human rights. Will human rights be a part of this conference at all? Thank you.

**MR CREAMER:** Thanks. The Alliance for Prosperity – and sometimes there is confusing – the Alliance for Prosperity is the initiative launched by the three Northern Triangle countries themselves. It was a recognition on their own part that they needed to do more in terms of institutional development, economic growth, inclusive growth, delivery of social services to their own people in order to respond to the demands of their electorate. So that was developed by them and it is their own initiative largely funded by those countries, as well as multilateral development bank institutions.

U.S. assistance in the region is a – related in some ways, many ways complementary to the Alliance for Prosperity, but it is a separate program. The \$460 million, yes, is – almost all would be for the Northern Triangle countries and will be part of our continuing engagement and commitment to work with them to address and help them meet the challenges on the security side, on the governance side, on the lack of economic opportunity which have led Central Americans to migrate illegally to the north and/or allowed criminal – transnational criminal organizations to operate in their space.

So the program continues and our support continues.

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY BROWNFIELD:** And you asked the human rights question as well. This is an easy one to answer, Tracy. Human rights is a component – and I'm coming at this from the security side – human rights is an inherent component of each and every program that we support in the Northern Triangle of Central America, in fact, throughout all of Central America, all of the Western Hemisphere, and all of the world. First, in terms of our partners, whoever we work with, be it individuals or units, are in fact vetted in accordance with U.S. law to verify that they have not – there is not reasonable grounds to suspect that they have committed human rights abuses in the past.

Second, we will work with human – with the NGOs, including human rights NGOs, in terms of how to make our programs – our community policing and community engagement programs – more successful in connecting with the local

communities, which obviously has an inherent connection to human rights and human rights concerns.

Third, we directly support in the case of Guatemala a UN-based organization that is responsible for independent investigations of corruption and other human-rights-related issues – it is called CICIG – a joint OAS and Honduran Government organization that performs the same mission called MACCIH, and the Salvadoran attorney general's own efforts to perform this same mission. Are human rights an integral part of this entire program in the Northern Triangle of Central America? Yes, they are.

**MS NAUERT:** Thank you. *El Nuevo Herald*. Are we still on, *El Nuevo Herald*?

**QUESTION:** Thank you for doing this. I have two questions. One, do you expect that TPS emerge in the conference at all or in the bilaterals?

And also, let's try to reframe that question about Mr. Tillerson agenda. Is he expected to stay in Miami on Friday, and has he – does he have any scheduled event on Friday?

**MS NAUERT:** I'll take the Secretary Tillerson question. Our understanding, or our planning right now is that the Secretary will be down there on Thursday, and that's all I can get into at this time. I would have to take a look at what the public schedule is for him on Friday, and I could certainly do that and get back with you.

**MR CREAMER:** And I'm sorry, was the first question – you said TPS?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY BROWNFIELD:** Yes.

**MR CREAMER:** Yeah.

**QUESTION:** Yes, the protection – the temporary protection status for Central America.

**MR CREAMER:** Right. No, I mean, that is not on the conference agenda. Obviously, it's important to countries in the Northern Triangle. I would expect it may come up in the bilats. But in terms of the countries in Central America at the moment, we have not made a decision yet on TPS. We just – we have the process underway. Decisions will be made later this year.

**MS NAUERT:** Okay. Thank you, everyone, for calling in, and we'd like to thank the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Cuba, Mexico, Central America, and the Western Hemisphere Regional Economic Policy and Summit issues John Creamer – that is quite a title, sir.

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY BROWNFIELD:** What a title.

**MS NAUERT:** Yeah.

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY BROWNFIELD:** That takes two breaths of air just to get it out.

**MS NAUERT:** It certainly does. And William Brownfield, Assistant Secretary for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs. The call is now over and the embargo has been lifted. Thank you, everyone, for joining us, and we'll talk to you again real soon.

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