

Press Releases: Russia's Violation of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty

Fact Sheet
Office of the Spokesperson

Washington, DC
December 4, 2018

Since 2013, the United States has raised its concerns with Russia regarding Russian development of a ground-launched cruise missile (NATO designator: SSC-8, Russian designator: 9M729) with a range capability between 500 and 5,500 kilometers on repeated occasions. These include more than 30 engagements at all levels of the Russian government.

Russia has repeatedly changed its cover story regarding its violating missile. For more than four years, Russia denied the existence of the missile and provided no information about it, despite the U.S. provision to Russia of the location of the tests and the names of the companies involved in the development and production of the missile. Russia only admitted that the missile existed after we publicly announced the missile system's Russian designator but claimed that the missile was incapable of ranges beyond 500 kilometers and, therefore, INF Treaty-compliant. Russia refuses to provide the United States any more information about the missile, its capability, or its testing history to support Russia's contention that the missile is Treaty-compliant. Despite such obfuscation, Russia claims that it wants to preserve the Treaty.

The United States has convened five meetings of the parties' technical experts to discuss Russia's INF Treaty violation since 2014. These meetings included two sessions of the Special Verification Commission, the Treaty body responsible for addressing compliance concerns, in November 2016 and December 2017, and three bilateral U.S.-Russia meetings of technical experts in September 2014, April 2015, and June 2018. At each of these meetings, the United States pressed Russia on its violating missile, urged it to come back into compliance, and highlighted the critical nature of our concerns. These actions were met with denials, obfuscation, and falsehoods. In contrast, Russia has initiated zero expert meetings with the United States on this topic during this time period and has not engaged in a substantive manner.

The United States has provided detailed information to Russia regarding its

violation over the course of these bilateral and multilateral engagements, giving more than enough information for Russia to engage substantively on the issue. This includes the following:

- Information pertaining to the missile and the launcher, including Russia's internal designator for the mobile launcher chassis and the names of the companies involved in developing and producing the missile and launcher;
- Information on the violating ground launched cruise missile's (GLCM's) test history, including coordinates of the tests and Russia's attempts to conceal the nature of the program;
- Information showing that the violating GLCM has a range capability between 500 and 5,500 kilometers;
- Information showing that the violating GLCM is distinct from the R-500/SSC-7 GLCM or the RS-26 ICBM; and
- The U.S. assessment that the Russian designator for the system in question is 9M729.

If Russia had decided it wanted to return to compliance, it had a clear path forward. There are measures in the Treaty that were used for eliminating systems, which Russia could have adopted to verifiably destroy the SSC-8 and its associated equipment. Russia decided not to do so.

It is important to note that, in addition to violating the INF Treaty, Russia is also not complying with its obligations under several other arms control treaties, including the Open Skies Treaty, the Chemical Weapons Convention, and the Conventional Armed Forces in Europe Treaty.

U.S. Compliance with the INF Treaty

The United States is in compliance with its obligations under the INF Treaty, and Allies affirmed this most recently in the NATO Summit declaration in July 2018. In contrast to Russia's refusal to answer substantively key U.S. questions about the SSC-8/9M729, the United States has provided Russia with detailed information explaining why the United States is in compliance with the INF Treaty. The United States has even presented some of this information publicly, including in a separate factsheet on the State Department webpage.

U.S. Response to Russia's Violation

The United States is declaring that Russia's ongoing violation of the INF Treaty constitutes a material breach of the Treaty. As a consequence of Russia's material breach, the United States will suspend its obligations under the Treaty effective in 60 days from December 4 unless Russia returns to full and verifiable compliance.

Russia must return to full and verifiable compliance; Russia's failure to do so will result in the demise of the INF Treaty. We should be clear that Russia has not shown any indications that it seeks to return to compliance.

As described in the 2018 Nuclear Posture Review, the United States is committed to arms control efforts that advance U.S., allied, and partner

security; are verifiable and enforceable; and include partners that comply in a verifiable manner with their obligations. An arms control treaty that restrains only one side, while the other side violates it, is not effective in making us safer. Rather, it undermines the very idea of arms control as a tool to enhance our collective security.

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Press Releases: Briefing With Special Representative for Syria Engagement Ambassador James F. Jeffrey

Special Briefing
James F. Jeffrey

Special Representative for Syria Engagement

Washington, DC
December 3, 2018

AMBASSADOR JEFFREY: Hello, folks. Here to talk a bit about Syria today and take your questions. Can you all hear me?

QUESTION: Yes.

AMBASSADOR JEFFREY: Okay. Let me review the bidding since the Astana meeting last week on Thursday of Turkey, Iran and Russia trying to focus on the political track. And I will focus my remarks on the political track because we're at a critical juncture on that important track in this month. I'll explain a little bit why and where we are on it.

We also just completed today a meeting of what we call the small group, which is an informal group of European states – Germany, France, and Britain – and Middle Eastern states – Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Egypt – who work with us and consult with us on this issue. They met with Under Secretary David Hale, and they also met with the head of the Syria negotiating committee – commission, rather, Nasr Hariri, who is basically the senior, and his senior staff from the Syrian political opposition, who are very much involved in this whole process.

So what I'd like to do is to take you through what happened last week and where we are now with the small group. As you may remember, the summit in Istanbul over a month ago now saw Angela Merkel, Vladimir Putin, President Macron, and President Erdogan meet together to discuss Syria. They discussed primarily two very contentious issues: the Idlib deconfliction zone of ceasefire, and particularly the political process, specifically the constitutional committee which is to be stood up, and it's something that three countries, known as the Astana group – Turkey, Iran, and Russia – took upon themselves a year ago to try to stand up, because the regime was not being cooperative.

That's all under the aegis of UN Resolution 2254 from December of 2015, which is the basic core document that is trying to resolve this terrible and very dangerous conflict, and we see indications of the danger of it all of the time. I can't confirm or deny the reports that were in *The Washington Post* today of strikes against terrorists. I can't confirm or deny reports of Israeli contacts a few days ago. But we get these things all of the time because this conflict is a very dangerous conflict, and as I've said before, you have the five military forces, outside military forces in close proximity.

Okay, so we were hoping – following up from the Istanbul conference – that the Russians, the Iranians, and the Turks would be able to finalize the third list of members to this constitutional committee, and that was a primary goal of the Astana meeting last Thursday. They didn't succeed. They issued a statement that basically did examine the Idlib de-escalation area, they call it, and stressed the importance of a lasting ceasefire while underlying the necessity to continue the effective fight against terrorism. That is good news because the Idlib ceasefire, as President Trump notably and other senior officials have said, is very, very important to the overall hope for stability in Syria.

But they did not take any significant action on the constitutional committee. Rather, they stated once again that there is no military solution to the Syrian conflict, but all they did was reaffirm their determination to set up joint efforts to launch the constitutional committee in Geneva. But they didn't even say "by the end of the year"; what they said was "the soonest possible time," which tends to be waffling.

As a result of that, you may have seen that the UN envoy, Staffan de Mistura, who was present at the conference, issued his own statement. It begins, "Staffan de Mistura appreciates the work done at the Astana meeting by the three guarantors to ensure the Idlib de-escalation arrangements are sustained."

He then issued for the UN at this point in the process quite a strong statement: "However, Special Envoy de Mistura deeply regrets that at a special meeting in Astana with the three Sochi co-conveners, there was no tangible progress in overcoming the 10-month stalemate on the composition of the constitutional committee. This was the last occasion of an Astana meeting in 2018 and has, sadly for the Syrian people, been a missed opportunity to accelerate the establishment of a credible, balanced, and inclusive Syria-owned, Syria-led, UN-facilitated constitutional committee."

We then issued a statement by Heather, "No breakthrough" on the Astana meeting, pointing out what had happened, making reference to Staffan, and basically saying that this is not a process we think has come to its end.

Today with the Syria small group, we first of all reviewed implementation of a UN-facilitated, Syrian-led, and Syrian-owned political process that would create a permanent, peaceful, and political end, in line, again, with 2254. There was support, as you can imagine, for UN Envoy de Mistura's statement regarding the November 28th, 29th Astana meeting which I just read to you,

particularly the importance of sustaining the Idlib de-escalation arrangements, the efforts to meet the December 31st deadline to convene the Syrian constitutional committee, and we are looking forward to de Mistura's December 14th report to the Security Council.

That will be the key point where we see whether we are going to have the political process moving forward under the UN, facilitated perhaps by the Astana guarantors putting pressure on Damascus, or whether we're going to be in another stalemate and then with a new Syrian UN envoy, Geir Pedersen, coming on board right thereafter. We'll all have to re-examine where we're going on this extremely important, extremely dangerous issue.

So I'll stop there, having brought you up to date on the situation.

STAFF: (Inaudible) AFP.

QUESTION: Thank you for doing this. Do you – we are now December 3rd. Do you really think that it's possible to convene the committal – constitutional committee before the end of the year? You have already pushed that deadline back other times, so do you think that this time you can do it, or you are going to say by the end of January and then by the end of February?

AMBASSADOR JEFFREY: We are staying with, as the Istanbul summit states, the end of the December. I'm sure that if Staffan de Mistura got a green light from the regime or the Astana people that there was a list that he could accept and verify as credible, that on the 14th he could announce a December convening, and I believe it would convene.

STAFF: Nadia, Al Arabiya.

QUESTION: Good to see you, Ambassador. As you just explained and elaborated, there seem to be a political stagnation. What does it take to have a breakthrough, especially that some people say the U.S. is playing a secondary role and Russia and Turkey are leading?

And if – allow me as well, I have a question on Russia. Yesterday, they accused the U.S. of playing a dangerous game, as they said, or playing the Kurdish card, especially now that the SDF are trying in the final push to clear an area from ISIS. Are you playing a dangerous game?

AMBASSADOR JEFFREY: That's about – first of all, we're not playing a dangerous game. Russia is playing a dangerous game accusing us of playing a dangerous game. We are totally committed to defeating Daesh along the Euphrates. Our local ally in that, as you know, since 2014, has been the SDF, as everybody else knows. They are involved in a very, very tough battle. This is not an organization that has been totally destroyed. We think that we'll be able to finish the job in the months ahead, but there's very heavy fighting there and we're putting a lot of our own effort and the effort of our friends and allies and partners into it.

In terms of – can you give me the first half of your –

QUESTION: What does it take to have a breakthrough in this since we have

political stagnation versus –

AMBASSADOR JEFFREY: Yeah. Oh, yeah, I know, that – are we playing a secondary role. There's about six questions there, so I'll try to pull each of them out.

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

AMBASSADOR JEFFREY: We think we're playing a primary role. I think you should ask the others and get their opinions because we're always going to think we're playing a primary role. Ask any of the other participants in this process the role of the United States overall in Syria. I think they'll say it's a very, very active role with many aspects.

Now, in terms of a breakthrough, we've been in a stalemate since this whole Sochi – Astana/Sochi process began in December of 2017, following on six years of stalemate. What we've seen in the last few months is a ministerial at the small-group level at the UN putting pressure on the UN and on the Astana group to come forth. Then we saw the Istanbul summit where, for the first time, Russia said that they would try to get this thing done by the end of the year. Up until that point, they would be saying there's no artificial deadline, when in their minds any date is an artificial deadline, so we got them to move on that. And there's at least a possibility that they will move by the 14th with de Mistura.

So I would say while I still think that the chances are not great, I would say they're better now than they were three months ago or six months ago.

QUESTION: Thank you.

STAFF: (Off-mike.)

QUESTION: Ambassador, thank you very much for doing this. One zoomed-in question and then one zoom-out.

Zoom-in: Idlib itself, the fighting, what are you tracking? Are you seeing the collapse of the stalemate itself in terms of the fighting on both sides?

And then zoom-out: Last time you and I had a conversation about the strategy in Syria, one of the three pieces of the strategy was the removal of all Iranian-commanded forces from the entirety of Syria. Is that still part of the strategy and is there any progress on that?

AMBASSADOR JEFFREY: That is part of the overall strategy. I would say we have made progress hammering that particular goal to everybody. We think that the people who need to listen are listening. I don't – again, have nothing to announce. I have no specific thing to point to. But this is in play, and again, as I mentioned at the time, it's in the context of a political solution to the overall conflict and the withdrawal of all the other forces that have arrived since 2011.

Now in terms of Idlib, we still believe (a) that it is a very good thing that there is this de-escalation zone. We believe it is holding. All of our

conversations, not just with the Turks but with the Russians, indicate it is. We had one incident a week ago with alleged use of chemical weapons by terrorists from Idlib, and the Russians then conducted a strike. We cannot, I want to underline, corroborate any chemical weapons attack based on that incident, and we'll try to have more for you as soon as possible.

STAFF: (Off-mike.)

QUESTION: Mr. Ambassador, good to see you again. My question is about Idlib. Contradict to Manbij roadmap, there are some reports indicating that there are a good amount of YPG/PYD militants still in Idlib right now. And also, what's your –

AMBASSADOR JEFFREY: YPG/PYD in Idlib?

QUESTION: Yeah, according to some of the reports from the field. And my question is –

AMBASSADOR JEFFREY: Not Manbij? You said Idlib.

QUESTION: I'm sorry, Manbij. I'm sorry. I'm sorry, Manbij. You're right. I'm sorry.

So my question is: What's your solution to preventing a possible attack from the group against Turkish troops? And I mean, they constantly are showing solidarity with PKK terror group and also threatening Turkish groups on the field, so –

AMBASSADOR JEFFREY: Sure. First of all, some – it's over 50 – we've confirmed over 50 members of those organizations have left Idlib, and we passed that number on to the Turks. We're also in the process now under what we call the Manbij roadmap that Secretary Pompeo and his counterpart Foreign Minister Cavusoglu agreed in June to vet senior leadership in the Manbij Military Committee, which is the military side, and in the Manbij Council – this is some, oh, 70, 80, 100 people – to vet them jointly by our two countries to ensure that there is nobody there who might be threatening the Turks.

In terms of an attack out of there, again, we have a quite significant force there. We have, under the Manbij Roadmap, joint patrols with the Turks, and – I've been out there myself – very good observation of everything that is going on. That region is, as regions go in Turkey – rather, correction – in Syria quite secure, at least north of where the regime is.

QUESTION: Have you personally talked to YPG/PYD leadership about this?

AMBASSADOR JEFFREY: I talk to whoever I need to talk to to accomplish my job.

STAFF: Barbara.

QUESTION: Thank you. Ambassador, if, as you seem to think it's possible or likely on the 14th the Staffan de Mistura doesn't come through with the breakthrough, then what happens next? Is there a Plan B if the whole Astana/Sochi process doesn't segue into the UN process and the regime doesn't

agree to this third committee? What happens then?

AMBASSADOR JEFFREY: Well, again, the first address to such a question is the UN, because the UN has been charged by the Security Council to carry out this political process under 2254 and specifically to the new successor to de Mistura, Mr. Pedersen. But our suggestion, and I think I would reflect the views of many of the other major UN countries that are concerned and interested in Syria, is that we do not continue with this rather strange Sochi/Astana initiative, for them to take over the job of putting together a constitutional committee and presenting it on a platter to de Mistura. They tried and they failed, or at least up to this point they failed. And if they are still failing by the 14th, the U.S. view, as we indicated in Heather's comment or Heather's press release on Thursday, is let's pull the plug on Astana.

QUESTION: And then what?

AMBASSADOR JEFFREY: And then we go back to the UN.

QUESTION: And the UN comes up – and the UN gets the regime to the table how?

AMBASSADOR JEFFREY: Well, that's a good a question because we've been trying now for six years. First of all, the regime has shown some flexibility. Again, is this is a stalemate? Yes. Are we quite as stalemated as we were a few months ago? I don't think so. I think that particularly in Astana the Turkish Government has held its position and not succumbed to pressure by the other two to sign up to a third list that would be pro regime. That's very important.

You've seen on the ground, be it al-Tanf, be it in Idlib, be it in some of the alleged Israeli actions, be it in some of our actions in the northeast, you've seen an unwillingness to yield to pressure from the regime or from the regime's allies. And you're in a different conflict now, a conflict – not a conflict, but you've got a situation where you've got a number of outside countries that are present on the ground or in the air over Syria, and that gives you fewer actors to deal with.

At one point John Kerry, when he was trying to do this in 2016, was trying to get a ceasefire among 400 opposition groups. Now the opposition groups are basically in a much different situation, and it's much easier to get them to stop shooting, as we've seen in Idlib and other areas. So that's the first thing why I'm somewhat more optimistic.

The second thing is it's very clear that the Damascus regime, and particularly the Russians and the Iranians, want to see what I call the three Rs: refugees essentially pushed back to Syria; reconstruction aid, perhaps up to 400 billion according to the UN, to flow into the country from the West – us, Europe, international organizations; and the regime to be recognized by the world as legitimate. None of those things are happening, and they're not going to happen until the political process makes progress, as far as I can see. And I don't see a change in that, and I think that's dawning on at least the Russians.

STAFF: (Off-mike.)

QUESTION: Thank you for your time, Mr. Ambassador. My question is what will be the U.S. policy on the Kurds in Syria.

AMBASSADOR JEFFREY: Our policy is to work with the people of the northeast first of all to defeat ISIS. We have to do some basic humanitarian work and local stabilization work in order to have a platform for this defeat of ISIS. We have no political agenda either with the Kurdish groups, with the Arab groups, or with any other groups inside Syria. Our position is (a) the territorial integrity of Syria under its present borders; (b) we will work with all political forces that are willing to recognize and accept the UN political process and the basic criteria of all of these UN initiatives since 2012 on Syria, which is no threat to the neighbors, no threat to the population, no use of chemical weapons, no support for terrorism, no mass slaughter of one's own civilians, and accountability for war crimes. That's our position with everybody and anybody.

STAFF: Right here.

QUESTION: Ambassador Jeffrey, last – during your last briefing you stated that the forces under the command of Iran were not as active as previously. Is that still the case? And what do you know about what they're actually doing on the ground in Syria?

AMBASSADOR JEFFREY: Well, right now there is a relative lack of combat in Syria other than the most active is against the ISIS forces around Hajin, around the Euphrates close the Iraqi border, which is an operation that we are leading with the SDF. There have been some very limited regime operations against ISIS or Daesh in the southwest of the country but not very much. So apart from that there hasn't been much military activity. That has an impact on the activity levels of the Iranians or anybody else, but I would just say that we're monitoring the Iranian situation closely. We're not the only ones monitoring the Iranian situation closely.

QUESTION: Does it look like they've maybe shrunk in terms –

AMBASSADOR JEFFREY: I would say we're monitoring the Iranian situation closely.

STAFF: Said.

QUESTION: Thank you. Thank you, Ambassador. I wanted to ask you – I mean, we're a bit confused on the position of the United States as far as Syria is concerned. On the one hand they say we will be there forever, on the other hand that your operation is limited and so on. Could you just give us like a vignette of how and when will the United States forces leave Syria?

AMBASSADOR JEFFREY: Well, the United States forces are in Syria for one mission, which is the enduring defeat of ISIS/Daesh. That is a military mission that flows from congressional authorization in 2001 against terror post-9/11. That's the military mission of our military there.

When we say we're going to be present not forever in Syria but present until our conditions – enduring defeat of ISIL, as was said earlier, the withdrawal of all Iranian-commanded forces from the entirety of Syria, and an irreversible political process. We're saying the United States as a whole, that the President as the Commander-in-Chief and as the leader of our foreign policy has various options that involve military involving our forces. Remember we were present not in northern Iraq but over northern Iraq in Operation Northern Watch for 13 years. That can be a UN force. Under 2254 there is language on a UN-managed and operated ceasefire. That can be partner forces. That can be other countries' forces.

Then there's the diplomatic initiatives that we do with the Small Group in the UN, then there is the actions of our friends and allies. For example, the Istanbul summit we weren't there, but we were working with the French, the Germans, and the Turks, and we got a good result from it. That's an example of the kind of tools we use.

Also economic, both sanctions on this regime every way possible – we're announcing them all of the time, including particularly our focus is on oil transfers from Iran to Syria and money back. We're pursuing that very aggressively.

And finally, our position, which has an awful lot of support, not to push refugees back, not to recognize the regime, and in particular not to allow reconstruction funds to flow to Syria until we see real progress on these other tracks.

So that's the summary of all of the tools we have that under the rubric of we will stay on in Syria until we get these goals.

QUESTION: Thank you.

STAFF: Tracy, did you have a question?

QUESTION: Oh yes, you just mentioned the sanctions. I wanted to ask about that. I think it was two weeks ago you all sanctioned – I think it was Russian and Iranian companies that were supplying oil to the Government of Syria. Does that kind – I mean, does that kind of sanction have an impact? Do you have any sense of seeing that that has reduced the shipments of oil to Damascus?

AMBASSADOR JEFFREY: Yes.

QUESTION: Okay. Do you want to elaborate?

AMBASSADOR JEFFREY: No. (Laughter.)

STAFF: Okay I think we have – last question. Michelle.

QUESTION: With the ultimate goal of removing Iranian influence from Syria –

AMBASSADOR JEFFREY: I didn't say that. I would – I wish I could say that, but that's not U.S. policy. It's Iranian-commanded forces.

QUESTION: Okay.

AMBASSADOR JEFFREY: Nice try.

QUESTION: But given that's part of it and finance – and squeezing them financially would be a part of that –

AMBASSADOR JEFFREY: Yes.

QUESTION: – what progressive effect have you seen on the continued sanctions regime on Iran in light – the effect of the Iranian involvement in Syria right now? Would you say that there has already been some effect?

AMBASSADOR JEFFREY: All I can say is – that's the problem if you leave government and you become an outside analyst, commentator, and think tanker. There is things you've written. I was ambivalent and probably leaning against pulling the plug on the JCPOA as late as a year ago. I have to say, from everything I have seen in coming back in, it was an absolutely valid decision in terms of putting pressure on Iran where it really hurts, which is in the financial area. It's still early. As you know, it's less than a month since we imposed the NDAA oil sanctions on Iran, but we have seen a dramatic drop in both international firm engagement in Iran, in the banking sector's activities and their ability to use the international financial system, and we've seen a huge drop of over a million barrels of oil. I mean, Brian Hook comes down here and does the briefings far better than I. I'm just doing the top level.

And I'm seeing some impacts of this on Syria, which I can't get into. It's another way of answering the same question, the other one asked a few minutes ago.

STAFF: All right, I think we have to wrap up now.

AMBASSADOR JEFFREY: Okay, that's fine. Thank you.

QUESTION: Thank you.

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Press Releases: The Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations Announces 2019 Industry Advisory Group Annual Meeting Date

Media Note
Office of the Spokesperson

Washington, DC
December 3, 2018

The U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations (OBO) will host a meeting of the Industry Advisory Group (IAG) on Tuesday, May 14, 2019 at the U.S. Department of State, located at 2201 C Street, N.W. Washington, D.C.

This committee serves the U.S. government solely in an advisory capacity concerning industry and academia's latest concepts, methods, best practices, innovations, and ideas related to OBO's mission to provide safe, secure, and functional facilities that represent the U.S. government to the host nation and support our staff in achieving U.S. foreign policy objectives. These facilities should represent American values and the best in American architecture, engineering, technology, sustainability, art, culture, construction execution, and resiliency.

The public may attend this meeting as seating capacity allows. Admittance to the State Department building will be through a pre-arranged clearance list. An open registration announcement will be posted on OBO's website, www.state.gov/obo, and sent through OBO's distribution list approximately 30 days prior to the event date. Those interested in joining OBO's distribution list should [visit our sign-up page](#) or email IAGR@state.gov. A meeting notice will also be published in the *Federal Register* prior to April 29, 2019, in accordance with the Federal Advisory Committee Act.

For further information, please contact Christy Foushee at FousheeCT@state.gov.

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Press Releases: Secretary Pompeo's Meeting With Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu

Readout
Heather Nauert

Department Spokesperson

Washington, DC
December 3, 2018

The below is attributable to Spokesperson Heather Nauert:

Secretary of State Michael R. Pompeo met with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu today in Brussels. The Secretary emphasized the United States' commitment to Israel's security and absolute right to self-defense and to fighting anti-Israeli bias at the United Nations. The Secretary reiterated U.S. support for warming ties and increased dialogue between Israel and its neighbors in the Middle East and Africa, including Oman and Chad. Secretary Pompeo noted the strength of the U.S.-Israel alliance and our multifaceted cooperation. He reiterated America's resolve in confronting the totality of the Iranian regime's threats through maximum pressure.

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Press Releases: Senior State Department Official Previewing Secretary Pompeo's Trip to Brussels, Belgium

Special Briefing

On Plane en route to Brussels, Belgium
December 3, 2018

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: I'm glad to have you guys along. I'm happy to talk about pretty much anything you want to talk about, and [Moderator], jump in, but I thought I'd give you a few top lines on why the trip is important, some of the meetings that are going to occur, and then you guys can jump in with all of your questions.

So this is the Secretary's third trip to NATO since he became Secretary of State. I think most of you know he came over the day he was confirmed. He got on the plane. A ministerial, and then he came back for a NATO summit. This is his third trip in the last however many months, eight months or so since he became Secretary. We see this as an opportunity first and foremost to reinforce U.S. commitment to NATO allies, the alliance, Article 5, U.S. commitment to Article 5 ironclad; also engage with very close allies on areas that we agree on, some areas we disagree on, but hoping to in particular talk with some of our major allies about some of the most important international security issues that we're tracking today.

First and foremost, I would say you can expect to see a follow-up on commitments that were made at the 2018 NATO summit, so the July summit, and I would highlight a few. We continue to press allies on following through with their Wales commitments: 2 percent of GDP on defense, 20 percent of defense budgets on major equipment. I would highlight allied Portugal, which recently came forward with a credible plan, 2 percent spending. Also Slovakia just put through major spending increases for the defense budget. Across the alliance, we have seen an historic increase in defense spending since January of 2017.

I would also highlight by way of follow-up on the summit the updated counterterrorism action plan. This is a major set of contributions from the NATO alliance. Really, it's the first time in NATO's history that NATO has

gotten deeply into the business of counterterrorism but also developed a strategy and an agenda for the South, the Mediterranean littoral. At this ministerial, we're going to go through a report on NATO's southern dimension but also update the 2017 counterterrorism plan with a heavy emphasis on intelligence sharing.

And we'll also be, by way of follow-up, going through Secretary General Stoltenberg's heroic efforts at a functional review, so bringing the NATO civilian command structure up to speed with the changes and evolutions that we've had in a strategic setting but also changes in the military command structure.

The second big thing I would highlight is the discussion about the INF treaty. I'm sure all of you have been following this very closely. We intend to engage our allies in a close discussion over the next day and a half on INF. We've been in discussions with – for several days now with European allies on INF.

As all of you know who follow this, this is not a new problem. The U.S. calling out Russia on noncompliance is not a new phenomenon. We've been pressing the Russian Federation for five years now in public about the so-called screwdriver SSC-8 missile which is not INF-compliant. We will be at this ministerial building on the very strong language that came out in the summer NATO declaration and working with allies to chart a joint way forward in how we tackle the problem of Russian noncompliance with INF, and I'm happy to talk more about that in the Q&A.

And then finally, we'll have several sessions of the NATO Atlantic – of the North Atlantic Commission, sessions on Ukraine and Georgia. In that session, we plan to build on recent U.S. statements pressing Russian leadership to release the detained crew members and ships that were taken into custody in the recent Kerch incident. We are calling on European allies to show leadership in tackling a problem that's in Europe's own backyard. The President and Secretary have been crystal-clear in where we stand on the matter of the Kerch incident, Ukrainian – Russian aggression against Ukraine. This administration has provided a lot of things that the previous administration did not want to provide, but we plan in this ministerial to work with allies charting a way forward on how we make progress on these crew members and ships.

We also have a session of the NAC meeting on Resolute Support Mission. The goal is to work with our allies to endorse Ambassador Khalilzad's reconciliation efforts. We had recent elections in Afghanistan and also a donors meetings in Geneva. We want to build on the momentum from those events. Ambassador Hutchison and I will be attending the RSM session. At the last NATO summit, the allies agreed to extend the financial support through 2024 for Afghanistan's security forces. We intend to continue to build on that as well.

I think most of you know that the Secretary is giving a major speech while he is in Brussels. I can provide you a little bit of a preview on that speech. I don't want to get too far ahead of him. It's a great speech. I've read it.

This will happen at the German Marshall Fund. The symbolism was deliberate. It was important to us to evoke the memory of George C. Marshall, one of the Secretary's predecessors who helped to create the foundation for the Atlantic alliance. The Bretton Woods system, the foundation for the international order as we know it, most of the major international institutions in the world today grew out of that immediate post World War II moment.

I think you can expect to see the Secretary walk you through a big-picture assessment of how he, how this administration, views the strategic reality in the world: rising revisionist authoritarian powers, number one; and number two, how we view international institutions and the growing gap between the international institutional order on one hand and the scale of the type of strategic challenges that we face on the other. So you can expect to see him share this administration's vision for America's place in the world.

So that's a quick preview. Happy to answer any questions. If there's anything I overlooked, let me know.

MODERATOR: Remember this is on background to a senior State Department official. Go ahead, let's get a question.

QUESTION: Can I ask, do you support Ukraine's call to (inaudible) which you said (inaudible) to the Sea of Azov?

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: I don't want to get ahead of process. We support Ukraine wholeheartedly in its defense of national sovereignty and territorial integrity, and I think our actions have been very clear in that regard. We're looking at a lot of measures both on the U.S. side, coordination with allies, and you'll be seeing more in the days ahead of how we and our allies will jointly message and where appropriate take action. We really want to see European allies do more. The United States I think has been – I think the administration has been forceful and clear up to an including providing a lot of lethal aid to Ukrainians. We want to see European allies take greater responsibility for a security problem that's just 200 miles from Germany's border, and we'll be right there with them every step of the way.

QUESTION: And is this the forum for official (inaudible) six months on INF? There was a lot of speculation in Brussels last week that that's what the speech was going to be used for, but then Stoltenberg said today that no, it's still not time yet.

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: Look, I don't want to get ahead of process. I want to stay focused on our goal right now, which is to be in sync with allies. We want to keep the burden squarely where it belongs – the onus, and that is on Russia for noncompliance. We are determined to stay in sync with our allies in our response to this problem. So the discussions over the next day will be about that, and you can expect to see a decision in due course.

QUESTION: In what?

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: In due course.

QUESTION: Okay. The speech is at 11:00 (inaudible) so –

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: The Secretary's speech?

QUESTION: Yeah.

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: Yeah. I'll let the Secretary's speech speak for itself. As I said, it's big-picture. It's looking at America's role in the world. On INF I don't want to – I don't want to get ahead of ourselves here. We really want to roll up our sleeves and work with our allies on a joint position, and that's what we're focused on right now.

QUESTION: Follow-up on Nike's question. Can you give any more specifics on what you'll be asking for from Europe as far as Ukraine?

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: As far as Ukraine is concerned. So we have some ideas in the United States. I think we've messaged very clearly that it's unacceptable that Russia took this latest step, this act of aggression. We've coordinated very closely over the last several days with European allies both in the NATO format and in the EU format, and right now we're focused on sizing an allied alliance-wide response, having the right size response to what happened at the Kerch. There is a humanitarian dimension to this with the sailors involved. There is an international legal dimension to this with freedom of navigation. And we want our allies to show leadership. It's a problem a lot closer to home for them than it is to us. There's a lot of things that the United States has done and will continue to do for the Ukrainians, but we want to make sure that we come out of this week with a unified position where we're working with allies to have a holistic response.

QUESTION: As you look at the risk metrics there in the Sea of Azov, what's the likelihood or – that you see of Russia trying to repeat in Mariupol some of the operations they had at Donbas?

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: I don't want to speculate on the military situation. I think the facts on the ground are very clear as they stand right now. Russian forces and Russian-backed so-called separatists are waging daily aggression in violations of ceasefire. It's one of the things that we will be addressing at OSCE in a couple of days. We're very watchful. The situation on the ground there is very dangerous. Ambassador Volker is very engaged, as you know, with the Russians, trying to find a clear way – a peaceful way forward. But I think Azov marked – I should say, it was on the Black Sea side – let's say the Kerch Strait act of aggression marked an unmistakable escalation on the part of the Russians, because it was the first time that they were openly using their own forces and being very unapologetic about it.

QUESTION: [Senior State Department Official], there's a sense in Europe that you're backing out of the INF because of concerns about China, not so much about Europe, and that the Europeans feel that you are – that that policy shows that American attention is increasingly diverted from Europe to China. What's your response to that?

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: Well, look, I think if you read the Nuclear

Posture Review, it was crystal-clear. Number one, we're committed to arms control, but number two, we have growing concerns about the actions of a lot of American rivals. There's Russia, there's China, there's Iran. I'm not sure it's helpful to disaggregate those when we're talking about the future of INF, because the central problem is that Russia – which is a party to INF – is in flagrant noncompliance. We're talking about five years of repeated U.S. efforts. We've tried on 30 different occasions at very high levels to share with the Russians the information that we have about their systems, to call them into – back into compliance. We've also shared a lot of intelligence with European allies.

I think at this point we have been so engaged with European allies, the one thing I don't question is whether the allies understand where we're coming from. They've seen the material. If you saw the NATO declaration, I think it's crystal-clear. Our central focus is Russia. And there is a China problem; a big portion of the Chinese ballistic arsenal is not in compliance with INF. But I would not say from a U.S. perspective we look at INF to look at the way forward. I wouldn't look at that and say the United States has made a determination on the basis of what Russia has done to do X, Y, or Z. Right now our focus is on sharing what we have with allies, making sure as I said a minute ago that we're on the same page with a clear way forward. And once we've had those conversations with allies, we'll make a decision and communicate those decisions in concert with our allies.

MODERATOR: Just a couple questions left.

QUESTION: One more, do one more. This is going to be the 70th anniversary of NATO coming up in – it'll be the first major anniversary of NATO where there is not going to be a leaders summit. Europeans are saying that they're not going to have a leaders summit because they don't want Trump to be part of such a big summit because the last summit with Trump was such a disaster. What's your response to that?

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: So we take the – as the Secretary has said on more than one occasion, we take the NATO alliance seriously and the 70th anniversary very seriously. We've been looking very closely with allies at some plans for next year. I don't think we're at a stage where we're sharing those publicly, but we take it seriously. You'll learn more in due course, but it's – we are cognizant of the symbolic value of next year, and you'll hear more about that in the days to come.

QUESTION: Can you talk about the agenda for tonight's meeting with Netanyahu?

MODERATOR: [Senior State Department Official] handles EUR, so not NEA issues. There'll be something more on that later. But we can confirm that the Secretary's meeting with the prime minister.

QUESTION: So you can't speak to the priorities of the pull-aside with the Libyan prime minister either?

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: I'm not deeply involved in that, unfortunately. I follow it closely, but it's not – I wouldn't want to step on

my NEA colleagues.

MODERATOR: And [Senior State Department Official] will still – even though we’ll be headed back to Washington for President Bush’s funeral, [Senior State Department Official] will still be heading to Milan, where he’ll be doing some of the OSCE meetings that the Secretary had planned.

QUESTION: Can you tell us about the agenda for Italy, what you’re looking to get out of that part of the trip?

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: For OSCE?

QUESTION: What you’re looking to get out of the Italy portion of the trip.

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: Right. So OSCE – we want to reaffirm U.S. commitment to the OSCE as a significant platform for security in Europe but also for human rights dialogue in Europe and Eurasia. I think a couple of the agenda items that you will see – number-one agenda item will be Ukraine and Kerch Strait. We are determined to hold Russia accountable for those actions, and OSCE is a great venue for European nations showing leadership. So you’ll see the U.S. focused on SMM, you’ll see us focused on ceasefire violations.

And then secondly, as you know, the United States continues to call on Russia to come back into compliance with a family of treaties and obligations under OSCE – Open Skies, conventional forces in Europe. We’re in the process of trying to work through a modernization of the Vienna document. The Vienna document is the instrument of OSCE. It provides transparency for military exercises. And those will be the two big focal points.

MODERATOR: Okay. [Senior State Department Official] has to get back to the other part of his job.

QUESTION: Thank you.

MODERATOR: Thanks, everybody.

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