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Readout
Office of the Spokesperson

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The below is attributable to Spokesperson Heather Nauert:□

Secretary Michael R. Pompeo spoke today with Swedish Foreign Minister Margot Wallstrom. They discussed denuclearization efforts in North Korea as well as bilateral relations.

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Heather Nauert
Spokesperson

Department Press Briefing
Washington, DC
August 9, 2018

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TRANSCRIPT:

3:00 p.m. EDT

MS NAUERT: Hi, everybody. How are you today? And why are so many of you showing up on an August afternoon? You're supposed to all be on vacation or something, but I notice a few empty seats. But Gardiner's back from vacation. Gardiner, welcome.

QUESTION: Thank you.

MS NAUERT: How've you been?

QUESTION: I've been good.

MS NAUERT: Good. A couple announcements to start before we get started with your questions today.

First, I would like to express our condolences to the victims of the recent earthquakes and also the aftershocks in Indonesia. The United States has experts and partner organizations on the ground. We're consulting with the Government of Indonesia at this time. We're closely monitoring the situation, and we stand ready to provide additional aid to the Government of Indonesia. Our U.S. consulate personnel are assisting affected U.S. citizens. At this time, we do not have any reports of U.S. citizen casualties associated with the earthquakes. Our thoughts and prayers go out to the Indonesian people. As many of you know, we were recently on the ground in Indonesia and had some terrific meetings with government officials there.

Next, I have some staffing news to bring you now. And I'm really excited about this one, because it affects our Bureau of Public Affairs and specifically the folks that you will be working with. Today I'd like to announce that Robert Palladino will be joining our press team as the State Department's deputy spokesperson. Robert is a career Foreign Service officer and I believe known well to some of you or perhaps many of you.

Over the past year, Robert has served as director of press and acting National Security Council spokesperson. In that role he's helped to prepare Sarah Sanders for her briefings at the White House. He was also a spokesperson to the White House press corps and worked as NSC communications lead for both Asia and Europe. Robert's Foreign Service career has included postings in Washington, where he worked for our Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, and the Office of the Under Secretary for Public Affairs and Public Diplomacy, and also on Capitol Hill. Overseas, he's worked in Milan, Italy; Guangzhou, China; and also Ho Chi Minh City in Vietnam.

Prior to joining the State Department, he practiced law in Asia and Europe in the Army JAG Corps. His service included deployment to Rwanda. He is a graduate of Notre Dame University, Washington and Lee School of Law, the U.S. Army War College, and he also speaks Chinese and Italian. Pretty impressive.

We are delighted that he is coming back to the State Department from the White House. I know you will enjoy working with him. For those of you who have not met him, he is a terrific guy. We've worked closely together for the past year or so. I asked him what his children thought, because he has two young girls – I asked him what they thought of his job, and I love these quotes. His youngest daughter said, "I'm proud of America and I'm proud of you, Dad, but it sounds really boring." And then his older daughter said this – and you'll appreciate it – "But wait a minute, everybody yells questions and they're angry. That's the worst job in the world." That actually might be the White House press corps, not you all. But we look forward to welcoming Robert when he joins us on the 20th of August. But try not to bug him between now and then; he's on vacation with his family. So another addition to our press family.

And that's it. With that, I'd be happy to take your questions.

QUESTION: Okay, thanks. We'll try not to be so angry.

MS NAUERT: I said not you all.

QUESTION: Let's – me, yes me. I just wanted to ask you briefly before I ask you about Yemen. I noticed the statement that you guys put out about Zimbabwe, the Zimbabwe elections and the Zambian decision to deport the opposition leader.

MS NAUERT: Right.

QUESTION: And in that statement it said that you are reviewing certain aspects of your cooperation with the Zambian Government. Can you be a little bit more specific? What aspects of –

MS NAUERT: Some of those will be conversations that will be had privately with both governments. But my understanding is that there are certain agreements in which that government was taking steps that the Zimbabweans weren't completely familiar with and weren't supportive of, and there were some concerns related to that. But let's just –

QUESTION: No, I understand, but I was just –

MS NAUERT: But let's just back up a couple steps for folks who've not been following this perhaps as closely as you have. Elections on July the 30th – those were promising, very promising. We thought it was a historic chance to sort of move beyond the political and economic crises of the past and toward a more democratic change and better dialogue in that country. People turned out massively in those elections. We put out a statement just after those elections complimenting them on those elections.

However, the success in delivering an election day that was peaceful and open to international observers was then marred by violence, which we've been seeing and has been heavily reported, at least in the international press, over the past about week and a half. We've seen a disproportionate use of deadly force against protestors by the security forces, which is a great concern of ours. We're concerned by those numerous reports of human rights violations since the elections had taken place about a week and a half or two ago. We have received credible allegations of detentions, of beatings, and other abuses of the people of Zimbabwe, particularly targeting opposition activists.

Now, the latest news today is the foreign – excuse me, the former minister of finance had left to go to Zambia. Zambia returned him to Zimbabwe, we understand. And some of this is still fresh so we don't have all the details at this point. But I understand he was detained and possibly let go.

So I'm going to pause there because some of this is still unfolding, and I don't want to give you any inaccurate information since it's still developing.

QUESTION: I get that. I just wanted to know is this a threat to withhold or suspend some aid to Zambia when you say you're reviewing certain aspects of our cooperation?

MS NAUERT: Matt, I'm not going to get into that at this point, but we're watching the situation carefully.

QUESTION: All right. Let me ask you about this airstrike in Yemen, which appears to have killed dozens of children. The Saudis obviously are the ones who conducted this, but they do that with weapons supplied by the U.S., with training supplied by the U.S., and with targeting information, targeting data, supplied by the U.S. How can something like this happen?

MS NAUERT: How can something like that report happen?

QUESTION: Yeah.

MS NAUERT: Well, I think we would start by saying –

QUESTION: It's more than a report. I mean, it's – they admitted that it happened.

MS NAUERT: Yeah. How can situations like this happen? We don't have the full details about what happened on the ground. We've certainly seen the news reports of what has been reported happened, okay? I can't confirm all the details because we are not there on the ground.

We can say that we're certainly concerned about these reports that resulted – that there was an attack that resulted in the deaths of civilians. We call on the Saudi-led coalition to conduct a thorough and transparent investigation into the incident. We take all credible accounts of civilian casualties very seriously. We call on the parties to take appropriate measures to protect civilians in accordance with international law and urge all parties to investigate all reported incidents of civilian casualties.

QUESTION: Okay. Well, they say – already the coalition says that they acted in accordance with international law. But if you look at the photographs, the video that come from the scene, it doesn't look like that's a really – that that's a credible answer. So are you okay with the coalition on its own doing an investigation, or would you like to see some kind of an international component to it or an international

investigation?

MS NAUERT: Well, I think I just answered that and we said that we would call upon the Saudi Government –

QUESTION: So you're –

MS NAUERT: – to do a full and thorough investigation, as we always do. And we call upon all parties in any kind of situation like this to take appropriate measures to try to mitigate the risk of civilian casualties.

QUESTION: So you don't think –

MS NAUERT: DOD and other entities put out reports on this after the fact as they all start to investigate, and so we will look forward to any information on that.

QUESTION: Right. But my question is you don't see a need for there to be something other than a coalition investigation, you don't see a need for an independent –

MS NAUERT: Matt, I'm not going to get – this is something that is fresh, that just happened, so I'm not going to get ahead of any kind of investigation that may take place. Okay?

QUESTION: It's only the latest in a huge number of civilians killed during these operations though.

MS NAUERT: I would encourage you to take a look – and that is we regret any loss of civilian life. That is something that the United States Government – in particular, any time you talk to the Department of Defense about civilian casualties, they will say the same thing –

QUESTION: Well –

MS NAUERT: – that – I'm not finished, okay? And they will say the exact same thing, that all parties take very strong responsibility and measures to try to protect against the loss of civilian life. As we have seen – and you all very rarely ask about the issue that has been unfolding and the devastation that has taken place in Yemen – let's look at some of the things that have been happening in Yemen.

You have the Houthi rebels who continue to attack Saudi Arabia. They continue to do that with Iranian weapons, missiles, and rockets. They continue to try to attack civilian infrastructure in Saudi Arabia, for example, and that is part of the reason why these actions are being taken.

Let me go back and remind you what I just said a moment ago, and that is we call for an investigation and we anticipate that a thorough investigation will be done. I don't have anything more for you on that.

QUESTION: The Secretary isn't planning on having a conversation with –

MS NAUERT: I don't have any information for you on that. Okay.

Hi, Nick.

QUESTION: Is this – hey, Heather. Is this latest incident or the previous incidents causing the U.S. to re-evaluate in any way the role that it's playing in the situation, in terms of its relationship with Saudi Arabia?

MS NAUERT: Look, we provide a tremendous amount of humanitarian assistance in Yemen to try to support civilians in Yemen and try to mitigate against the devastation that's taken place there in that country. I don't have anything more for you on that.

QUESTION: But you also supply a tremendous amount of weaponry and the data for targeting to the Saudis.

MS NAUERT: Well, then – sorry.

QUESTION: Right? No?

QUESTION: No.

QUESTION: Am I wrong? Is that wrong?

QUESTION: That's not wrong.

MS NAUERT: Sorry, these ladies over here are laughing. On that I would refer you to the Department of Defense that is involved with that, but as you know, Saudi Arabia is an important strategic partner in the region to the United States.

Okay. Hi, Gardiner.

QUESTION: Just a follow-up on that. Hey. So obviously, there's growing concerns in Congress about the toll this war is taking within Yemen. It's the worst humanitarian disaster on the planet. Aren't you concerned that incidents like this will further erode congressional support and lead to further support for legislation that could cut off Saudi Arabia from arms sales and the rest?

MS NAUERT: I mean, I think that is an entirely hypothetical question and we don't comment on congressional proposals in any event, but I would ask – all of you have been very silent on the issue of Yemen, and times –

QUESTION: Well –

MS NAUERT: Although Said has asked. You've been the one reporter who's asked a lot about Yemen and the situation there.

QUESTION: Well I would suggest that if you had more than two briefings a week and they lasted for longer than a half an hour or 40 minutes that you might get questions about something other than the actual main topic of the day.

MS NAUERT: Matt, I think you and I talk every single day.

QUESTION: Yes, we do.

MS NAUERT: You have my phone number. You have all my numbers, and anytime you want to talk about Yemen, I'd be more than happy to answer your questions and provide you additional expert briefings –

QUESTION: Okay.

MS NAUERT: – on Yemen anytime anyone is interested, but I have not seen a major level of interest on the part of our press corps, with the exception of Said, on the issue of Yemen.

Yeah.

QUESTION: Why does that matter, though? There's news today, so –

MS NAUERT: Yeah.

QUESTION: Can you request an expert on Yemen?

MS NAUERT: Yeah, certainly, I'd be happy to. Yeah.

QUESTION: Wait, so first of all, I think that when there have been

attacks against Saudi installations or missiles and stuff, I think you've seen that there have been just as vigorous of reporting.

MS NAUERT: I don't – I disagree, but –

QUESTION: Well, I mean, that's – it's not our job to, like, sit here and go back and forth on that. We're asking today. The U.S. has tried to increase its target training with – to try and improve the targeting of the Saudi coalition. Is that still continuing?

MS NAUERT: Elise, I think that would be a DOD issue, so I'd encourage you to talk with my –

QUESTION: But these are foreign – okay, but these are foreign military financing.

MS NAUERT: Yeah, yeah.

QUESTION: Which is out of the State Department.

MS NAUERT: And I would encourage you to talk to DOD about that. So some
—

QUESTION: Well, maybe —

MS NAUERT: Some of this — some of this is a State Department equity, but much of this is Department of Defense, so I'd encourage you to talk with them about it.

Hey, Laurie.

QUESTION: Hi. On Iraq, the road between Erbil and Kirkuk, which was cut as a result of fighting last October, is being rebuilt, but Baghdad has said that it will establish a customs border on that road and collect revenues. Is that consistent, a customs border in the middle of the Erbil-Baghdad road, in which one party, the Iraqi Government, is going to collect revenues? Is that consistent with your view of a unified Iraq?

MS NAUERT: I would – there are other countries that have done this in the past, including our own country years ago in which this type of thing has been done. I think this is largely an internal matter for the Government of Iraq, between Iraq and Erbil, to try to work out. We do encourage them to resolve any remaining issues between Baghdad and Erbil.

QUESTION: You don't have a position beyond that?

MS NAUERT: Look, we believe that a strong KRG government within a unified and federal Iraq is something that's essential to Iraq's long-term stability and the enduring defeat overall of ISIS.

QUESTION: Okay, if I could ask you about Turkey. So the deputy foreign minister was here; it seemed there was no progress. Is that the case? And was pastor – were the American hostages the only issues that were discussed or were there other questions like the Turkish purchase of the S-400 discussed as well?

MS NAUERT: Yeah. I mean, obviously you all know that we have a very broad relationship with Turkey and a host of issues that we talk about with the Turkish Government whenever we do meet. Yesterday we had a wide-ranging conversation with Turkish Government officials. We made it clear that Pastor Brunson needs to be returned home. Much of this, though, we're not going to negotiate in public.

QUESTION: Can you tell us –

MS NAUERT: Go ahead. Hi.

QUESTION: Can you tell us if you made any progress about the situation of Pastor Brunson?

MS NAUERT: Yeah, I would say we would define progress as Pastor Brunson being brought home.

QUESTION: So in other words, no.

MS NAUERT: And so progress is –

QUESTION: Until he – until he's –

MS NAUERT: Progress is Pastor Brunson being brought home to the United –

QUESTION: So until he's home there is no progress?

MS NAUERT: – to the United States.

QUESTION: Did you give any –

MS NAUERT: Yeah.

QUESTION: Did you give any deadline? Did you give Turkish officials any

deadline?

MS NAUERT: I don't have any information for you on that.

Thanks. Hi.

QUESTION: I think progress is kind of coming closer towards an agreement, like you're not – you don't have full North Korean denuclearization but you say that there is progress in working towards that goal. So is there progress in coming to some kind of deal with the Turks or are you still as far apart as you were the day that he was being hospitalized?

MS NAUERT: Yeah, I'm not going to characterize it that way. As you know, we had – we met yesterday. They had wide-ranging meetings at the State Department and with other departments here in Washington. I'd refer you to those other departments that met with the Turkish Government. The progress that we want to be made is to have Pastor Brunson return home. And I'll leave it at that. Okay?

QUESTION: So is that saying you will not engage with the Turks anymore on this issue until Pastor Brunson comes home?

MS NAUERT: I'm not going to speculate on that, and I'm not going to get ahead of the administration on that issue. Hey, Said.

QUESTION: Hi. Thank you, Heather. Could we move – could you comment on the escalation in Gaza? There has been escalation in Israeli bombardment of Gaza as we speak.

MS NAUERT: I'm sorry, start that over again.

QUESTION: There is an escalation as we speak of Israeli bombardment of Gaza. They said that they killed a 23-year-old woman, pregnant, with her toddler. Do you have any comments on that?

MS NAUERT: Yeah. I mean, overall we've been watching this as it has been unfolding, and it's a very concerning situation that has taken place in Gaza. Overall, we condemn the launching of missile attacks into Israel and call for an end to the destructive violence. We've seen reports that 180 or so rocket attacks have taken place, shot from Gaza into Israel, and we fully support Israel's right to defend itself and to take actions to prevent provocations of that nature.

QUESTION: But this last round of bombardment, Israeli bombardment, actually began by the Israelis. It was not Hamas that started this latest round.

MS NAUERT: Look, I'm not going to get into how this thing started. Let's not forget that Hamas bears ultimate responsibility for the dire humanitarian situation in Gaza. It's a tremendous concern of ours.

QUESTION: Okay. Let me ask you about the peace efforts that are taking place. Now, there are reports that the unveiling of the plan, the deal of the century, has been pushed back. Can – do you have any comment on that?

MS NAUERT: I would object to the premise of the question, your statement in that question. We have not unveiled the peace plan at this time. That will be unveiled by Mr. Kushner and Mr. Greenblatt when it is ready. And when it's ready to be unveiled, they will unveil it.

QUESTION: And lastly, last week you guys released some funds or some aid to the Palestinian Authority. I believe it was sent to the security forces. Can you share with us the amount of that aid? Is that a one-time

thing, or is it part of the sort of unfreezing of the funds to the Palestinian Authority?

MS NAUERT: I'm going to have to get back to you on that issue. I don't have any information for you on that today. Okay?

QUESTION: Russia?

MS NAUERT: Hi.

QUESTION: Russia?

MS NAUERT: Yeah, go right ahead.

QUESTION: Okay, two quick questions. First of all, on the sanctions that were announced yesterday, one of the requirements for Russia to avoid further sanctions is to allow inspections to make sure that they're not using chemical weapons. Does the State Department have any reason to think that Russia is going to allow that? And is the U.S. expecting Russia to allow that?

MS NAUERT: I mean, that's asking us to look into the future, and we don't know what the future holds. I think that's a hypothetical question, so I don't have an answer for you.

QUESTION: But the U.S. is fully expecting to have some kind of inspections take place, then, according to this law?

MS NAUERT: I don't have anything for you on that today, and I'm not going to get ahead of anything that happens in the near future. Okay?

QUESTION: Okay, well, that's what the law says.

MS NAUERT: Yep.

QUESTION: But my other question is on the – is the U.S. then currently preparing for this next round of sanctions, then?

MS NAUERT: As you well know, we don't forecast sanctions. We have complied with the law in announcing those sanctions just yesterday, and

we will comply with the law going forward, of course, as we always would. Okay?

QUESTION: Heather, just to get a follow-on on that?

MS NAUERT: Yeah, sure. Hi, Gardiner.

QUESTION: So you – in the case of Iran, you have this 12-point plan of what behavior you want the government to implement in order to lift sanctions. You have a whole series of sanctions that are now revolving around Russia having to do with CAATSA, Magnitsky, now weapons. Can you give us some global sense of what these sanctions are trying to achieve from an American foreign policy perspective? What are you looking for

from Russia? Why do we have sanctions on them? What's your goal? And when's the – when's the periodicity of these things?

MS NAUERT: Sure. I think I would start by answering that question with this: That we approach every country very differently. Every country that we have a relationship or even countries that we don't have relationships with are viewed through a separate lens. So what may be appropriate for one country is maybe not necessarily appropriate for another country.

The United States Government has determined that sanctions can be a very effective tool in trying to bring various governments to the table to negotiate with us or try to encourage countries to comply or to return to a better set of behaviors. So this is one tool that we have in a very big toolkit. The State Department works closely with Treasury and OFAC and other entities to implement, study, and enforce sanctions, and that is part of what you've seen yesterday. Let's remember that one of the things that has brought North Korea to the table is sanctions. And we have found sanctions to be very effective in many cases around the world. So the U.S. Government looks at that as an overall tool.

QUESTION: Right, so North Korea is a great example. Sanctions – as a result, you want to get rid of their nuclear program. Again, Iran, you’ve got a list of 12 things. Venezuela, you’ve got sort of a clear list. I’m trying to understand what your policy is with Russia. You’ve got a variety – myriad now of sanctions. What’s your goal?

MS NAUERT: Well, I think the President has addressed this and so has Secretary Pompeo. We’d like to have a better relationship with the Russian Government, recognizing that we have a lot of areas of mutual concern. It is a major country; we are a major country as well. And so when you have that, you are forced to have to have conversations with other governments. And sanctions is a way that we can try to encourage better behavior on the part of government. Now, I’m speaking in a broad-based sense, but that’s one way that we can encourage better behavior. Okay.

QUESTION: Same topic?

QUESTION: Could I ask a follow-up on that?

QUESTION: (Off-mike)

MS NAUERT: Sure. What is your name, miss?

QUESTION: My name's Emily, I'm from BuzzFeed News.

MS NAUERT: Emily, hi.

QUESTION: So if these sanctions are in part meant to encourage better behavior with Russia, Russia today came out and said that these sanctions – sort of as was expected – that these sanctions are not in keeping with the spirit of Helsinki. So – and I understand these sanctions were – they're in keeping with the law, et cetera, but does this – or to put it a different way, is the cooperation that was sort of established at Helsinki – is the U.S. Government still planning on having that with Russia after yesterday's sanctions?

MS NAUERT: We tend to believe that dialogue is always an important issue. I think I had just addressed this with Gardiner, and that is trying to build a better relationship with countries that we need to cooperate with or we need to be able to have relations with, and that would be one example.

QUESTION: And then just on the other point on the second tranche, and I don't mean to get you into hypotheticals, but yesterday at the briefing they did say that if Russia doesn't do certain things, including sort of admit wrongdoing and say that they weren't going to do it again, that there would be second tranche. And today, Russia said this is ridiculous, we didn't do that. So if they keep that position for the next 90 days, won't there – won't there, under the law, have to be a second tranche?

MS NAUERT: And that's why I would go back and say that we will comply with the law. We are well aware of what the law contains; we will comply with the law. But I'm not going to get ahead of what could happen 90 days from now. Okay.

QUESTION: The same topic – same topic?

QUESTION: (Off-mike)

MS NAUERT: Janne, go right ahead.

QUESTION: Thank you, thank you, Heather. On North Korean and South Korean issues.

MS NAUERT: Okay.

QUESTION: And – recently, South Korea imported North Korean coal. What is the U.S. position on the smuggling of North Korean coal into South Korea? Is that – do you think this is the – South Korea has violated sanctions?

MS NAUERT: I think – we'd say this: that we have a great relationship with the Government of South Korea. My understanding is that they are looking into reports of this. We encourage all countries to maintain sanctions, and to not skirt sanctions and make sure that sanctions are adhered to.

QUESTION: But two days ago, John Bolton, national security advisor, and South Korean national security advisor Chung Eui-yong, they had telephone conversation and John Bolton said that he trust or believe in the South Korean Government. What does it mean that you trust the South Korean Government, so –

MS NAUERT: Well, the Government of the Republic of Korea is an ally and longstanding partner of ours, and we closely coordinate with that government.

QUESTION: But allies – but they do something behind the United States is smuggling something else, so how you going to trust them?

MS NAUERT: Look, we trust when they say that they will investigate that they will investigate. We closely coordinate with them. They've been longstanding allies and partners, and we have a strong relationship with them.

QUESTION: Are you still investigations or waiting –

MS NAUERT: I don't have anything more for you on that, okay?

QUESTION: All right, thank you.

MS NAUERT: Thanks.

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

MS NAUERT: Kylie, go right ahead.

QUESTION: So there's been discussion of potentially having another meeting with North Korea. Has there been any progress on that that –

MS NAUERT: We have no meetings, no travel plans to announce today, and by the way, we just got back from a long flight, which I will remind you was a very long flight. Headed over to Asia, a long flight back. We're okay with being here for a while.

QUESTION: All right.

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

MS NAUERT: Okay. Hi. Go ahead.

QUESTION: Well wait, can I just follow up real quick on that?

MS NAUERT: Just hold on, hold on, hold on. He asked first. Go right ahead.

QUESTION: Oh, I'm sorry.

QUESTION: Yes. So about the North Korean coal, yeah. And South Korean Government is going to announce the result of investigation about North Korean coal smuggling maybe later today. So now the issue is that – whether the United States is going to apply the second boycott to the Korean companies, which it appears to be violated the sanctions. So I just wonder whether you are going to apply the secondary boycott to the companies.

MS NAUERT: I think I just answered that, that the investigation was initiated by the Government of South Korea, and we will wait to hear from them on any announcements with regard to that, okay?

And we're going to have to wrap it up in just a minute. Elise, go right ahead.

QUESTION: Just on the – you said there's nothing new to announce. Are the delegations trying to get another negotiating session? Like your team in Asia, are they trying to get another negotiating session together with the North Koreans?

MS NAUERT: Look, I mean, I can tell you we continue to have conversations virtually every day, every other day or so –

QUESTION: With the North Koreans?

MS NAUERT: – with the North Koreans, and when I say “conversations,” that can be by phone, that can be my message, that can be by email. Those are – they take different forms, those conversations do. So we continue to have conversations with the government. When – if and when we have travel announcements to make, I will certainly let you know, but we have nothing yet.

QUESTION: But I mean, obviously that you'll make those announcements, but I'm just wondering if like – if there is efforts being made to put together another negotiating session.

MS NAUERT: I don't have anything for you on that right now.

QUESTION: Can I have one question on the sanctions?

MS NAUERT: Okay? Okay. Sir, go right ahead.

QUESTION: Yeah. Just to follow up, you said you have nothing planned, but Mr. Bolton mentioned that in the letter that Secretary Pompeo gave to Foreign Minister Ri, there was an offer to meet. Has North Korea responded to that offer yet?

MS NAUERT: I don't have any information for you on that. This was a letter from the President to Chairman Kim, so I don't have any visibility on what was actually in that letter or what conversations the White House may or may not be having. I'd have to refer you to the White House for anything on that.

QUESTION: So you can confirm that there was an offer?

MS NAUERT: I can confirm there was a letter. Anything that the White House has said about that or Ambassador Bolton has said about that, I'd refer you back to them on those matters. When I have something to let you know, I certainly would be happy to.

Okay, last question.

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

MS NAUERT: Yeah.

QUESTION: Two days ago, President Trump claimed most Chinese students in the United States are spies. I'm not asking you to comment on what he said, but State Department as a agency to issue visa to Chinese students, do you share the view – do you think most Chinese students in the United States are spies?

MS NAUERT: Yeah, I don't have the President's comments in front of me. I have not seen those comments, so I would hesitate to comment on his comments without having read it and had the full context. As you are

well aware, we have many Chinese students studying in the United States. We have strong people-to-people ties with the Government of China, but of course there are concerns with some who might come into the United States and try to pick up some of our technology and other information and bring it back home for reasons that the United States Government would be concerned about. But we have a strong relationship with China and we enjoy having students studying in the United States from China, and I'll just leave it at that.

Okay, thanks. We've got to go, guys. We'll see you soon.

(The briefing was concluded at 3:28 p.m.)

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Press Releases: Recent Events in Zimbabwe

Press Statement
Heather Nauert

Department Spokesperson

Washington, DC
August 9, 2018

The United States government is gravely concerned by credible reports of numerous detentions, beatings, and other abuses of Zimbabweans over the past week, particularly targeting opposition activists. There should be no role for violence, intimidation, or harassment in the new Zimbabwe.

We are also deeply concerned that Zambia chose to hand over former Minister of Finance Tendai Biti to the Zimbabwean authorities, and in the face of a reported Zambian court order blocking his expulsion from Zambia.

This decision is particularly disheartening given the courage that Zambia showed in sheltering thousands of Zimbabwean freedom fighters from Rhodesian aggression in the days of Zimbabwe's independence struggle. We will be discussing this matter with Zambia's leaders and reviewing certain aspects of our cooperation with the Zambian government.

The Government of Zimbabwe is now responsible for Tendai Biti's safety and welfare. We call on Zimbabwe's leaders to guarantee Mr. Biti's physical safety and ensure his constitutional and human rights are respected, consistent with the rule of law and Zimbabwe's international obligations and commitments. In Washington, the United States has convoked the ambassadors of both Zimbabwe and Zambia to register our gravest concerns.

While Zimbabwe had a historic opportunity to move the country toward a brighter future for all its citizens, an electoral process marred by violence that does not respect constitutional rights and procedures is not a step toward that future.

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[Press Releases: Secretary Pompeo's Call With Mexican Foreign Secretary Videgaray](#)

Readout
Office of the Spokesperson

Washington, DC
August 9, 2018

The below is attributable to Spokesperson Heather Nauert:□

Yesterday U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo spoke with Mexican Foreign Secretary Luis Videgaray. The two leaders talked about the importance of reducing irregular migration through Mexico and the region and discussed the need for greater investment in Central America to address security, governance, and economic prosperity challenges. They also discussed the importance of concluding a NAFTA agreement.

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[Press Releases: Ecuador National Day](#)

Press Statement
Michael R. Pompeo

Secretary of State

Washington, DC
August 9, 2018

On behalf of the Government of the United States, I extend congratulations to the people of Ecuador on the anniversary of the first call to independence on August 10, 1809, which sparked the independence movement in Latin America 209 years ago.

Since we established bilateral relations, our nations have enjoyed deep ties, which are growing stronger every day. Vice President Mike Pence's visit to Ecuador underscores the ongoing progress. Our bonds are made especially evident by the reinvigorated friendship and partnership between our two countries. The United States is committed to working with the Ecuadorian people and their government to expand bilateral trade and investment, strengthen security cooperation, and increase cultural and educational exchanges. We welcome the opportunity to work with President Lenin Moreno and

his administration to build a stronger bilateral relationship in areas of mutual interest.

I congratulate all Ecuadorians on this day that led to your nation's independence.

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