

Press Releases: Special Representative for Venezuela Elliott Abrams On-Camera Briefing in the Press Briefing Room

Notice to the Press
Office of the Spokesperson

Washington, DC
March 8, 2019

Special Representative for Venezuela Elliott Abrams will hold an on-camera, on-the-record briefing TODAY, Friday, March 8, at 12:00 p.m. in the Press Briefing Room at the Department of State.

This event is open press coverage.

Media representatives may attend this event upon presentation of one of the following: (1) a U.S. Government-issued photo media credential (e.g., Department of State, White House, Congress, Department of Defense or Foreign Press Center), or (2) an official photo identification card issued by their news organization, or (3) a letter from their employer on official letterhead verifying their current employment as a journalist. Additionally, they must present an official government photo identification card (i.e., U.S. driver's license or passport).

The event will be streamed live on www.state.gov.

For further information, please contact the Office of Press Relations at (202) 647-2492 or PAPressDuty@state.gov.

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Press Releases: Commemorating the 12th Anniversary of the Capture of Robert A. Levinson

Press Statement
Michael R. Pompeo

Secretary of State

Washington, DC
March 8, 2019

Tomorrow marks the twelfth anniversary of Robert A. “Bob” Levinson’s capture on Kish Island, Iran. The Department of State renews its call on the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran to return Mr. Levinson to his family. Representatives of Iran and the United States previously agreed to cooperate on locating and recovering Mr. Levinson. Iran must honor this commitment, and demonstrate its adherence to international norms and respect for human rights.

The United States Government remains unwavering in our commitment to reunite the Levinson family with their beloved husband and father, who served our great nation during a long and distinguished career. We share our deepest sympathy with Mr. Levinson’s family and friends, and stand with them in solidarity against those who would separate loved ones in the name of political gain.

We are determined to secure the release of all American hostages and wrongful detainees, including Mr. Levinson, and will not rest until they are home. Special Presidential Envoy for Hostage Affairs Robert C. O’Brien, the entire Department of State, and our partners in the United States Government are actively and tirelessly fighting to bring Mr. Levinson home. There is a \$5 million reward for information that could lead to Mr. Levinson’s safe return. Information will be kept confidential and can be provided anonymously. For more information on the reward, please visit <https://www.fbi.gov/levinson>.

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Press Releases: Observance of International Women's Day

Press Statement
Michael R. Pompeo

Secretary of State

Washington, DC
March 8, 2019

The United States is proud to observe International Women's Day, March 8. We extend our gratitude to the diverse women and girls around the globe who have made vast contributions in lifting up those facing challenges and hardship and put their own communities and countries on a path to greater progress. The United States reaffirms our support for those women leading in boardrooms and the halls of government, for those changing lives in classrooms and laboratories, for those contributing to families and communities, and for those discovering solutions to prevent disease and end poverty. Barriers to the equal status of women still persist. In far too many places, women and girls still do not enjoy basic rights and are prevented from taking their rightful place in society. We strive for a world in which women and girls are free to realize their full potential and live in dignity along with their families, communities, and countries.

As we affirmed at the [International Women of Courage Awards Ceremony](#) yesterday, courageous women inspire a better world and are essential to building peace, prosperity, and security for all. The United States is honored to recognize these outstanding women of courage, emblematic of so many working for the betterment of society and generations to come. International Women's Day serves as a reminder to rededicate ourselves to gender equality and to remember those who came before us and had the vision to stand up for the rights of half the population to better the whole.

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[Press Releases: Senior State Department Official On North Korea](#)

Special Briefing

Washington, DC
March 7, 2019

MODERATOR: Thank you all for coming today to this on-background briefing. For your situational awareness only and not for reporting, with us today is [Senior State Department Official]. You may – for purposes of attribution, he is a senior State Department official. This briefing is embargoed until its conclusion. None of this may be used for broadcast. And with that, [Senior State Department Official], why don't you start us off, and we'll take a couple questions.

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: Okay. Thanks, [Moderator].

Let me say a few things up front, just to frame where we are on our work with the North Koreans. All of you follow this closely enough that I don't need to go – I don't need to wind the clock back to 2017, much less to the Singapore summit in 2016. The Singapore summit does remain very relevant to our discussions because that summit joint statement laid out the framework that we've been using to pursue negotiations with the North Koreans over the past many months.

We went through a bit of a holding pattern with the North Koreans in the fall of last year, but we've been at a pretty active pace – in fact, the most robust pace – of diplomacy between the United States and North Korea in many, many years, since the – since Christmas and through the new year.

I, myself, have made several trips to the region. I have had the opportunity, with the Secretary of State, to participate in discussions that we had here in Washington, D.C. in mid-January with Kim Yong-chol, the Secretary of State's counterpart in the North Korean diplomacy. We have had working-level

negotiations between the United States and North Korea on several occasions now, most recently in the run-up to the Hanoi summit. A team of U.S. negotiators has made a trip to Pyongyang, where over several days in-depth discussions took place in early February. And we had quite a bit of interaction between our North Korean counterparts and the U.S., as I said, in the days leading up – in the week leading up to the President's summit with Kim Jong-un.

Throughout those negotiations, it's largely been the same set of parties on both sides involved in these discussions. And as the President and the Secretary of State summed up at the end of the Hanoi summit, we have managed to close gaps on a number of issues in the U.S.-North Korea relationship. There are still important areas for us to progress, none more so than in the area of denuclearization. But the summit itself also provided us a very important opportunity at the senior levels of government to have an important exchange that lays out at least the options that we have to move forward on this issue, although ultimately at the conclusion of the summit, the ball was in North Korea's court. And it is going to be up to the North Koreans, to some extent, to decide to engage on meeting some of the expectations that are out there on denuclearization.

I think I'll leave that, leave the framing at that, and then I'm going to ask [Moderator] if [Moderator] would help me here to call on questions, since [Moderator] is much more familiar with you than me.

MODERATOR: Point of clarification. Singapore summit was in 2017.

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: What year did I say? It's 2018. It was June of 2018.

MODERATOR: '18, '18. And now I'm doing the same thing. Sorry about that. Excellent. Andrea, please.

QUESTION: Hi. Thank you very much. Andrea Mitchell from NBC. There have been satellite images – two more identified today. Two think tanks are saying that it shows that a particular site that had been discussed in Singapore, and which the North Koreans, according to the President, had agreed to dismantle in Singapore and had been dormant since August is now fully operational – no sign of anything being put on a launchpad, but operational, that there had been a lot of activity in recent days or weeks. They are interpreting this to mean a symbol – a signal that –

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: Who's "they?"

QUESTION: These experts at CSIS and at 38 North are interpreting this to mean that Kim Jong-un wants to send a message – he knows we're watching; it's commercial satellite imagery – that he's angry about not getting more sanction relief offered, and that it's a response to Hanoi. Do you interpret this imagery the same way? Do you interpret the – Kim Jong-un's response at all, and has there been any discussions about this issue?

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: So we are familiar and well aware of what

you're describing. We obviously watch very closely developments in North Korea, both in open source and sensitive areas, and we have seen the open source reporting on this issue. We have not drawn the same conclusions that you cited, although it remains to be seen what exactly the purpose is of this activity. I think you heard the President's comments yesterday that he would be disappointed, very disappointed, if this was in any way backsliding against commitments that the North Koreans have made to date, and we would very much see it as that if they use this facility in any capacity, because it is one that they have cited their intention to dismantle.

I have also seen in that open source analysis – and I wouldn't contradict it – that it's likely that these steps were happening prior to this summit in Singapore –

QUESTION: Can I just clarify?

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: – and were that the case, it would be very difficult to establish a causality between the outcome of a summit in which the North Koreans came to the table very much expecting a certain outcome and any steps that were taken. That's not to rule out the possibility. We simply haven't reached any specific conclusion about what's happening there, nor would we necessarily share the conclusion – at least, I don't have information that would support that that site is at this point, quote, "operational," unquote.

QUESTION: Would – can I just clarify about what your conclusion is? Would you accept the conclusion that there is a lot of activity that was not seen during months of it being dormant?

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: We watch all of – we watch as much of North – as the President has said, we watch as much of North Korea as we can see, and we are not always able to explain activity that happens. We have not – we clearly see in the commercial satellite photography that there is some level of reassembly going on in these buildings, so I'm not disputing what's in plain sight. Why it's happening, for what purpose it's happening, are areas that we're not ready yet to reach a conclusion, but suffice it to say the President has spoken quite clearly on this, that he would be disappointed – in fact, I think he said very disappointed – if this, in fact, did turn out to be backsliding on commitments that had been previously made to him.

MODERATOR: Let's go to Michael Gordon.

QUESTION: Sir, just to clarify, would you interpret a launch of a space launch vehicle to be a violation of North Korea's self-declared moratorium on missile launches? I ask that in light of the U.S. experience with the Leap Day Accord, where the North Koreans interpreted a space launch as consistent with a moratorium on missile launches. And have you conveyed that to them? Have you told them that if they launch a space launch vehicle, it would be considered to be a breach of their missile launch moratorium?

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: So I won't – I'm not going to elaborate on things that we might have discussed in privately with the North Koreans, but

let me just say in our judgment, launch of a space launch vehicle from that site in our view would be inconsistent with the commitments that the North Koreans have made.

MODERATOR: Let's go to *New York Times*, David Sanger.

QUESTION: Thanks very much for doing this. Good to see you. If – just following on Andrea and Michael's question here, you suggested that a lot of this activity had been going on prior to the summit, which seems reasonable, given all of the other reports we were seeing over the months from – between Singapore and the Hanoi summit. So first of all, in your view, did any of the activity that you were seeing on the satellites run counter to any commitments that you had gotten in Singapore or in your conversations with them since? And –

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: On the satellites, to deal –

QUESTION: Right, so from the satellites what you've seen are expansions of missile bases.

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: You mean from the commercial photography? Is that what you're referring to?

QUESTION: The commercial photography, right.

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: Okay.

QUESTION: Okay. So the first question is: did you – was any of this inconsistent? Second, have the North Koreans in any way explained this activity, even if to say we never told you we would stop doing this? And thirdly, the President, during the press conference, talked a bit about the second enrichment facility, which was obviously outside of Yongbyon and therefore a concern, given the Yongbyon proposal that President Kim made. Have you addressed that particular issue? Because that is obviously the one that would continue production in a significant way even if they closed Yongbyon.

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: So, David, first let me correct your characterization of what I said to Andrea. I said that we have also seen in the open-source reports suggestions that this activity had started prior to the Singapore – prior to the Hanoi summit.

QUESTION: And you agree with that?

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: That's – I'm just telling you what I saw. I saw the reports, and that's what they suggest. So that's what we're talking about here. Obviously, I'm not going to talk about intelligence information in this setting.

As far as your second question, the President communicated to the North Koreans yesterday – the President suggested publicly, in front of the entire world, that he would be disappointed, very disappointed, if they were taking steps that would represent backsliding from commitments previously made. The

North Koreans in fact not only mentioned the disassembly and dismantlement and destruction of this site, which is variously known as Sohae, or Tongchang-ri, or in some cases (inaudible) – the President not only received that commitment from Kim Jong-un in Singapore, but likewise Chairman Kim made that commitment to President Moon Jae-in at the Pyongyang summit on September 19th, when the North-South summit occurred, and specifically declared a North Korean intent to destroy that facility and allow access to international – what they said at the time was international inspectors to the facility.

We have pressed the North Koreans on moving forward with that step. I should say that the Tongchang-ri rocket engine and missile test site is not a critical part of North Korea's nuclear infrastructure, but it is an important location where they tested many of their early ICBMs, and it is certainly a facility that, as part of our efforts on denuclearization, we would like to see completely dismantled and destroyed in a verifiable manner. You will know this from your previous coverage, that many of the more recent tests that the North Koreans made with their nuclear – excuse me, with their ICBMs – were actually from mobile launchers, or in sites outside of Tongchang-ri, or Sohae.

So this is – I don't want to under – I don't want to diminish the concern that we would have if there is North Korean backsliding on commitments to dismantle and destroy Tongchang-ri, but I also don't want to exaggerate the effect on their missile programs if we were to permanently disable and destroy it. It's part of that infrastructure, but it is not a critical part of that infrastructure at this point.

QUESTION: Just to be clear on this, they never did allow the inspectors into Tongchang-ri, and they have committed as well, if I remember right, to the Secretary during one of his trips to Pyongyang that they would allow inspectors to the nuclear test site where they had blown up the entrances, that they would allow inspectors there, I think the Secretary said publicly. Did that ever happen?

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: Yeah, so that was Punggye-ri site, and your citation is correct; that was during Secretary Pompeo's trip to Pyongyang. And in that case they declared in the meeting to the Secretary that they would do that in the presence of U.S. inspectors. I'm not sure there's a consequence between the two constructs they used, but in the case of Punggye-ri they have also not yet permitted the admission of experts to confirm the destruction. Needless to say, these places are in open view and commercial satellite photography has achieved a level of excellence in which it's possible, even for a reporter from *The New York Times*, to monitor developments at those sites. But in terms of destroying and dismantling those in a manner that's fully verifiable and to our satisfaction, in neither case have those occurred yet. They haven't used the facilities to date, but they also haven't completed to our satisfaction the destruction or dismantlement.

QUESTION: So no inspectors at either location that they have committed to?

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: Correct.

MODERATOR: Margaret Brennan.

QUESTION: Hi, thank you for doing this. Margaret Brennan from CBS. Two questions. One: Can you clarify what the President meant today when he said we'll see in a year? He was asked in the Oval Office by some reporters shouting questions about North Korea, he said we'll see in a year. And sort of part two to that is: Can give you us a sense of your timeline here? John Bolton has said it would take a year from the point that the North Koreans agree to our definition of denuclearization to actually dismantle everything. That was the timeline he said the U.S. had worked out. How much time do you have for the diplomacy to get to that point?

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: So, Margaret, I have been in a communications cocoon all day and I have no idea what was discussed today or what might have been in the news today. I'd suggest on that one you go to the White House and ask them for an explanation. I wasn't part of that discussion. I – this is the first time –

QUESTION: You don't know anything about a one-year limit on any of your work?

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: Well, what I would say more generally, and this is to your second question, is that we still believe this is all achievable within the President's first term, and that's the timetable we're working on. We have discussed extensively the outlines of the calendar that allow us to do that, and it is doable. The – ultimately, the ultimate driver of this is not going to be the amount of days it takes. It's going to be the degree to which we can satisfactorily achieve the steps that we feel are necessary to finally and fully verify the denuclearization of North Korea. That's what we're working for, but I fully believe at this point we have sufficient time in the President's first term to do that. That's a little more than a year.

Originally, we set out the aggressive timetable for this to happen in a year, but we also aren't at a starting point yet where I think you could reasonably begin to run that clock. We're not going to be held to a limit of 365 days to get this done. It's the job that's going to drive the outcome, not the timing. But in our view it is still doable within the President's first term, and that's what we're pushing very hard with our North Korean interlocutors to achieve.

QUESTION: But to be clear, you don't know that the one year the President referred to was the dismantlement?

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: I don't know – I don't know what the President said at all. I could neither clarify nor contradict what the President said because I – this is the first time I've heard it.

MODERATOR: David Brunnstrom.

QUESTION: Yeah, David Brunnstrom from Reuters. Thanks for doing this. I – have you been in direct contact yourself or have any of your colleagues been in contact with the North Koreans since the summit? And is there any

possibility, as Secretary Pompeo suggested, that you could go back to Pyongyang in a couple of weeks? And also, do you agree with the suggestion by John Bolton that new sanctions may be necessary against North Korea to push this forward?

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: So on the communication and on the trips, to the extent that we have anything to say on those points, we will say them largely after the fact, not before the fact. But let me say that in terms of where we are with the North Koreans, we had a very constructive discussion with them in Hanoi and we left on very good terms. I think both sides agreed that the door remains open. Ultimately, the proof will be in the pudding. The North Koreans have only been – the North Korean delegation has only been back in Pyongyang for approximately 48 hours at this point. Because keep in mind, while many of us who were there flew back on our U.S. Government aircraft, the North Koreans spent an additional two days in Vietnam conducting a bilateral visit with their Vietnamese hosts, and that was followed by a 60-plus-hour train ride through China back to Pyongyang.

So there will necessarily need to be a period of reflection here. Both sides are going to have to digest the outcome to the summit. We ourselves have thought through some next steps to build on the progress that we were able to make in the discussions over the last several weeks, and quite frankly, in the President's discussions with Kim Jong-un as well. But there's a lot of work that's left to be done as well, particularly around the central issue for us, which is an agreement on the denuclearization that allows us to get to the end state that we aspire to.

As far as what it would take, the sanctions remain in place. Whether the President ultimately decides to expand those sanctions is a decision I think would ultimately rise to the President's level, but at this moment I would say the sanctions are still in place. I think they're still having a crushing effect on the North Korean economy, and we continue to put our full efforts into policing and enforcing those sanctions because, as we all know well, there is a certain amount of leakage and evasion that has taken place with those sanctions. We're looking to many of our international partners to work closely with us in that effort, and we are certain that we can maintain the economic pressure against North Korea that will make clear to the entire North Korean Government, but to Chairman Kim specifically, that there's a clear choice to be made here, and if they choose to go in the direction that the President laid out to them in an expansive manner at the summit in Hanoi, then they can – they have a very bright future ahead of them. Otherwise, the pressure campaign will be maintained and if the President decides, the sanctions will be increased.

MODERATOR: Let's go to CNN.

QUESTION: Hi. Quick question just following up on two things that you've said. You said that it remains to be seen what the purpose of this activity is at Sohae.

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: At Sohae. Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: Yeah. So how will you make that determination? Is it based on U.S. intelligence? Is it based on you straight up asking the North Koreans that are your counterparts? How will that determination be made? And then, my second question is you said that this all is achievable within the President's first term. What exactly is "this all?" The deal or denuclearization of North Korea writ large?

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: So we're watching in real time, as you are, developments at Sohae and we will definitely be seeking clarification on the purposes of that, and we'll definitely be continuing to seek the admission of U.S. inspectors to the site to verify the permanent dismantlement and destruction. That's our operating plan, and we're going to continue to move forward with that regardless of what we see happening right now. The intent of the North Koreans in this matter is known only to them at this point. We don't know why they're taking these steps. We don't know what they intend to do with it. But suffice it to say we're watching closely and we expect them to abide by the commitments that they've made to the President of the United States. In terms of your second question, it was what?

QUESTION: You said, "We believe this all is achievable within the President's first term."

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: Yeah, it's quite – writ large, what I'm talking about is the finally, fully verified denuclearization of North Korea. That means taking out all their key – parts of their nuclear fuel cycle, removing all their fissile material, removing their nuclear warheads, removing or destroying all their intercontinental ballistic missiles, permanently freezing any other weapons of mass destruction programs, and moving them on a course to reorient their economy towards civilian pursuits in order to make this a permanent direction for their country. In exchange for that, what the North Koreans will be able to enjoy is integration into the global economy, a transformed relationship with the United States of America, a permanent peace regime on the Korean Peninsula, and a closure to a 70-year relationship characterized by hostility and warfare between our two countries.

MODERATOR: Water? You okay on water?

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: I'm good.

MODERATOR: You're good? Let's go *Washington Times*.

QUESTION: Thanks so much for agreeing to interact with the free press. Can you say confidently –

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: Grudgingly. (Laughter.)

QUESTION: No, we appreciate it. Can you say confidently that all of the different members of President Trump's advisory team on the negotiations with North Korea were in agreement with the all-or-nothing strategy the President ultimately embraced in Hanoi? And I ask because there's the appearance that Mr. Bolton may have had the most influence over the President's decision not

to embrace a more step-by-step approach that others on the team had advocated for in the weeks leading up to this summit.

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: So nobody in the administration advocates a step-by-step approach. In all cases, the expectation is a complete denuclearization of North Korea as a condition for all the other steps being – all the other steps being taken. It has very much been characteristic of past negotiations to take an incremental approach to this that stretches it out over a long period of time, and quite honestly, has failed on previous occasions to deliver the outcome that both sides at least ostensibly committed to. This would be in the 1994 Agreed Framework negotiations as well as in the Six-Party Talks. So we're trying to do it differently here. The President has made abundantly clear to Chairman Kim that he's personally invested in taking North Korea in this direction if North Korea gives up all of its weapons of mass destruction and the means of delivery. That's a position that is supported by the entire interagency, Guy.

MODERATOR: Yes, ma'am, way back there.

QUESTION: Yeah, regarding the Yongbyon plus alpha, and the big deal that the U.S. suggested at the Hanoi, it's not quite clear, because what North Korean Foreign Minister Ri Yong-ho said was the U.S. side asked for one more. And South Korean media quoting sources say that this "one more" was (inaudible), the underground highly enriched uranium facility. And National Security Advisor John Bolton says that what the U.S. side offered was biochemical and all the WMD. So can you be more clear on what the U.S. side offered? Was it one more uranium facility or the entire WMD? And my second question is South Korea President Moon Jae-in told the National Security Council to speed up efforts to start tourists to Mount Kumgang and Kaesong Industrial Complex after the breakdown of the Hanoi summit. So is the State Department currently considering giving exemptions to the inter-Korean projects? Thank you.

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: So on your first question, I can't clarify what Foreign Minister Ri Yong-ho meant in his presentation, but I can certainly affirm what the President proposed to Chairman Kim, which was the complete elimination of their weapons of mass destruction program. So I'm not sure what Foreign Minister Ri meant by "one more thing," but I will say that – to be clear too, the President's vision wasn't simply invested in what the North Koreans needed to do. The President likewise laid out an expansive vision for a brighter future that would be available for North Korea were it to make the right choices in this regard.

I'm sorry. Your second question was?

QUESTION: Is the State Department currently considering giving exemptions to inter-Korean economic projects?

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: Okay. Yeah, I got it. No.

MODERATOR: Please, right there. Barbara.

QUESTION: Are you in consultation still with South Korea?

MODERATOR: Right here. Right here, please. Barbara.

QUESTION: Yeah. Just again to clarify your answer to this last question, the complete elimination of weapons of mass destruction program means chemical, biological, and nuclear; is that correct?

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: Yes.

QUESTION: And then also, there have been reports today of a tremor, 2.1 degrees on the Richter scale, coming out of a mine shaft, and I wondered if you're aware of the reports and what's your take on them?

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: I saw the press reports. It's nothing that is causing us any particular alarm right now –

QUESTION: Okay.

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: – but we'll continue to watch it.

MODERATOR: Rich from Fox.

QUESTION: Thank you very much. In your conversations and lead-up to the Hanoi summit, did you feel as though you had exhausted your conversations with the North Korean team and reached an impasse? And with the lack of a written agreement in Hanoi, where does that leave you, and are you confident in hopefully having more discussions with the same North Korean team that you were speaking with prior to the summit?

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: So thank you. The discussions – the negotiations, really, with the North Koreans in the run-up to the summit were very productive. We covered a lot of areas. The area that we fell most short was on denuclearization and it was clear to us that our North Korean interlocutors had very little authority to move on the set of issues that were, in our view, central to the success of this outcome. We have a lot of areas that we can continue to discuss with the North Koreans, and we will continue to discuss with them when we next engage. But fundamentally, where we really need to see the progress and we need to see it soon is on meaningful and verifiable steps on denuclearization. That's our goal and that's how we see these negotiations picking up momentum.

The – one of the – I suppose every system of government is unique, but the North Korean system is particularly different, and in that system, virtually any position that's going to be explored in the course of negotiations is going to be driven from the top down. There's no clever think tanks or op-ed writers or experts or former government officials who are going to float ideas that people might cling to or think about. The system very much is driven from the top down and the President understands this very much, and that's why he seeks to direct engagement with Kim Jong-un to invest him in a shared vision of that brighter future that could happen if they denuclearize.

In order for our North Korean counterparts to have more latitude, it's clear they're going to have to get direction and space from the top. They will not do that on their own. They will not test ideas at the negotiating table. So

there's an important interplay between the President's summit meetings and the President's direct engagement between summit meetings with Kim Jong-un and the amount of latitude that the negotiating teams at the working level are entrusted with in order to breathe life into some of these agreements. We need the North Korean negotiators to have much more latitude than they did in the run-up to the summit on denuclearization, but I'm confident that if they get that direction from the top of the North Korean Government, we can make quick progress with them.

MODERATOR: Last, we're going to go to *The Guardian*, AFP, and then we're done. Please.

QUESTION: Thank you. Julian Borger from *The Guardian*. You said the talks in Hanoi were productive and you said that the two leaders were on good terms. Why, then, was it cut short? Why didn't they stay for lunch?

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: So I think that's a bit of a mischaracterization. It's not yours. I've seen it reported many times. I know that. I think the amount of time that the President spent with Kim Jong-un equaled or exceeded what was the original plan. We worked through break times, we worked through scheduled lunches, we worked right up until the point where the President was previously scheduled to move back to his location where he was doing his press conference. So I think the schedule proceeded in a manner that was different than the planned structure, but in terms of the discussions themselves, they went on at quite some length and went on until the President, I think, was convinced that we weren't going to be able to fully close the gap at this meeting.

So a little bit different take on it, but they had more than sufficient time to explore in depth the possibilities here, and ultimately for the President to reach the conclusion he did at the conclusion of the summit.

MODERATOR: Please, AFP.

QUESTION: Thank you. Francesco Fontemaggi for AFP. What would be for you the deadline to reach an agreement in order to get this done, the denuclearization done by the end of the first term?

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: Yeah, so we are certainly engaged in a forward-leaning way to get there as quickly as we can, because we are mindful that every day the challenge gets greater. The threat posed by North Korea is not going away, and we recognize that fact, but we're not going to be driven by any artificial timeline. Certainly, as I said, we have a confirmed belief that we can achieve our goals for final, fully verified denuclearization in the course of the President's first term. The sooner we get that started, the higher my level of confidence we'll actually do that, but we're not bound to any specific timeline.

QUESTION: Excuse me, if I just can add you said that in Stanford, just before the summit, that you didn't even have an agreement on the definition of denuclearization. Do you now have one with the North Koreans?

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: We have the elements of one. We have closed some of the gaps on what that would be, and as we have closed some of the gaps on other issues, like declarations and freezes. Some of that is an accumulation of the issues we have discussed in the course of our discussions over the first three months of this year. Some of the ideas are still ours and remain to be accepted by the North Koreans.

It's a grinding process to negotiate with the North Koreans. Part of it is the nature of their system; part of it is that they've been at this for a very long time. We're not as far long as we would like to be, but we are making progress, and the door remains open to continue those negotiations as soon as possible.

MODERATOR: Great. With that, we'll call it there. Thank you so much for coming today.

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: Yeah. Thank you, [Moderator]. Thank you all.

QUESTION: Thank you.

MODERATOR: Thank you all. Bye-bye.

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Robert Palladino
Deputy Spokesperson

Department Press Briefing
Washington, DC
March 7, 2019

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TRANSCRIPT:

2:53 p.m. EST

MR PALLADINO: All right, one thing to begin with today. Yesterday, the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs launched the Academy for Women Entrepreneurs, and this is a new initiative supporting women entrepreneurs around the world. The academy will equip women with the practical skills needed to create sustainable businesses and enterprises.

Through an inclusive learning community, women from around the world will be given opportunities to explore the fundamentals of business,

including creating business plans and raising capital, with the goal of building a better future for families and communities around the world. The inaugural cohort will feature women in 26 countries, primarily Latin America, the Caribbean, and Africa, and that's going to include the Bahamas, Barbados, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Ghana, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Kenya, Nigeria, Papua New Guinea, Peru, Senegal, Spain, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Venezuela, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

QUESTION: Venezuela, huh?

MR PALLADINO: Venezuela.

QUESTION: Okay.

MR PALLADINO: The program will support the White House-led Global Development and Prosperity Initiative, which is designed to empower at least 50 million women worldwide by 2025 to fulfill their economic potential, and in doing so, create conditions for increased stability and security and prosperity for all. And with that, I'd be happy to take some questions.

QUESTION: I got two extremely brief ones, one just to clear something up on Venezuela. Yesterday the Vice President said that 77 additional visas had been revoked or whatever it is that you guys do for that. And then today, the assistant secretary, Kim Breier, tweeted that 77 additional visas – are they the same ones? Are we –

MR PALLADINO: The same 77, right.

QUESTION: Okay. All right, so that's –

MR PALLADINO: So yesterday, that was an additional 77 visa –

QUESTION: Yeah, but it's –

MR PALLADINO: – revocations, and to date, more than 250 is the number.

QUESTION: Okay. But you're not doing these in blocks of 77? So there's not –

MR PALLADINO: No, there's nothing special, Matt. Yes.

QUESTION: All right, and then secondly, I don't know if you're aware of this report that came out of San Diego last night about DHS and the CBP – Customs and Border Protection flagging U.S. citizen travelers to Mexico for specific – for additional questioning, et cetera. Are you aware of this?

MR PALLADINO: I have seen that story, I have.

QUESTION: Does the State Department have anything to do with this? And if it does not, can you say whether it would exceed to some kind of – to

a request from another federal government agency to provide information about – passport information about Americans for what would seem to be noncriminal or just kind of political actions or reporting or activism?

MR PALLADINO: What I can say is definitively the State Department has nothing at all, no role to do with any of this. This is a – this is apparently related to actions that are taken by other governmental agencies, so I'm not going to speculate what those are. Of course, law enforcement possibly could be involved, but I don't want to speculate. And then if you're – for further information, I think Department of Homeland Security would be the best place to go.

QUESTION: You're going to knock this down as a hypothetical, but I'm going to ask it anyway. If another government had done this, what would the – what would this – the building's position be on that? Would that be something that would raise concerns from the State Department if, say, this was the Government of France or –

MR PALLADINO: I'm not going to speculate. I don't want to do a hypothetical, Matt, all right?

QUESTION: All right. Thanks.

MR PALLADINO: Thanks.

QUESTION: Robert.

MR PALLADINO: Francesco.

QUESTION: May I have one?

MR PALLADINO: Sure.

QUESTION: Thank you, Robert. On North Korea, on the reports that the site has been rebuilt by North Koreans, I wanted to know if you guys have reached out to the North Koreans to ask an explanation, and at least if you have had any contact with them since the summit in Hanoi on Tuesday. You weren't able to answer to that.

MR PALLADINO: Before I get to your question, I should have read – said – mentioned something at the top, just for the general group. At 4 o'clock here today, there will be an on background briefing by a senior State Department official on the subject of North Korea, for anyone that's interested. So there will be some more subject matter expert later today. But regarding your –

QUESTION: In other words, Francesco, he's not going to answer your question. (Laughter.)

MR PALLADINO: No, no.

QUESTION: Yeah, I know. But –

MR PALLADINO: That is not what I just said, actually. And what I would say is – if I could remember your question now, Francesco. (Laughter.)

QUESTION: Did you reach out to the North Koreans to get an explanation or at least to –

MR PALLADINO: I think the President spoke to this yesterday. And he said, were it to be true, he would be disappointed.

QUESTION: But my question is different. Did you have any contact with North Koreans?

MR PALLADINO: Right. And I'm not going to be able to discuss or confirm every communication that the United States is having with North Korea. But our message here publicly – and privately, for that matter – is we're ready. We remain ready to engage North Korea in a constructive negotiation.

QUESTION: A follow up?

MR PALLADINO: Please, Lesley.

QUESTION: Robert, but today there was a 2.1-magnitude earth tremor in North Korea in a mining town. Do you believe this has got anything to do with testing, a testing site, or any kind of testing or questionable behavior by the North Koreans?

MR PALLADINO: Yeah, I have seen those reports. We're aware of them. I have no evidence suggesting that to be the case.

QUESTION: Can I follow up?

QUESTION: Robert?

MR PALLADINO: Any on this subject? Can we –

QUESTION: Yeah.

MR PALLADINO: Mr. Gordon, please.

QUESTION: Just a sort of policy question, not an intel question. President Trump and senior State Department officials said that, at the Hanoi summit, Kim Jong-un had reaffirmed the moratorium on missile test launches and nuclear tests. And my question is: Is it the U.S. understanding that this missile test moratorium also applies to satellite launches, should the North Koreans undertake such an activity from their satellite launch site? If they were to do that, would you consider that a breach of their missile test moratorium? I ask because of the reported work at that satellite launch site and the history of dealing with North Korean Leap Day agreement.

MR PALLADINO: Yeah, we've seen those reports, and we're not going to comment on intelligence. And regarding what would be our policy in this

regard, I'm not going to respond to that today. I'm going to defer on that. All right?

QUESTION: Can I follow up, Robert?

MR PALLADINO: Sure. Right here, please.

QUESTION: A little while ago President Trump said in the Oval Office that "We'll let you know in about a year" on North Korea. Can you elaborate on what that means for negotiations?

MR PALLADINO: I would refer you to the White House. I'm not going to try to –

QUESTION: So negotiations are ongoing?

QUESTION: Robert?

MR PALLADINO: Said, please.

QUESTION: Thank you. Very quick question. This, on the occasion of the International Women's Day, there are 48 Palestinian women at the Damon prison. I mean, there are many more, but in this particular prison, many of them – if not all of them, but many of them – are on administrative detention that just keeps getting renewed all the time. There are girls that have grown up to be women in there. I mean, there are mothers with their children that are denied exercise and denied books, and on all these – could you look into it? Could you look into this issue? And what would you have to say to the Israelis? Would you urge them to release those who are on administrative detentions? Because that is not a policy that is – that, let's say, Western democracies implement, administration detentions.

MR PALLADINO: What I would say is, Said, I'm not familiar with any of these cases that you're referencing. So I mean, I would have to refer you to the Government of Israel for more information on –

QUESTION: I understand.

MR PALLADINO: Right.

QUESTION: And I know that I could be referred to the Government of Israel and so on, and I probably know what they would say. But do you – are you alarmed by this situation? Are you alarmed by young girls – 14, 13, 15 – that are – that get to prison and they spend years and they grow up to be women in the same prison and so on, denied any access to recourse of – or legal recourse? Does that bother you? Does that – do you feel uncomfortable knowing that your ally Israel is doing that?

MR PALLADINO: Again, I know nothing about that. But I would say that as close partners and allies with Israel we have frank discussions and on a wide range of issues.

Laurie.

QUESTION: You don't know anything about administrative detention in Israel?

MR PALLADINO: I don't know – I don't – I know nothing about the specific cases that Said is raising.

QUESTION: Said has been asking about this for, like, every day for the last, like, five years.

MR PALLADINO: These 47? I don't know anything about these cases. Go ahead, Laurie.

QUESTION: The Iranian President Hassan Rouhani will visit Baghdad on Sunday with a trade delegation. So I have two questions. One, do you have any comment on his visit in general? And two, any comment on the trade delegations? They were all complying with the sanctions on Iran?

MR PALLADINO: I would say that our concerns about Iran's malign influence in the region are well known. In Iraq, Iran's support of armed groups, many of which engage in criminal behavior that undermines the security of Iraqi civilians, especially those from persecuted religious communities. And that's why we insist that armed groups in Iraq must be under the effective command and control of the central government, and we believe strongly in Iraq sovereignty, that it must be respected. And we remain concerned about any actions that could heighten sectarian tensions inside of Iraq. So our position is we urge Iran to avoid actions that undermine the authority of the state, efforts that are aimed at promoting reconciliations among communities in Iraq and the rights of all Iraqi citizens.

As your second question was regards to a trade delegation, I would say that the question of Iraq's foreign relations is for the Iraqi Government to answer. And after years of conflict, we believe that the Iraqis, first and foremost, would value their sovereignty and independence.

QUESTION: Well, to follow up on your statement about the pro-Iranian militias, you sanctioned al-Nujaba the other day. There's also calls for you to sanction Qais Khazali's militia, Asaib Ahl al-Haq, which was involved in attacking Americans and other coalition members during the Iraq – during Operation Iraqi Freedom. What do you have to say about the fact that that militia still remains active in Iraq and that Khazali has 15 seats in the Iraqi parliament?

MR PALLADINO: Yeah. Nothing further on that today, Laurie. Sorry.

Yeah. Please, right here.

QUESTION: On China, Chinese telecommunication company Huawei filed a lawsuit, suing the U.S. Government for prohibiting the federal agency of using its equipment. Do you have anything on the latest deferment? Is

there any diplomatic conversation between U.S. and China on Huawei's legal battle?

MR PALLADINO: Regarding this litigation, I don't have any comment on that, because it's pending litigation. That's really all I have to say about that lawsuit. We have made our – more generally, aside from that lawsuit, on the question of Huawei, that's something that we have spoken about regularly and consistently in recent days, on the Secretary's travel especially.

The United States advocates for secure telecom networks and supply chains that are free from suppliers subject to foreign government control or undue influence, which would pose risks of unauthorized access and malicious cyber activity. Because we believe that these risks posed by vendors subject to extrajudicial or unchecked compulsion by foreign states that do not share our values need to be weighed rigorously before making procurement decisions on these technologies. So we are in the process of routinely engaging our allies and our partners to provide them with information to help them to evaluate the risks, to exercise vigilance, so they can secure their own systems and protect their own people. This is something that we are engaged in, and this is a decision that every nation must make for itself.

QUESTION: Secretary Pompeo is going to Houston next week for energy conference to address – in your words, to address how America's energy revolution strengthens national security in an age of renewed great power competition. And meanwhile, we understand there are a group of 11 senators, bipartisan senators, has wrote a letter and asking the government to look at new issue and also to call for a ban on electrical device, meaning inverters produced by Huawei not to be used in the energy infrastructure. First, do you agree with those senators' call? And secondly, should we expect Secretary Pompeo to warn the energy sectors not to use products, specifically inverters, produced by Huawei?

MR PALLADINO: Regarding the first specific call as I understand it, I'm not familiar with that specific ask, and I don't have a specific answer to give. So I'm going to refrain from doing so.

Regarding what the Secretary is going to be raising next week, he's going to be talking about energy policy as a matter of national security, and on that I'm certain that our – the Indo-Pacific will very much be a focus. But I don't want to get too far ahead of what the Secretary will or will not be speaking about next week. We'll have some more information to give you in that regard, so –

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

MR PALLADINO: Let's go to –

QUESTION: Thank you.

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

QUESTION: (Inaudible) follow-up on Huawei, Robert? Follow-up on Huawei?

MR PALLADINO: Huawei. Okay, let's – little bit more Huawei. Sure.

QUESTION: (Inaudible) explicit. So do you include Huawei among the list of vendors that you believe poses a threat to telecom (inaudible)?

MR PALLADINO: We do.

QUESTION: Okay. And then, do you believe that Huawei has grounds to file this lawsuit in the United States?

MR PALLADINO: Not going to comment on the legislation. I'd refer to the Department of Justice.

Lalit.

QUESTION: Thank you. The news reports coming out of the UN building in New York City says that U.S., France, and Britain have moved a new resolution in UN Security Council for terrorist designation of Azhar Masood. U.S. has – U.S. and France has done this in the past, but China has always blocked it, saying that you people don't have enough evidence against Azhar Masood. So what has changed now? What – do you have any fresh evidence? Have you talked to the Chinese? They are convinced this time?

MR PALLADINO: Our views on Masood Azhar and Jaish-e-Mohammed are well-known. Jaish-e-Mohammed is a United Nations-designated terrorist group that has been responsible for numerous terrorist attacks and is a threat to regional stability. Masood Azhar is the founder and leader of JEM. As far as your specific question on United Nations sanctions committee deliberations, those are confidential and as such, it's not something that I'm going to be able to comment on specific matters in that regard. But we will continue to work with the sanctions committee to ensure that the list is updated and that it's accurate.

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

MR PALLADINO: Let's go to Sri.

QUESTION: Follow-up? Follow-up?

MR PALLADINO: Let's go – Sri, please, go ahead.

QUESTION: Yeah, thanks. My question is also about India and Pakistan. As you know, Pakistan has arrested 44 people who are members of terror organizations. In the past, Pakistan has taken action against such individuals, but they haven't been credible or long-lasting. This time, do you think – how is the U.S. viewing this? Is the U.S. viewing this as more of the same old, same old, or is it viewing it as a structural break, that something is different this time? And if you're optimistic about things this time, why the optimism?

MR PALLADINO: I would say that we, the United States notes these steps and we continue to urge Pakistan to take sustained, irreversible action against terrorist groups that will prevent future attacks and that will promote regional stability. And we reiterate our call for Pakistan to abide by its United Nations Security Council obligations to deny terrorists safe haven and block their entry to funds. And I'll leave it at that.

QUESTION: Just follow, Robert?

MR PALLADINO: Please, Rich.

QUESTION: Robert, on Venezuela, can you – can you confirm that Venezuela has deported an American citizen and journalist to the United States?

MR PALLADINO: He's on his way to Miami, as I understand, and we're happy on that regard. Yes.

Please.

QUESTION: Venezuela.

QUESTION: Robert. Robert.

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

MR PALLADINO: Let's try right there.

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

QUESTION: It's just the one, yeah.

QUESTION: Thank you. Actually, my subject of the question is kind of old, but it might be new anytime – sometime soon now. Mr. Palladino, as you know, State Department has held some of those individuals in Congo accountable and even imposed –

MR PALLADINO: I'm sorry, where?

QUESTION: Congo.

MR PALLADINO: Congo?

QUESTION: Yeah, in Congo accountable, and even imposed some sanctions due to human rights abuse and undermining democracy, releasing a statement about that. But the Sisi government has been reportedly torturing and executing opposition members without a fair trial, as it happened with nine young Egyptian citizens a couple of weeks ago, and is it about to happen again due to the ongoing trials. But we haven't heard anything from the State Department about this. Do you have any comment on that?

MR PALLADINO: Sure.

QUESTION: To prevent the further executions, maybe.

MR PALLADINO: We discuss human rights regularly in all of our interactions when we engage with other nations, and that includes Egypt. I don't have anything specific on the particular case that you are raising today, and I would want to gather a little more information before responding specifically to that, but we have raised and will continue to raise at senior levels the fundamental importance for human rights and fundamental freedoms and the need for a robust civil society. I'll stop there.

Please.

QUESTION: Nicaragua.

MR PALLADINO: Nicaragua.

QUESTION: On Syria.

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

MR PALLADINO: Okay, we'll try Nicaragua. Please.

QUESTION: There is a dialogue going on in Nicaragua. Does the U.S. support this dialogue, and specifically if the U.S. thinks that the Catholic Church, which were very relevant in the previous dialogue, if they should participate as a witness in the negotiations?

MR PALLADINO: We continue to urge the Ortega government to take concrete actions now to join the church-led peace dialogue, and to negotiate in good faith. That's what I'd say.

Please, Syria. Okay.

QUESTION: Thank you. So, as you know, there are thousands of women and children who have escaped Baghouz. The women, of course, they were ISIS brides, and the children are their children. So what's your stance on the children, and should they suffer for the crimes their parents have committed?

MR PALLADINO: Our position on foreign terrorist fighters we've spoken about previously here, but you're asking specifically about –

QUESTION: About the children.

MR PALLADINO: – children that could – I mean, we're taking – those on the ground are taking every precaution possible as that – the final fight continues and we're coming close to an end. There are many groups on the ground with whom we're engaging that are very involved in that, and of course we're trying to ensure everything is done to minimize any danger.

QUESTION: Is anything done, like, by the State Department's human rights

and labor department to make sure these children are safe and not harmed in the process of trying to bring the mothers or the fathers to justice?

MR PALLADINO: We're working with those groups that are on the ground in this regard, and we will continue to do so.

Please, Christina.

QUESTION: On Syria. Could I just ask you why it took you six days to put out a statement about the OPCW findings on the Douma attack?

MR PALLADINO: Six days ago would have been Saturday morning and I had just gotten back from Hanoi. I'm sorry. Yeah.

QUESTION: March 1st it came out.

MR PALLADINO: You got it today. I know.

QUESTION: No, but I mean –

MR PALLADINO: Sorry. We're slow.

QUESTION: Well, don't apologize to me. But I mean, if you want your – it just seems to me to be smart from a communications point of view that if you want your sense, your stance on something known, you should try and get it out a little bit more contemporaneously with the actual thing you're commenting on.

MR PALLADINO: Again, again, I want to hire you for our communications team at some point, but your point is taken.

QUESTION: It's like offering condolences for President Truman's death.

MR PALLADINO: We'll be better. We'll be better. Christina. Christina had a question.

QUESTION: I just wanted to ask a follow-up. To that point, though, is there any kind of State Department policy in the offing, in the works to deal with the kids of these foreign fighters, especially foreign fighters that you said you're not going to repatriate? Hoda Muthana comes to mind. Because it just seems to me it's a little shortsighted to say, okay, so now we've got a bunch of kids of people who aligned themselves with terrorists in refugee camps, growing up I'm assuming even angrier at the U.S. than their parents would be. Isn't this – by not having a way to deal with this, aren't you kind of shooting yourselves in the foot when it comes to trying to deal with these policies and these people and making sure there's not another generation looking to join ISIS and start this all over again?

MR PALLADINO: We're taking a look at these issues and we're going to continue to do so, but I don't have any policies to announce today.

Let's go to Lesley, please.

QUESTION: I have a twofer, as they say. President Erdogan said yesterday that his country would never turn back from its deal to purchase the S-400 from Russia and that it would actually also look at the S-500 from Russia. Does this in any way – and you’ve probably seen that the currency’s moving, the lira is reacting to this because of – it provides some more tensions for – between the countries. What is your reaction to that? Is it a do-or-die rule that they absolutely cannot buy this? Is there a middle road here?

MR PALLADINO: I was – I explained the policy yesterday in detail, and I would refer back to that. I have nothing additional to add to what we said yesterday.

QUESTION: And then on Zimbabwe, please, yesterday the – or the day before that the President extended the sanctions against Zimbabwe. It comes at a time when African leaders want those sanctions lifted. Is there any – why did the President extend them, and is there any discussions going on with the new government to lift some or all of them?

MR PALLADINO: Right, so you’re referring to the March 4th renewal?

QUESTION: Correct, which the President put out.

MR PALLADINO: Right, which would maintain targeted sanctions on individuals and entities in Zimbabwe that are responsible for undermining democratic processes and institutions.

QUESTION: Correct.

MR PALLADINO: The basis of that is something that is renewed annually and has been done for – yeah, the basis – that is the basis of law.

QUESTION: I don’t know. That’s why I’m asking.

MR PALLADINO: Yes. It’s done under – it’s in pursuant to the International Emergency Economic Powers Act, which are various executive orders under that – that fall under that.

QUESTION: So you believe that nothing has improved under the new government?

MR PALLADINO: I would say that these sanctions target certain persons and senior – who are senior officials in the Government of Zimbabwe that have participated in human rights abuses related to political repression, or they’ve engaged in facilitating public corruption by senior officials. This is not comprehensive sanctions; this is targeted sanctions against specific individuals. And the renewal that was – that took place on the 4th is – does not add any new names. It is simply a renewal of the sanctions that were – targeted sanctions that were already in place, and I’ll – does that –

QUESTION: So nothing’s improved?

MR PALLADINO: We believe that President Emmerson Mnangagwa has yet to implement the political and economic overhaul required to improve the country's reputation with the community of nations, and with the United States, frankly. The actions of the targeted individuals continue to undermine Zimbabwe's democratic processes, and I'll stop there. So we – well, we're also seriously concerned about the ongoing human rights abuses in Zimbabwe.

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

QUESTION: The U.S. embassy in Riyadh – the U.S. embassy in Riyadh – I've got a question about –

MR PALLADINO: Let's go –

QUESTION: – about the U.S. embassy –

MR PALLADINO: Lalit, one more, Lalit. No, I already called on you, Said.

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

QUESTION: One quick one on Afghanistan. Do you have any update on Ambassador Khalilzad's talks to the Taliban? Has any progress, further progress, been made?

MR PALLADINO: Let me check.

QUESTION: If the answer is anything other than "no," I will be – (laughter).

MR PALLADINO: No updates from yesterday – (laughter) – or two days ago.

QUESTION: That means you have to take Said's question.

MR PALLADINO: But talks continue, talks are continuing, I would say.

QUESTION: So long he's going to stay there? Do you know?

MR PALLADINO: I don't have an end, but we remain committed to the efforts there, and that's something that we're going to continue to pursue. Special Representative Khalilzad is active on the ground right now with his counterpart, and we've spoken about that recently. I don't have any new information on how the talks are progressing, but it's something that we're of course watching closely. The Secretary has indicated as much. He continues to watch this – we're all watching this very closely, and no updates to provide, though, today.

QUESTION: Robert, U.S. embassy in Riyadh.

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

QUESTION: The embassy in Riyadh –

MR PALLADINO: Guys, we're going to call it there.

QUESTION: The U.S. embassy in Riyadh.

QUESTION: Hold on a –

MR PALLADINO: That is the end for today.

QUESTION: Wait a – hold on a second. Wait a second.

MR PALLADINO: Go ahead, go ahead.

QUESTION: Well, I'm going to – if Said can't ask it, I'll ask it.

MR PALLADINO: Okay.

QUESTION: Do you have any comment on this report about the embassy staff in Riyadh being kept out of Jared Kushner and Jason Greenblatt's meetings there?

QUESTION: Right, thank you.

QUESTION: And secondly, can you explain why exactly this Finnish journalist was – her – the award, International Women of Courage Award, was rescinded? Why did that happen?

MR PALLADINO: On the first one, I am not familiar with the report, I haven't heard anything about that, and I don't want to speculate.

On the second one, yeah, I've seen that report.

QUESTION: Oh, I'm sure you have.

MR PALLADINO: What I would say is we made a mistake. This was a regrettable error.

QUESTION: In rescinding it?

MR PALLADINO: In rescinding, we –

QUESTION: You should not have rescinded?

MR PALLADINO: No, no, no, no.

QUESTION: Oh.

MR PALLADINO: We incorrectly notified this individual that she had been selected as a finalist. This was an error. This was a mistake.

QUESTION: So she hadn't been selected as a finalist?

MR PALLADINO: She had not. We regret the error. And to be clear, we admire this journalist's achievements as a journalist, and that was the basis of her nomination by Embassy Helsinki.

QUESTION: Okay. So the process here is that the embassy, wherever the

person is – various embassies nominate people, it comes back here, these – the nominations are looked at and then you guys make a decision. Somehow, someone screwed up here and notified her that she had won, but she hadn't?

MR PALLADINO: Yes, yes.

QUESTION: Is that – that's the short? So it has –

MR PALLADINO: Yes.

QUESTION: – nothing to do with any social media commentary that is critical of the President or this administration?

MR PALLADINO: I've seen that speculation. I'm not going to be able to go further into weighing the merits of who was selected, whether one person had more merit versus the other. That's internal. But I can say we regret the error and we've got to do better in that regard. I'll leave it at that.

QUESTION: A follow-up?

MR PALLADINO: We're done.

(The briefing was concluded at 3:27 p.m.)

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