

Press Releases: Previewing the Upcoming U.S.-India 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue

Special Briefing
Senior Administration Officials
Via Teleconference
August 30, 2018

MODERATOR: Good afternoon, everyone. Thank you for joining today's call on the upcoming United States-India 2+2 ministerial dialogue. As a reminder, today's call is on background. For your own situational awareness, joining us today [is] [Senior Administration Official One], who will be referred to as Senior Administration Official Number One. And joining him [is] [Senior Administration Official Two], who will be referred to as Senior Administration Official Number Two.

I'll now turn it over to our senior administration officials, who will open our call with brief remarks. Senior Administration Official Number One, thank you.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL ONE: Thank you. Thank you for joining me; I'm very pleased to preview the upcoming 2+2 ministerial dialogue, which will take place on September 6th in New Delhi. And we'd just like to acknowledge upfront really the close cooperation between the Departments of State and Defense in organizing U.S. participation in this event.

The 2+2 is a major opportunity to enhance our engagement with India on critical diplomatic and security priorities. I know that Secretary Pompeo and Secretary Mattis are honored to be making – excuse me, Secretary Pompeo is honored to be making his first trip to India as Secretary of State for such an important event. I should also add that we are grateful to External Affairs Minister Swaraj, Defense Minister Sitharaman, and the Indian Government for their partnership in this effort.

The Secretary's travel in tandem with Secretary Mattis is a strong indication of the deepening strategic partnership between the United States and India, and of India's emergence as an important security provider in the region. India's central role in our National Security Strategy is enshrined in the President's National Security Strategy as well as the administration's South Asia and Indo-Pacific strategies.

So that's my first message, that the relationship with India is a key U.S.

priority and integral to our national security.

Secondly, I would like to emphasize that we have a very full and ambitious agenda for the 2+2, including advancing our shared vision for the Indo-Pacific. As democracies bookending the Indo-Pacific region, the United States and India share an interest in promoting security and prosperity in this region. Together and with other like-minded partners, we want to ensure the freedom of the seas and skies, promote market economics, support good governance, and insulate sovereign nations from external coercion.

As you know, the India – the United States, excuse me, declared India a major defense partner in 2016, a status unique to India, and operationalizing that status will also be an important part of our discussion at the 2+2. We expect progress and further deepening the ties between our two militaries and creating a framework for greater information sharing and interoperability. We are also eager to expand defense trade, which is estimated to reach 18 billion by 2019 from essentially zero in 2008. To support this goal, the U.S. Government recently granted India Strategy Trade Authority Tier 1 designation, which enables U.S. companies to export dual-use items to India under a more streamlined, licensed process.

We also will use the 2+2 to further advance our expanding counterterrorism cooperation.

I would like to briefly touch on our economic relationship with India, because it remains a key pillar of our partnership. The United States and India expanded bilateral trade by 12 billion last year, reaching 126 billion in 2017. We want to continue to grow the trade relationship to our mutual benefit, but to ensure the trade is fair and reciprocal. It is no surprise that tariff and non-tariff barriers have been the subject of longstanding concern, and the U.S. Government is working with the Government of India to address market access challenges.

Finally, I just want to acknowledge the importance of the strong people-to-people ties that bind the United States and India. From the 186,000 Indian students at U.S. colleges and universities to the deep links between our companies, scientists, and academics, to the over 3 million Indian Americans making such important contributions to our country, these people-to-people ties create a foundation of trust and understanding that make conversations like the 2+2 so fruitful.

So I'll stop there and would be happy to take your questions.

OPERATOR: Ladies and gentlemen, if you'd like to ask a question, please press *1 at this time. You may remove yourself from queue at any time by pressing the # key. Once again, for questions, press *1. And we'll wait just a moment for the first question.

And we will go to the line of Susannah George with AP. Please, go ahead.

QUESTION: Hi there. Thank you so much for doing this call. Will secondary sanctions, specifically India's purchases of Iranian oil, be a subject of

talks during the trip?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL ONE: So we plan to discuss a number of different ways to increase our diplomatic, security, and military cooperation to confront pressing regional, global concerns, but I don't want to at this point speculate or foresee the details of the topics that will be discussed. I will say, however, that we have been discussing regularly with India issues related to both Iran and CAATSA and are looking, as with other partners, to identify ways to cooperate to support our policy goals with regard to both those issues.

MODERATOR: Next question, please.

OPERATOR: Next we will go to the line of Gardiner Harris with *New York Times*. Please, go ahead.

QUESTION: Hi guys, thanks for doing this call again. It's been widely reported in the Indian media that the summit between Modi and Trump in November was a disaster. It's also been widely reported that President Trump made fun of Prime Minister Modi's accent, and there have been times on TV when he mimics an Indian accent. Is that a problem for the relationship or are you going to deal with that at all, the sort of – the Trump effect?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL ONE: So I take issue with the fundamental premise. The two leaders had, actually, a great meeting back in June of last year, and in fact, it was at that session that they decided to undertake this 2+2 dialogue to create this new venue for us to deepen our security and defense cooperation. And I know that President Trump is strongly committed to the relationship with India, I know that the prime minister values very much the engagements, interactions he's had with the President, and that strong connection between our two leaders is really what is helping to animate both our bureaucracies to make sure that we continue to make strong progress, including through the 2+2. I would also –

QUESTION: But [Senior Administration Official One], they met again in November at the ASEAN meeting too, didn't they? It wasn't just Modi here in June.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL ONE: So yes, that's correct. It was – again, I cited that first summit meeting because it's – again, it's relevant to the 2+2. That's where they agreed to undertake this new mechanism. But they have indeed met on a number of occasions and spoken by phone, and also would like to note the fact that the prime minister was very eager and happy to welcome Ivanka Trump to India in November when the U.S. and India co-hosted the Global Entrepreneurship Summit.

MODERATOR: Next question, please.

OPERATOR: Next we will go to the line of Thomas Watkins with AFP. Please, go ahead.

QUESTION: Hello. Thank you for doing this. Can you – just going back – kind of a follow on the first question, can you give us an update on where things

are with India and its prospective purchase of the S-400, and can you also tell us if there are any other prospective Russian arms deals that you're concerned about from India and what – how those concerns will be raised and what you'll be – what level they'll be discussed at the 2+2? Thank you.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL ONE: So again, I'm not really in a position to speak to any of the individual topics and subjects that may come up during the conversations, but I will say just on the subject of CAATSA, I think as you referenced, the Trump administration fully committed to implementing CAATSA, including section 231. We have discussed CAATSA with the Government of India along with other partners, and we continue to look for ways to work with India and other countries to help them identify and avoid engaging in potentially sanctionable activities.

QUESTION: But can you give an update on where the actual – where the process is? I'm sorry for my ignorance, but in terms of where India is on the S-400 purchase.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL ONE: So I would – I'd really refer you to the Government of India for the question about the status of any procurements they may have.

MODERATOR: Next question, please.

OPERATOR: Next we will go to the line of Aziz Haniffa with *India Abroad*. Please, go ahead.

QUESTION: Thanks, [Senior Administration Official One], for doing this call. In terms of some of the earlier questions, is the CAATSA waiver by the Congress a done deal? And do you foresee any problems coming up with the India deal with Russia on this front?

And how concerned are you, even more than Russia, as to where India's very close relationship with Iran would figure into the sanctions regime?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL ONE: So thank you for that question. So with regard to the waiver, there is obviously no country-specific waiver in the new legislation. There are no blanket waivers that will be issued for any one countries – any one country, excuse me – and any waiver that we might contemplate for significant transaction with Russia would be assessed on a case-by-case basis and would require, among other things, countries to significantly reduce their reliance on Russian arms.

And with regard to Iran, I'll say that, again, as I noted I think in the past, we continue to discuss our Iran policy with our Indian counterparts and speak to them, certainly, about the implications of our re-imposition of sanctions previously lifted or waived under the JCPOA. And just to reiterate, as you all know, the President has made very clear that the United States is fully committed to enforce all our sanctions, and that starting on November 5th sanctions on Iran's energy sector, Central Bank of Iran, and Iran's shipping sectors will come into effect.

And we know that India and other countries around the world certainly share

our concern about the urgency of addressing the full range of Iranian malign behavior, and we're closely – we're looking for ways to remain closely engaged with India in finding a way forward to end Iran's destabilizing behavior. We also have been quite clear in informing other governments when we speak about CAATSA to explain the risks of running afoul of CAATSA. That's an important part of our messaging as well.

MODERATOR: Next question, please.

OPERATOR: Next, we will go to the line of Seema Sirohi with *The Economic Times* in India. Please, go ahead.

QUESTION: Hi. [Senior Administration Official], I wanted to ask about the discussions with the Taliban. And was India kept in the loop about that, and will this come up for discussion in the 2+2?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL ONE: So, again, not going to speculate about the diplomatic conversation that will take place at the 2+2. I will say, however, that we consult extremely closely with India on Afghanistan. The South Asia strategy acknowledges and highlights India's important role to play. We are certainly welcoming and grateful for India's significant economic and development assistance provided to Afghanistan, over \$3 billion that's been pledged, and again, welcome the fact that our countries have shared interest in Afghanistan. I think we'll continue to work closely towards our shared goals.

MODERATOR: Next question, please.

OPERATOR: Next, we'll go to the line of Nike Ching with VOA. Please, go ahead.

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

OPERATOR: Your line is open.

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

OPERATOR: Next, we will go to the line of Emily Tamkin with BuzzFeed. Please, go ahead.

QUESTION: Hi. Thank you for this. So you mentioned people-to-people ties, and there's been some frustration over U.S. immigration policy, particularly how the stamps, current stamps on H1-B visas, is falling heavily on Indian citizens. Do you expect that to come up? If it were to come up, how would you – I know you don't forecast discussions, but how would you address it? And how is immigration generally factoring into this, this talk or this meeting?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL ONE: So I will say that the Trump administration's executive order has called for a broad review of U.S. worker visa program known as H1-B in the interests of ensuring that they are administered in a way that doesn't disadvantage U.S. workers or wages. But there has been no change to the processing of H1-B visas, so it's really impossible for me to speculate on the outcome and any possible changes to the

system. It is obviously an issue that is important to India. They're the largest beneficiary of H1-B – of H1-B program, and it's an issue which we – they regularly raise with us and we're regularly discussing with them. But again, just highlight the fact that no changes to the program to date.

MODERATOR: Next question.

OPERATOR: Next, we'll go to the line of Yashwant Raj with *Hindustan Times*. Please, go ahead.

QUESTION: Yeah, hi. Secretary Mattis was – a couple of days ago at a news briefing at the Pentagon said India and the U.S. expect to sign some – finalize some agreements at the 2+2. Can you discuss what agreements, how many, and is COMCASA going to be one of them? Thank you.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL TWO: So yeah, maybe I can speak to some of that. So we've made some encouraging progress is one of our key enabling agreements, the Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement. We've had several rounds of negotiations and we're encouraged by the progress we've made. And at the 2+2 it'll be discussed, and we'll see how far we get. But we're very encouraged by the progress we've made in that particularly key enabling agreement which will allow us to increase our interoperability between both U.S. and India, and India with its other systems, and open up a much bigger range of options to acquire advanced technology.

QUESTION: Any specifics about the other agreements that the Secretary was referring to, could have been referring to?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL TWO: So I wouldn't say they're a formal agreement. We're going to discuss proposals to increase maritime domain awareness, defense innovation. We're looking at potentially collaborating with some of our defense innovation efforts in the United States, our Defense Innovation Unit for example, and discuss proposals to enhance bilateral defense cooperation. So those are – those would be just an example of some of the proposals that we're going to discuss at the meeting.

QUESTION: Thank you.

MODERATOR: Go to the next question, please.

OPERATOR: Next we'll go to the line of Reena Bhardwaj with ANI. Please, go ahead.

QUESTION: Hi. Thank you for doing this call. My question is on Maldives. Do you think there would be any discussions in the 2+2 on Maldives and its upcoming elections?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL ONE: So again, I'm sorry to be repeating myself, but I really don't want to go into specifics of what these private diplomatic discussions may cover.

MODERATOR: Next question, please.

OPERATOR: Next we will go to the line of Nike Ching with VOA. Please, go ahead.

QUESTION: Thank you so much for the call. A quick follow-up of Susannah's question. Did India make any specific commitment to cut oil purchase from Iran, and would the United States consider a waiver to Indian companies that continue to buy oil from Iran? Thank you.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL ONE: So I will just say that I noted that on the 5th of November we will reimpose a number of those sanctions. And with regard to oil imports, our goal remains to get to zero oil imports from Iran as quickly as possible, ideally by November 4th, and we are prepared to work with countries that are reducing their imports on a case-by-case basis.

MODERATOR: Okay. This is our final question. Thank you.

OPERATOR: And that will come from the line of Seema Sirohi with *Economic Times* in India. Please, go ahead.

QUESTION: I wanted to ask [Senior Administration Official Two] a question. Yesterday, Randy Schriver basically said that the U.S. wants to wean India away from Russian defense systems and especially the S-400. Is the U.S. willing to offer something that matches the S-400's capabilities, and if so, would that be part of this dialogue?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL TWO: As [Senior Administration Official One] said, I really can't discuss the S-400 specifically, but I can say in general terms we've made great progress with India as a Major Defense Partner to create the conditions where we can offer much more advanced technology. I mentioned in the previous question the progress we've made on the Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement, the COMCASA. That's one example of the type of enabling agreement that'll allow us to provide India or offer India some of our most advanced technology. Now, certainly India is going to make its decisions based on its interests, but we're encouraged that increasingly more capable U.S.-sourced technology can be among their choices.

MODERATOR: Okay. Thank you very much. Thank you, all. That concludes today's call. As a reminder, today's call was on background. You may refer to the two speakers today as Senior Administration Official One and Senior Administration Official Two. Thank you all for joining. Bye-bye.

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[Press Releases: Russia's Harassment of International Shipping Transiting the Kerch Strait and Sea of Azov](#)

Press Statement
Heather Nauert

Department Spokesperson

Washington, DC
August 30, 2018

The United States condemns Russia's harassment of international shipping in the Sea of Azov and the Kerch Strait. Russia has delayed hundreds of commercial vessels since April and in recent weeks has stopped at least 16 commercial ships attempting to reach Ukrainian ports.

Russia's actions to impede maritime transit are further examples of its ongoing campaign to undermine and destabilize Ukraine, as well as its disregard for international norms.

The United States supports Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders, extending to its territorial waters.

We call on Russia to cease its harassment of international shipping in the Sea of Azov and the Kerch Strait.

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[Press Releases: Secretary Pompeo's Call With Masud Barzani](#)

Readout
Office of the Spokesperson

Washington, DC
August 30, 2018

The below is attributable to Spokesperson Heather Nauert: □

Secretary of State Michael R. Pompeo spoke yesterday with Masud Barzani, former President of the Kurdistan Region and head of the Kurdistan Democratic Party, to discuss political developments in Iraq and the broader region. He stressed that formation of a new Iraqi government is an Iraqi process that should proceed according to Iraq's constitutional timeline and reflect the will of Iraqi voters. He emphasized that the United States hopes to see a strong government that includes all communities and serves all of the Iraqi people.

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[Press Releases: Trinidad and Tobago Independence Day](#)

Press Statement
Michael R. Pompeo

Secretary of State

Washington, DC
August 30, 2018

On behalf of the people of the United States of America, my warmest congratulations to the people of Trinidad and Tobago as you celebrate 56 years of independence on August 31.

The people of the United States and Trinidad and Tobago have always enjoyed rich cross-cultural exchange, friendship, and the shared goal of building a more safe and secure region as underscored in the Caribbean 2020 strategy. We thank Trinidad and Tobago for hosting the joint Fused Response exercise this year, which demonstrated the importance of our cooperation in security and emergency preparedness.

We are grateful for the continued strong partnership as our countries work to deepen cooperation on trade, energy, and opportunity for all.

Today, we wish Trinbagonians from both beautiful islands a happy Independence Day with peace and prosperity throughout the year to come.

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[Press Releases: Department Press Briefing – August 29, 2018](#)

Heather Nauert
Spokesperson

Department Press Briefing
Washington, DC
August 29, 2018

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TRANSCRIPT:

2:54 p.m. EDT

MS NAUERT: Good afternoon. You're probably wondering why we are briefing on a Wednesday. Why not? I thought some of you might enjoy an extra-long weekend; if anyone wants to feel free to take off tomorrow we'll certainly write you a slip to go.

I wanted to mention yesterday I was at the Department of Defense, and saw your digs over there, or your colleagues' digs. I saw your colleague, Jennifer Griffin, Rich, and saw some CNN folks as well. If

you've not been over there – boy, that's nice. I mean, they really have a great setup over there. So your colleagues said don't tell that to our State Department colleagues.

QUESTION: Is it better than ours?

MS NAUERT: Yes, they have nice big offices.

QUESTION: Do they have rats? (Laughter.)

MS NAUERT: I did not ask about rats, but it was very, very nice, and I want to thank my colleague Dana White for having me over there.

QUESTION: They have WiFi, right?

MS NAUERT: I don't know if they have WiFi.

QUESTION: I think they do, yes.

MS NAUERT: Yes, yes. (Laughter.) But we were actually over there talking about the India 2+2 meeting that is coming up, which I wanted to make a little announcement about that today, and mention that Secretary Pompeo looks forward to traveling to New Delhi with Secretary Mattis for the inaugural India 2+2 ministerial dialogue that takes place starting on September the 6th. They'll meet with their Indian counterparts, External Affairs Minister Swaraj and Defense Minister Sitharaman, to discuss enhancing our engagement with India on critical diplomatic and security priorities. The dialogue is an indication of the deepening strategic partnership between our two countries, and India's emergence as a net security provider in the region.

The importance of the U.S.-India strategic partnership is highlighted in the President's National Security Strategy as well as the administration's South Asia and Indo-Pacific strategies. So we look forward to that and look forward to having some of you travel along with us.

Next, I'd like to recognize a colleague of mine who is moving on to his next posting and will be preparing to head to Moldova. Some of you may know Joe Geraghty, who's worked in the European Affairs bureau, and I just wanted to recognize Joe for truly being one of the best press officers here in the building. My first day, about 16 months ago, he helped get me prepped up to start briefing all of you, and he's really been fantastic. So I just wanted to wish him and his family well as he moves on to his new post.

Last thing I'd like to highlight, and that is something we're really proud of that's taking place in Uzbekistan right now. Earlier today, our U.S. ambassador to Uzbekistan, Pamela Spratlen, joined the deputy justice minister of Uzbekistan to welcome the American Councils for International Education to Uzbekistan. That group is based here in Washington, D.C. The American Councils implements U.S. educational programs and exchanges worldwide. It will be the first U.S. Government –

excuse me, the first U.S. NGO organization registered in Uzbekistan for more than 15 years. It demonstrates our growing strategic partnership between the United States and Uzbekistan, and the Government of Uzbekistan's commitment to meaningful reform and international engagement. The welcome news represents our two countries' strengthening of people-to-people ties as American Councils will open up many opportunities for academic and cultural exchanges between the United States and Uzbekistan.

And as you may recall, we invited that country to attend our religious freedom ministerial here at the State Department back in July in recognition of the recent steps that the Government of Uzbekistan has taken to improve religious freedom. We commend the government for its significant progress that it's made in implementing the president's reform agenda.

And with that, I'd be happy to take your questions. Go ahead, Suzanne.

QUESTION: Yeah, I'd like to ask about something that we didn't really get a chance to talk about too much yesterday.

MS NAUERT: Okay.

QUESTION: Yemen and the UN report that was out this week that detailed possible war crimes there. I'd just like to get your view on this report, and the Secretary's view. And I was interested if this is something that you expect will inform U.S. policy moving forward.

MS NAUERT: Yeah. Give me one second. I've got Yemen back here, and it takes a bit to get to.

Okay. First, let me start by saying that Secretary Mattis and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General – Chairman Dunford addressed this to great extent yesterday in their press briefing, so I would just add on to their comments that they made yesterday. In terms of the UNHCR report that you ask about, we've seen that report to the Human Rights Council. The possible violations of international law as outlined in that report are very concerning to the United States Government. We believe that if such crimes have taken place, that there is simply no justification for those types of crimes. We take the report seriously. We're certainly taking a look at the report and urge all parties to the conflict to do the same.

This serves as a good reminder that all parties to the conflict need to comply with their obligations under the Law of Armed Conflict to thoroughly investigate alleged violations of the Law of Armed Conflict and take necessary measures to prevent such violations. And that report I think gets us back to something that we have long supported, and that is a political solution to take place in Yemen. Martin Griffiths, who represents the United Nations as its special envoy, has a meeting coming up – I believe it's within the next week or so. So we're hoping to have some additional information and possibly some progress coming out of

those meetings. And I'd be happy to bring you more when we do have it on that.

QUESTION: Yeah, but do you expect that this could maybe cause the U.S. to reevaluate support for the Saudi-led coalition?

MS NAUERT: Yeah, I'm not going to get ahead of that. I think that Secretary Mattis addressed that yesterday. And so I would just urge you to go back and read his comments. Saudi Arabia is obviously a strong strategic partner of the United States and we work with Saudi Arabia on a host of issues because we have a very broad relationship with that government. As we have discussed for the past several weeks, they are conducting an investigation; that's something that the U.S. Government has encouraged them to do so, and they have accepted that and they have given us assurances that they will conduct that investigation fully.

Okay. Hey, Lesley.

QUESTION: Yeah, I do have a follow-up on that one. Does that mean – you said you were reviewing the report. Does that mean that aid or any kind of assistance could be implicated depending on whatever your finding is? Or, I mean, I'm trying to find out what the – what the endpoint could be on that.

MS NAUERT: Yeah, I'm not going to get ahead of any of the decisions that may or may not be made in the future with regard to that, but just want to say that we take those findings seriously and we're urging parties to the conflict to do the same thing.

QUESTION: And then how long will your review take? Or you don't have a deadline for that?

MS NAUERT: I don't. I don't know if there is a deadline on that or how long that that will necessarily take, but I think we will spend the time necessary to review it as appropriate.

Okay. Okay. Hey.

QUESTION: Just a quick follow-up on that?

QUESTION: I have a question on Palestinian aid.

MS NAUERT: Okay.

QUESTION: Can you confirm reports that a decision was made to cut the whole U.S. funding to the UN Agency for Palestinian Refugees?

MS NAUERT: No, and we have covered this extensively here in this briefing room. That issue is – the funding is still under review and we have no announcements to make at this time.

Said.

QUESTION: Can I follow up on the aid?

MS NAUERT: Sure.

QUESTION: The question that I asked about yesterday. There was a report yesterday afternoon that Congress actually rejected the aid cuts, the international aid cuts, as it was submitted. Does that include the Palestinian aid package? Are you aware of that?

MS NAUERT: I'm sorry, I don't have any information on that. I'm just not aware of Congress's position on that.

QUESTION: Well, congressional staffers said that. Some – there was some – some of this information was attributed to high officials in the administration. So you cannot confirm?

MS NAUERT: I'm sorry, I just don't have anything for you on that.

QUESTION: If I could stay with the Palestinian issue for a –

MS NAUERT: Sure.

QUESTION: – minute. Also, the – an Israeli court ruled yesterday that settlements that are deemed illegal by the United States on private Palestinian land, which you have complained about in the past and in fact protested with the Israelis, that now they are legal depending on good faith. I don't know what that means, if the land was taken from Palestinians in good faith then they can build settlements. Do you have any reaction to that? Do you plan on protesting, as you have done in the past, on these particular settlements?

MS NAUERT: The only thing I can tell you is that the President has made his position on settlements very clear, and I'll state that position once again, and that is that the Israeli Government has made it clear to the U.S. Government that its – intends to adopt a policy regarding settlement activity that is in line with the President's overall concerns, and that the Israelis will take that into consideration, and that's something that we certainly welcome. What we want to get to is a comprehensive peace deal between the Israelis and the Palestinians, and we'll keep pushing ahead for that.

QUESTION: But on the issue of this privately owned Palestinian – you have taken a very strong stance in the past every time it happened that you object to this. What – do you plan on doing the same for this particular –

MS NAUERT: Well, we have said in the past –

QUESTION: Okay.

MS NAUERT: – about unrestrained settlement activity, and we have made our position very clear with the Israeli Government. We've spoken about that. They have made it clear that they intend to adopt a policy

concerning settlement activity that is in line with the President's concerns and that they will take that into consideration. Okay.

QUESTION: And lastly – I promise lastly on this issue – the Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas told Israeli academics yesterday that the Palestinians want an unarmed or disarmed Palestinian state. Is that a good step? Is that something that you would encourage? What is –

MS NAUERT: I'm not – I'm sorry, Said, I'm just not familiar with his comment so I wouldn't want to comment on anything that I have not seen myself, but thank you.

Hi, Elise.

QUESTION: Hi. On Syria.

MS NAUERT: Yes.

QUESTION: There's a report out there that a U.S. delegation met with members of the Assad regime in Damascus recently. I was told you might have something.

MS NAUERT: Yeah. So we have seen that report. When I say "yeah," that's a figure of speech. That is not a yes. We've seen that report. It doesn't reflect any reality that we are certainly aware of, so that is all I have on that. We've seen that report; it doesn't reflect anything that the U.S. Government is tracking at this point.

QUESTION: Well, are you saying that you don't know of a meeting between U.S. Government officials and Assad regime officials?

MS NAUERT: I am not aware of any meeting to that effect.

QUESTION: Okay.

MS NAUERT: If we – if we have anything more on that for you, I'll let you know. Okay.

QUESTION: Heather?

QUESTION: A follow-up on Syria, if you don't mind.

MS NAUERT: Yes.

QUESTION: Yesterday you mentioned – you warned against any possible chemical weapons attack in – by the Russians or the Syrian Government, and in – afterwards I had in my mind – I was like, where did this come from? And do you – is it that the U.S. believes that there is an offensive about to happen in Idlib or –

MS NAUERT: I think what we are concerned about is not just a potential chemical weapons attack, but we're concerned about the threat, any kind of escalation of violence in Idlib. That would put civilians and

civilian infrastructure in Idlib at risk. We have shared the concerns that we have about any potential offensive taking place. We've shared those concerns with the Russian Government at many levels, from Secretary Pompeo to his counterpart, to Chairman Dunford, also to Secretary Mattis, National Security Advisor Bolton and others. So we've made our position on that very clear. In addition to that, our new Syrian envoy, Ambassador Jim Jeffrey, has discussed that as well with some of his counterparts.

QUESTION: But you – it's not that you have evidence of chemical weapons or of them assembling chemical weapons, just a warning?

MS NAUERT: Nothing that I can – nothing I can share with you at this point, so I wouldn't want you to jump too far ahead and jump to any kind of conclusions on that. That of course is a concern of ours. We know those types of things have been used in Syria in the past.

QUESTION: Heather, conversely –

QUESTION: Two things on – wait –

MS NAUERT: Hold on. Hold on.

QUESTION: Two things on that. First of all, when you say that Ambassador Jeffrey has been discussing it with his counterparts, do you mean his Russian counterparts or is he in – is he empowered with kind of sending message directly to the Syrian regime?

MS NAUERT: I – no, I'm talking about Russia here.

QUESTION: Okay.

MS NAUERT: Ambassador Jeffrey and Ambassador David Satterfield met earlier this week with the Russian ambassador to the United States, in part to raise concerns about what could happen in Idlib.

QUESTION: Okay, just – and on that, I mean, obviously if they're kind of – mention these warnings about what can happen, are you looking at the situation on the ground and you're – and you see some indications that there's going to be an offensive underway?

MS NAUERT: We're concerned about it. I mean, you've seen the – you've read the Russian reports, you've heard their rhetoric, and so we're concerned about what could potentially happen.

QUESTION: Well, it's not just rhetoric. I mean, aren't there indications that the Syrians are moving some equipment around?

MS NAUERT: Yeah, I can't comment on that in particular. That would be more of an intelligence matter or a Department of Defense matter, but we've seen the reports about that and of course we're concerned, concerned about the potential impact on civilians and also infrastructure as well, in a country that has been through so much.

QUESTION: When you say that Ambassador Jeffrey talked to his – and Ambassador Satterfield talked to their Russian counterparts, was this about – in general about an escalation in Idlib or specifically about the use of chemical weapons?

MS NAUERT: Well, it talked about the situation in Syria. They covered that, with a particular focus on U.S. indications of an impending Syrian regime offensive. So that's obviously supported by Russian forces and Iranian forces, and that is something that is of concern to them and to us.

QUESTION: So you do say that there are indications of an offensive. Does that mean including the use of chemical weapons?

MS NAUERT: Elise, I don't have anything more for you on that. If I do, I will certainly let you know, but that is a concern of ours. We have all seen what the Syrian regime, backed by the Russian Government, has done in the past. That should not be a surprise to anyone that that would be a concern of ours once again.

QUESTION: Heather.

QUESTION: Heather, on –

MS NAUERT: Hi, Janne.

QUESTION: Thank you very much. On North Korea (inaudible).

QUESTION: On the – on this chemical weapons issue, the Russian – just a quick follow-up.

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

QUESTION: Just a quick follow-up on Elise's –

MS NAUERT: Okay, just briefly, go ahead.

QUESTION: Really very briefly. The Russians are claiming that al-Nusra and other groups are stockpiling chemical weapons and planning an attack. So you dismiss that out of hand?

MS NAUERT: I think that's more false flag type reporting.

QUESTION: They've been talking about this for a while.

MS NAUERT: We've seen that before –

QUESTION: So you dismiss it?

MS NAUERT: – where they try to put the blame, they try to put the onus on other groups, and we don't buy into that. Go ahead, Janne.

QUESTION: Thank you, Heather. On North Korea, U.S. Ambassador to United Nations Nikki Haley mentioned that North Korea is threatening to nullify

the denuclearization talks. What is your comment that –

MS NAUERT: That they're threatening to what?

QUESTION: Nullify the denuclearization –

MS NAUERT: I have not read that quote from Ambassador Haley. I've read most of her quotes. I don't recall having seen that one. I can just say diplomacy is something that we will be pushing ahead with, and that has not changed.

QUESTION: One more: The North Korea travel ban is lifted or is it extended?

MS NAUERT: As far as I know, that is – our policy has not changed on that. If and when we have some change to let you know about, I'll let you know.

QUESTION: But expires at the end of this month.

MS NAUERT: Okay, well then that's the end of this month. I will take a look at it and see if we –

QUESTION: Two days left.

MS NAUERT: I'll see if we have any updates for you on that.

QUESTION: All right, thank you.

MS NAUERT: Hey, Ben.

QUESTION: Yeah, thanks, Heather. Two questions on North Korea. First, yesterday you took a question whether Secretary Pompeo had spoken with his North Korean counterpart after the cancellation of the trip. Have you gotten an answer yet?

MS NAUERT: I did not ask for an answer on that. My apologies, it just slipped my mind.

QUESTION: Okay. If you can ask that, and then maybe not the Secretary but –

MS NAUERT: I'll see what I can find out for you. You know we often don't talk about our private diplomatic conversations. If there is something I can share with you, I will. I may not be able to, however.

QUESTION: Okay, and the second question is: You said diplomatic efforts are ongoing as far as denuclearization, but it seems the cancellation of this trip is sort of a setback. And then in the statement you read, you said that America stands ready to engage when it's clear Chairman Kim stands ready to deliver on his commitments he made. Does that mean the U.S. is waiting to see what North Korea does, or are you guys going to do anything to try and maybe add any more pressure to get North Korea to

sort of deliver on their promises?

MS NAUERT: I think I would say we always stand ready to engage. Those – some of these things are diplomatic conversations that we're not going to read out. I know it's frustrating to a lot of reporters because we're not giving you the tick-tock on everything. The President decided to postpone this trip because he felt like it was not the time to go on this trip, and when we have something more for you on that, we'll let you know, okay?

QUESTION: Can I follow up on that?

MS NAUERT: Okay, hold on. Go ahead.

QUESTION: Just – is Steve Biegun – are there plans that he goes on his own to North Korea without Secretary Pompeo or –

MS NAUERT: I don't have any travel on Steve Biegun to read out at this point or to announce at this point, but I know he will be traveling in the region sometime probably within the next several weeks or so to meet some of his counterparts in other countries. Whether – whether or not he ends up going to North Korea at some point, I'm not going to forecast that. We have no travel to announce, but at some point he will be going to the region to meet some of his counterparts.

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

MS NAUERT: Hey. Hold on.

QUESTION: I have two questions, one regarding when President Trump announced to cancel Secretary Pompeo's trip. One of his tweets, he also – he blamed China not putting enough pressure on North Korea. I'm wondering if Secretary Pompeo has talked to his Chinese counterparts and is the United States considering any more sanctions on Chinese companies.

MS NAUERT: Well, you know we never forecast sanctions, so that's just something I will not address. But I can tell you that – and we say this about many other countries around the world – that certain countries – all countries can do more to adhere to sanctions. We would expect China, just like other countries, to adhere to the UN Security Council resolutions that it too voted for. So we'd just remind folks of that, but certainly we would expect other countries to continue to live up to its expectations with regard to imposing sanctions and seeing those sanctions through.

QUESTION: And I'm sure you have seen the report about a secret meeting between Japan and North Korea in Vietnam in July, and it was reported that United States was irritated by this meeting. I'm wondering if you have any comment on this report.

MS NAUERT: Yeah, I can't confirm any kind of meeting of that sort. I can tell you, though, that the U.S. and Japan, just like the U.S. and South

Korea, are very closely coordinated. They talk, we talk, I would say virtually every single day. I've sat in on some of those meetings with the South Koreans and the Japanese, and we are all in coordination, singing out of the same hymn book, as some of us here in the United States would certainly say, and that is something that has not changed. We still remain in close coordination on many things.

QUESTION: Heather, on that note, there's, I don't know, a big report out from South Korea that Secretary Pompeo sent a letter to his South Korean counterpart kind of explaining why he didn't travel to North Korea, that the time wasn't right –

MS NAUERT: Yeah, I saw that report earlier. I'm not sure why that – I can't confirm that. He spoke with his South Korean counterpart. That I can confirm. We put out a readout of that call, but any supposed letter, I'm not familiar with that in any way, shape, or form.

QUESTION: Okay. Thanks.

QUESTION: I just have a quick follow-up on South Korea. While Pompeo canceled his trip, South Korea has announced that they're going to continue with talks with North Korea, and I'm just wondering is there concern that that could undercut U.S.-North Korea talks or that South Korea and the U.S. are out of sync on this issue –

MS NAUERT: And I've started to see some reporting about that, claiming that there is a rift between South Korea and the United States, and I can just say that that notion is simply overblown. There is no reality to that. I was just talking about how we closely coordinate with Japan. We closely coordinate with South Korea. We couldn't have gotten to this point where we have been having conversations with North Korea without the assistance of South Korea and without the assistance of Japan, and without a lot of other countries for that matter, but those two key allies helped get us to that position. So while we may have minor disagreements here and there on different kinds of policy issues, all of this narrative is simply overblown. We closely coordinate and have an excellent relationship with these countries and share information all the time.

Okay. Hey, Conor.

QUESTION: Can I ask one last question on this?

MS NAUERT: Yeah.

QUESTION: President Trump talked about a couple of different verbal agreements between him and Kim Jong-un during their meeting in Singapore. Can you say whether or not a declaration, a joint declaration to end the war, was one of those agreements?

MS NAUERT: I'm not familiar with that being a part of the overall agreement, but I can tell you that we believe that denuclearization has to take place before we get to other parts, and that's been a part of

our policy.

QUESTION: Including a joint declaration?

MS NAUERT: Pardon me?

QUESTION: Including a joint declaration?

MS NAUERT: Yes. Yeah.

Okay, I've got to wrap it up, then.

QUESTION: On next week's 2+2.

MS NAUERT: Hey. Yeah.

QUESTION: So on next week's 2+2, earlier this summer, over 4 million individuals in Assam were left off the citizenship rolls. There was some controversy, there were fears about deportations. Will Secretary –

MS NAUERT: I'm sorry, they were left off of what?

QUESTION: Citizenship rolls. They were left off lists of citizens.

MS NAUERT: In India?

QUESTION: Mm-hmm.

MS NAUERT: Okay.

QUESTION: And I was wondering if Secretary Pompeo planned to raise that issue or minority rights more generally in his meetings next week.

MS NAUERT: Well, we talk about a whole host of things with other governments. That particular issue I'm not aware of. Doesn't mean that he's not aware of it, I'm just simply not aware of that. We are going there, of course, with our Department of Defense counterparts. We'll be having some breakaway meetings of our own as will our DOD counterparts be having their own meetings. When we have an agenda and a particular list of topics that I can share with you I certainly will, but I'm just not aware of that one in particular.

QUESTION: Thank you.

QUESTION: On North Korea.

MS NAUERT: Okay, last question. Let me just call on somebody who –

QUESTION: Also on North Korea.

MS NAUERT: Hey, there. How are you doing?

QUESTION: Hi. Good, how are you? Just a quick clarification question on North Korea. You had said yesterday from the President's tweet about

there wasn't quite enough progress on denuclearization. I wondered what you consider to be enough progress for a trip to be justified in the future.

MS NAUERT: If – the last part of the question was what again?

QUESTION: What would be considered enough progress on denuclearization for a trip for Secretary Pompeo and Steve Biegun to be justified to North Korea?

MS NAUERT: So the President said we were not making sufficient progress with respect to the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.

QUESTION: So what –

MS NAUERT: That was the President's position, that's the Secretary's position, and that's the position of the President's national security team. And so they made the decision to postpone that trip. I think it's one of those things that we'll know it when we see it. We stand ready. We're watching closely. We stand ready to have meetings, and we will wait and see what happens. But I'll let you know when we have something more for that, okay?

QUESTION: Can I ask you one more question on China?

MS NAUERT: Yeah, and then I got to go.

QUESTION: There was a letter today from a bipartisan group of lawmakers urging the administration to use Global Magnitsky Act to sanction China over the crackdown in western China and Xinjiang province. Do you guys have any response to that? Is that something that you're considering?

MS NAUERT: I've not seen that letter. Sometimes when a letter comes to the State Department, reporters tend to hear about it from members of Congress faster than we do. So I just can't confirm receipt of that letter just yet, but I'll take a look and see if we have anything for you on that.

QUESTION: I just want to –

QUESTION: If I could just broadly on – is that something that you would consider, sanctioning China?

MS NAUERT: I'm just not going to comment on that in general terms without having seen the letter, who it's from, what it includes. It's certainly something that we would – we would take a look at and consider, however.

QUESTION: I just want to ask (inaudible) letter –

MS NAUERT: Okay. Lesley, go ahead.

QUESTION: – because it happened last week, but I don't think we've had a

chance to raise it, is that's the letter from Menendez and Shaheen requesting the notes of the interpreter from the Helsinki summit between Trump and –

MS NAUERT: I don't have any updates for you on that. I know that those interpreters take an oath of privacy, and that's something that they hold very dear. It's one of the ethics that they adhere to and agree to when they take on those positions. If I have anything more for you, I'll let you know.

Okay. Thanks, everybody. And have a good Memorial weekend.

QUESTION: Labor Day.

QUESTION: Labor Day.

MS NAUERT: Labor Day weekend, yes. Thank you.

(The briefing was concluded at 3:18 p.m.)

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