

Press Releases: Global Magnitsky Designations for Nicaragua

Press Statement
Heather Nauert

Department Spokesperson

Washington, DC
July 5, 2018

Today, the United States government sanctioned three individuals from Nicaragua who have been involved in serious human rights abuse or engaged in corruption. As a result of today's actions, any property, or interest in property, of those designated within U.S. jurisdiction is blocked. Additionally, U.S. persons are generally prohibited from engaging in transactions with blocked persons, including entities owned or controlled by designated persons.

Under Francisco Javier Diaz Madriz's command, Nicaragua's National Police has engaged in serious human rights abuse against the people of Nicaragua. Fidel Antonio Moreno Briones has directed acts of violence committed by the Sandinista Youth and pro-government armed groups which have been implicated in numerous human rights abuses related to the ongoing protests against the Nicaraguan government. Jose Francisco Lopez Centeno is the Vice President of ALBANISA, the President of Petronic, and the Treasurer of the ruling FSLN party and has been accused of leveraging his position to his and his family's benefit by using companies they own to win government contracts.

Today's sanctions announcement, plus earlier and continuing visa revocations, shows the United States will expose and hold accountable those responsible for the Nicaraguan government's ongoing violence and intimidation campaign against its people. These actions must end. We support the Episcopal Conference of Nicaragua's efforts to advance negotiations to resolve the crisis, and urge full implementation of the June 15 National Dialogue agreement on human rights as a critical component. The United States also supports calls for early, free, fair and transparent elections. We will continue to monitor the situation closely and take additional actions as events warrant.

The Office of Website Management, Bureau of Public Affairs, manages this site as a portal for information from the U.S. State Department. External links to other Internet sites should not be construed as an endorsement of the views or privacy policies contained therein.

Press Releases: Solomon Islands **National Day**

Press Statement
Michael R. Pompeo

Secretary of State

Washington, DC
July 5, 2018

On behalf of the Government of the United States of America, please accept my best wishes in celebration of your National Day on July 7th.

Since World War II, the United States and the Solomon Islands have maintained a strong and warm friendship. Our cooperation on sustainable fisheries, economic development, and unexploded ordnance removal are just some of the areas in which we partner to make the Pacific region more prosperous and resilient. We appreciate your partnership in international fora and applaud your dedication to good governance and transparency.

On this joyful occasion, I offer my warmest regards for a wonderful National Day.

The Office of Website Management, Bureau of Public Affairs, manages this site as a portal for information from the U.S. State Department. External links to other Internet sites should not be construed as an endorsement of the views or privacy policies contained therein.

Press Releases: Cabo Verde's National Day

Press Statement
Michael R. Pompeo

Secretary of State

Washington, DC
July 5, 2018

On behalf of the Government of the United States of America, I send my best wishes to Cabo Verdeans as they celebrate 43 years of independence.

The United States and Cabo Verde share a longstanding friendship based on our mutual commitment to strengthening democracy and good governance, enhancing economic opportunities, and fortifying law enforcement and maritime security.

As we reflect upon our historic partnership, we congratulate Cabo Verde for serving as a model of democratic governance and for its continued maritime security partnership with the United States. We celebrate Cabo Verde's progress and its promise for the future. I offer best wishes for a joyous and safe holiday, and I reaffirm the commitment of the United States to our enduring friendship.

The Office of Website Management, Bureau of Public Affairs, manages this site as a portal for information from the U.S. State Department. External links to other Internet sites should not be construed as an endorsement of the views or privacy policies contained therein.

[Press Releases: Venezuela's Independence Day](#)

Press Statement
Michael R. Pompeo

Secretary of State

Washington, DC
July 5, 2018

On behalf of the people of the United States of America, I offer the people of Venezuela on the anniversary of your independence our enduring commitment to your liberty and freedom.

Venezuela stands at a critical juncture in its history. Even in the face of a dictatorial regime, you continue to forge onward, revitalizing the ideals of freedom and equality upon which Venezuela was founded. We support your struggle to build a future in which you can freely elect your leaders and rebuild Venezuela's once thriving economy.

The United States stands with the people of Venezuela. We will work with regional and international partners to help you realize the peaceful, democratic, and prosperous future you deserve.

The Office of Website Management, Bureau of Public Affairs, manages this site as a portal for information from the U.S. State Department. External links to other Internet sites should not be construed as an endorsement of the views or privacy policies contained therein.

[Press Releases: Department Press](#)

Briefing – July 3, 2018

Heather Nauert
Spokesperson

Department Press Briefing
Washington, DC
July 3, 2018

Index for Today's Briefing

- [DEPARTMENT](#)
- [NORTH KOREA](#)
- [VIETNAM](#)
- [NORTH KOREA](#)
- [DEPARTMENT](#)
- [ISRAEL/PALESTINIANS](#)
- [IRAQ](#)
- [IRAN](#)

TRANSCRIPT:

3:14 p.m. EDT

MS NAUERT: Good afternoon. How is everybody? Hi. Okay, a couple announcements to start off with this afternoon.

First, I would like to say that on Tuesday, June the 26th, our Deputy Secretary John Sullivan delivered the U.S. statement to the Fourth Special Session of the Conference of States Parties, urging the OPCW member-states to address the current crisis resulting from the rise and use of chemical weapons. We want to congratulate the United Kingdom and likeminded states on the successful adoption of the decision addressing the threat from chemical weapons use at the Conference of the States Parties. Eighty-two responsible states voted to provide the OPCW's technical secretariat with additional tools to respond to chemical weapons use, including the means to identify the perpetrators of chemical weapons attacks in Syria. Efforts to delay and obstruct its passage by Russia, Syria, Iran, and China were unsuccessful.

The decision calls on the technical secretariat to establish arrangements for identifying the perpetrators of chemical weapons attacks in Syria by using all potentially relevant information regarding the origin of the chemical weapons for instances in which the OPCW's fact-finding mission has determined chemical weapons were used. The decision also expands the OPCW's ability to assist states parties in the event of chemical weapons use on their territory, it authorizes it to share information related to chemical weapons use with other investigative efforts, and it empowers it to further facilitate capacity building.

Attribution is a key step toward ensuring that chemical weapons cannot be used with impunity. The United States remains fully committed to a future free of chemical weapons and we look forward to the progress that will come from the adoption and the implementation of this decision. When we have more on that, we'll let you know.

Second, I'd like to announce our Acting Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Stephen Mull's travel to Brussels, Belgium and Vienna, Austria July the 3rd through the 5th. He'll meet with his European counterparts there to discuss the transatlantic relationship. He arrives in Brussels on July the 4th for consultations with senior officials from the European Union's European External Action Service. On July the 5th, the acting under secretary will be in Vienna for discussions with the European Union's 28 political directors.

Next, I'd like to announce that the Secretary next week, after a whirlwind trip around the world, will be traveling to Mexico City on July the 13th. We anticipate that the Secretary will meet with President Pena Nieto, Foreign Secretary Videgaray, and also the President-elect Lopez Obrador. Secretary Pompeo will reaffirm the U.S. partnership with Mexico to combat transnational criminal organizations and also the opioid epidemic. He will also discuss efforts to enhance trade, curb irregular migration, and manage our shared border. The Secretary will discuss continued U.S.-Mexico cooperation with the Nieto administration throughout the transition. The United States looks forward to working

closely with President-elect Obrador to continue strengthening the U.S.-Mexico relationship after the new administration takes office on December the 1st.

And lastly, I would like to say congratulations to a member of the State Department press corps. Many of you know Alicia Rose from NHK. She's traveled on the road with us and has been here, I think, every day, at least since I've been here. Alicia will be leaving NHK to go to law school, correct, in Los Angeles?

QUESTION: Yes, ma'am.

MS NAUERT: So congratulations to you. We're excited for you, and best wishes. God speed.

And then while I'm on that note, I'd like to congratulate Josh Lederman, your –

QUESTION: Former colleague.

MS NAUERT: Yeah, your former, like Ponch and Jon or like Bo and Luke Duke. Josh. (Laughter.)

QUESTION: Wow. And you –

MS NAUERT: It has now taken off.

QUESTION: And you said I showed my age with the Six Million Dollar Man reference. (Laughter.)

MS NAUERT: I'm sure many of you know who both of those – all those characters are.

QUESTION: Ponch and Jon, huh?

MS NAUERT: Anyway, so congratulations to Josh. Well-deserved success and good luck to you at NBC News, and welcoming Susannah once again.

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

QUESTION: Heather, the Secretary, before he goes to Mexico –

MS NAUERT: Yes.

QUESTION: – on the first – his first stop of the trip that he's leaving on this week is in North Korea, as you know. The President tweeted this morning that if it weren't for him, meaning President Trump, that we would be now at war with North Korea. Does the Secretary – does the State Department share that view?

MS NAUERT: Well, I think back to where we were one year ago today – actually, one year ago tomorrow. Many of you will remember the 4th of July. Many of you were contacted to have to return to work. I know I was in New York planning to go to fireworks with my family – had to hop on

an earlier flight to come back to Washington. Why? Because there was an ICBM launch on the part of North Korea. So if we look back to where we were one year ago, we're in a good position today and I think that's what the President was simply referring to.

A lot of people were in panic. A lot of people around the world were very concerned about what would happen between the United States and North Korea. And the fact that our Secretary is now getting ready to go and have his fourth meeting with the North Koreans in less than three months I think is a testament to just how far we've come.

QUESTION: All right. And then just one last one on that same one. The Secretary is aware, right, that the Korean War ended not with a peace treaty but rather with an armistice. And so technically all the combatant parties to that conflict are still at war, right? He understands that, right?

MS NAUERT: I don't understand why we're doing a history lesson here, Matt. What's – what's your question?

QUESTION: Because the President, in his tweet, said "we would be at war with North Korea" if it weren't for me. And because –

MS NAUERT: Matt, I think what the –

QUESTION: Because of the situation –

MS NAUERT: Come on. I think what the President –

QUESTION: No.

MS NAUERT: – is referring to is where we were one year ago. And how many of your friends, how many family members asked you for your honest assessment about whether or not we would be in this situation? I would be willing to guess that a good number of people asked you that very question. We're in a good spot today, and the Secretary's looking forward to having meetings with his North Korean counterparts. And we're going to this eyes wide open, but nevertheless we've made a lot of progress in the past year.

QUESTION: Last one. It's just extremely tangentially related; it's just a day. When did Steve Mull start as the acting?

MS NAUERT: He's been sort of performing those functions for a few weeks now. When exactly he received the designations, that I don't know.

QUESTION: All right. Thanks.

MS NAUERT: But we're thrilled to have him back and on board.

QUESTION: Heather, follow-up on North Korea.

MS NAUERT: Okay. Let's finish up on North Korea before we move on to

something else.

QUESTION: Yes. I've got a –

MS NAUERT: Okay. Hi, Janne.

QUESTION: Yeah. Secretary Pompeo's trip to North Korea – the name of the configured team – do you have any go with –

MS NAUERT: The name of what, I'm sorry?

QUESTION: Configured teams.

MS NAUERT: Who will be going?

QUESTION: Yes.

MS NAUERT: Well, the Secretary is going to be going. He's leading. I'll be along with him. I understand we've got six reporters who will be coming along with us as well. So those folks who will be on the trip will certainly see who will be a part of the delegation, I'll call it, and I'll just leave it at that right now.

QUESTION: John Bolton's going with him, or –

MS NAUERT: Pardon me?

QUESTION: John Bolton is – NSC?

QUESTION: John Bolton.

MS NAUERT: Oh, is he going to North Korea? Not to my awareness, but I don't speak for Ambassador Bolton.

QUESTION: Just ask you.

MS NAUERT: Yes, not – no. No. But I'd refer you over to the NSC for any questions about Ambassador Bolton's travel.

QUESTION: North Korea?

MS NAUERT: Hey, how are you?

QUESTION: Could you just share with us the agenda of Secretary Pompeo's talks to the DPRK and what are the expectations for these talks? Thank you.

MS NAUERT: Well, again, as I say, we go into this eyes wide open. We're continuing our conversations and also our consultations with the North Korean Government about what the President and what Kim Jong-un agreed to at the Singapore summit. So we obviously have a whole lot to talk about. We have at least a day and a half of meetings planned, depending on how the schedule goes. I'm not going to get ahead of those meetings, so I know you all will want a ton of details, but we've got these

meetings coming up. Ambassador Sung Kim had a good series of meetings when he was in North Korea to help plan for this, and so I'm just not going to be able to give you all the details about what we intend to do that very day.

Okay. Alicia, go ahead.

QUESTION: Thank you. Well, first, thank you for your kind words. It's been a pleasure to work with everyone. And I wanted to ask how confident the Secretary is that he can get firm and specific commitments from the North Koreans on making progress towards denuclearization.

MS NAUERT: Yeah. I think the Secretary has addressed that extensively, in which he said that North Korea is very clear in terms of our expectations. We've had very clear conversations with them. There will be no surprises in terms of what we are asking them to do. Our policy remains the same today as it was going into the Singapore summit. So nothing in that regard has changed. The Secretary looks forward to having those additional meetings, and that's simply where we are right now.

QUESTION: And you said that he would be there for a day and a half. Does that mean –

MS NAUERT: About, approximately or so. I haven't done the math on it exactly, but yeah.

QUESTION: Does that mean that the Secretary will be spending the night in Pyongyang?

MS NAUERT: Again, that's why I say we're not exactly there yet. I haven't done the math, but we're spending a good bit of time there. Okay? Okay.

QUESTION: North Korea?

MS NAUERT: Hey, yeah.

QUESTION: Heather. So John Bolton was mentioned. As he told over the weekend in a media interview that North Korea could dismantle the WMD and ballistic missile program in a year. So my question for you is: Is one year the timeline? And since you mentioned last year, July 4th – what do you expect to see North Korea be doing on July 4th next year?

MS NAUERT: Well, I don't know how they traditionally celebrate that – our holiday in North Korea, but I'm not going to speculate on anything that somebody may or may not do. The Secretary has said – and he's been very clear about this, and I know it's much to your frustration, but we're not going to get into all the details about the discussions that are taking place. In terms of a timeline, I know some individuals have given timelines. We're not going to provide a timeline for that. The Secretary's looking forward to having his meetings.

A lot of work is left to be done, certainly. We go into this eyes wide open, very clear – with a very clear view of these conversations. And I'm just not going to get ahead of those discussions. Okay? You'll be on the trip; a lot of you will be on the trip, and you'll be able to ask some of those questions then.

QUESTION: One year – one – the Secretary –

MS NAUERT: Janne, let me move around and go to somebody else.

QUESTION: Can we move on?

MS NAUERT: Hold on.

QUESTION: No, not yet.

MS NAUERT: Hold on. Let me head over to Reuters, and you're a summer intern, I understand, right?

QUESTION: Yes.

MS NAUERT: Okay. So it's intern season here in Washington.

QUESTION: It is.

MS NAUERT: Well, welcome on board.

QUESTION: Thank you so much. Related to travel, what is the Secretary planning to accomplish in Vietnam? Why did he think it was important to include on this trip? And what are the preparations going into the Putin-Trump summit?

And then I'd like to change –

MS NAUERT: Let me take one at a time.

QUESTION: Okay.

MS NAUERT: Everybody will tell you I do one at a time. In terms of Vietnam, Vietnam is an important partner of the United States. Vietnam is an incredible example of a country, a communist country that has yet done very well, done well in terms of its economy, in terms of what it provides its people, in terms of the trade and the trade that the United States and many other countries do with Vietnam. So I think it's just a good example of a country that's doing well in the region, and that's part of the reason why we're planning to travel there. The Secretary has a lot of meetings planned while he's there, also a dinner that he'll be attending where he'll be addressing some business leaders there, so – have a good chance to talk with him about that.

QUESTION: Sorry, is that the extent of the relationship? Vietnam also throws dissidents in jail – bloggers, et cetera – people who you –

MS NAUERT: And we have covered that, yep.

QUESTION: So is that going to be part of his visit as well or is it –

MS NAUERT: You know what, I don't have a full readout on what exactly that visit will entail, but as you know, Matt, when we have conversations with other governments there are a whole host of things that come up and a lot of things that we discuss privately that we don't discuss here every single day.

Okay. Yeah.

QUESTION: Also related to the travel, Daphne wanted to talk to you about Brussels stop on Syria, the discussions on Syria.

MS NAUERT: Okay. Let's – okay, we'll move on from North Korea and we'll head over to Syria now then, okay? All right –

QUESTION: Can we ask a question about North Korea?

MS NAUERT: Okay.

QUESTION: Can you tell us what the Secretary –

MS NAUERT: We'll come back to you, Daphne.

QUESTION: Can you tell us what the Secretary is going to be telling the North Koreans in relation to these reports that they are continuing their research in secret locations?

MS NAUERT: That's why I say – and I'm not going to get into any intelligence matters; that's not what we do at the State Department. We don't talk about intelligence matters, but the Secretary – we're all keeping a close eye – the U.S. Government keeping a close eye on North Korea, and the Secretary has been very clear and very blunt with the North Koreans about what he expects, and I'll leave it at that.

QUESTION: One more on Korea.

QUESTION: Just one more on this.

MS NAUERT: Okay, okay.

QUESTION: One of the other issues that was a part of the joint declaration was the returning of Americans' remains. The Pentagon and UN Command have said that carrying caskets are waiting at the DMZ for these remains to be returned. What's the holdup? Why haven't they been returned yet?

MS NAUERT: Well, I think that would be a DOD issue, because DOD has a department or a bureau that deals specifically with that issue, and so they apparently facilitated some of the materials that would be needed to transfer any remains in a dignified fashion. So I would just refer you over to DOD for that. We don't have anything for you on that.

But I will say that would certainly be a good sign, if North Koreans were to fulfill that commitment, certainly. Okay?

QUESTION: They say it's a diplomatic issue, though, because it's the North Koreans who haven't followed through on –

MS NAUERT: Who says it's a diplomatic issue?

QUESTION: The Pentagon.

MS NAUERT: I would refer you back to the Pentagon. The Pentagon has a robust department that deals specifically with these issues each and every day in difficult parts of the world, so I would refer you back to the Pentagon for that, okay?

QUESTION: Sorry, one more (inaudible).

MS NAUERT: All right, let's move on from North Korea now. Okay, go ahead. You wanted to talk about –

QUESTION: Syria.

QUESTION: I have a question –

MS NAUERT: Okay, go ahead. You wanted to talk about –

QUESTION: Syria.

MS NAUERT: Syria, okay.

QUESTION: Yes, and I have a question on Iran as well.

MS NAUERT: Okay. We tend to stick to regions before we move on.

QUESTION: Okay.

MS NAUERT: So we'll go to Syria. If we get back to you with a question about Iran, we can do that.

QUESTION: Okay. How much and what does the Secretary want to accomplish in Syria – in southern Syria, where Russia is currently in peace talks with the rebels? And they – I understand they've reached an agreement to hand over their weapons and allow Russian military police to enter rebel-held towns.

MS NAUERT: Okay. I have not seen that specific report that you were referring to. The southwest ceasefire area is something that the United States has paid very close attention to over the past nearly one year. The United States, Russia, and Jordan have all been involved in trying to maintain a ceasefire that had held up until not too long ago. As many of you know, Secretary Pompeo spoke earlier today to Foreign Minister Lavrov. One of the issues that they did discuss with this – was this southwest Syria ceasefire situation.

As we have talked about the ceasefire over the past year, we have on numerous occasions highlighted the fact that humanitarian aid was able to get in as a result of that ceasefire, and we also said that lives were undoubtedly saved because of that ceasefire. And now as we watch the situation there, we have extreme concerns about the situation. There are ongoing airstrikes; some humanitarian aid had been stopped. We understand that some humanitarian aid may be getting back in again, at least for now, but it's certainly not a safe situation. So we're continuing to have talks with the Russians, we're continuing to have talks with the Jordanians and express our extreme concern about the situation there.

Okay, anything else on Syria today?

QUESTION: No.

MS NAUERT: Okay.

QUESTION: Is there any meeting between Secretary Pompeo and the Russia Foreign Minister Lavrov being set up or being discussed? Because I understand Secretary Pompeo is going also to Middle East and also to Brussel. Is there a pull-aside meeting?

MS NAUERT: Is there a pull-aside? No. Nothing is on the schedule, at least not at this point.

All right. Said, go right.

QUESTION: Can we move on? Thank you, Heather. Yes. Seven former U.S. ambassadors to the United Nations submitted a letter to Secretary Pompeo yesterday, asking or urging him to reinstate the funding UNRWA. Could you share anything with us? Has he read it? Did he react to it? What is your position on this?

MS NAUERT: I can just tell you –

QUESTION: They're both – they were both –

MS NAUERT: – we don't comment –

QUESTION: – submitted by Democrats and Republicans.

MS NAUERT: As a general matter, we don't comment on the Secretary's correspondence, so let me start out by saying that. We certainly have seen the reports about former U.S. officials expressing their concern about the situation. No decision has been made on UNRWA funding at this point. We talked about this about a week and a half or so ago. We continue to express our concerns about the mismanagement of UNRWA, about the fact that UNRWA every year about this time has this emergency funding appeal where they come to all kinds of countries and say help, help, help, we need money. We feel that structural reforms need to be made and those reforms need to be put in place, and also that UNRWA should find some additional voluntary funding streams so that the

burden-sharing is not just on the United States but on many other countries as well. There was a meeting back in Rome a few months ago that our Ambassador Satterfield had attended in which other countries had expressed their interest in providing some money, so we hope that some other countries in the region will step up to that.

QUESTION: I have couple more questions. Also on funding to the Palestinian Authority, there were reports two weeks ago that funding was cut off.

MS NAUERT: I'm sorry, there were reports what?

QUESTION: That aid to the Palestinian Authority was completely cut off or frozen. Could you share anything with us on that?

MS NAUERT: I don't have anything for you on that, so I'm sorry. I can just tell you in terms of the UNRWA funding that that's still under review.

QUESTION: And lastly, the Israelis denied entry to an American woman who was going in because of her activities. Is that something that you – that in any way disturbs you, that they disallow Americans from going in because of their political views or their activism?

MS NAUERT: I don't know the details of this particular case. Countries are, however, allowed to admit or not to admit certain people into their countries. Just leave it at that.

QUESTION: But they said clearly that she was not allowed in because she supports BDS, which is really a peaceful movement. Is that –

MS NAUERT: Well, you know that we as a United States Government do not support –

QUESTION: Right.

MS NAUERT: – what you call BDS.

QUESTION: Okay, that's fine, but that's –

MS NAUERT: Yeah.

QUESTION: – still – I mean, it's a peaceful protest kind of movement. It's not in any way militant. You certainly will not deny –

MS NAUERT: And we value freedom of expression. You know that, yeah.

QUESTION: You don't deny anyone for supporting BDS entry into the country.

MS NAUERT: Yeah. I don't have the details on her particular case or on this particular case. We value the freedom of expression and we refer you back to the Government of Israel on that.

QUESTION: But this seems to have occurred time and time and time again, to the clergy, to professors and so on, and you are not bothered by that American –

MS NAUERT: Okay, last thing I will say is that countries are sovereign. They have a right to either admit or deny admittance to individuals at their border, okay?

QUESTION: Can you –

QUESTION: Nigeria.

QUESTION: – excuse me, please – but when you do find out –

QUESTION: India.

QUESTION: – more about this specific case, find out if there is a concern? Because she is a U.S. citizen and it is the mission of the State Department to assist Americans abroad in distress. It's one of your primary functions, safety and security of American citizens. And because she is being – apparently being denied entry into an allied country because of free – her expression of free speech, that would seem to me that you might take more than just a casual interest. So when you do look into it, please get back to us. Thank you.

MS NAUERT: Certainly, Matt. Of course, always.

Laurie, go right ahead.

QUESTION: India.

QUESTION: Thank you. Are you concerned about the deteriorating security situation in Kirkuk? Because General Votel told us that the coalition, Peshmerga, and Iraqi Security Forces should all work together to address these problems. Is that your view too?

MS NAUERT: We – I would refer you to DOD, first of all, for any comments that General Votel may have made, but we certainly work with all of them to try to help ensure the security of Iraq.

QUESTION: And to renew cooperation between the two forces would be a good idea in your opinion?

MS NAUERT: I think – for the Iraqi Security Forces, for the Peshmerga, all of those various groups to be able to continue working together in conjunction with coalition partners, that's certainly a good thing.

QUESTION: Okay. On Kirkuk – and this is your domain – relates to Iran, that Iraqi militias, which are part of the Iraqi Security Forces, are now transporting oil from Kirkuk to Iran and selling it there. That will soon be a violation of your policy on sanctions regarding Iran. Are you trying to stop that oil trade?

MS NAUERT: First, I want to – I want to make this clear: We can't confirm that report. We've seen that report; we just can't confirm it. Okay.

QUESTION: Okay.

QUESTION: (Off-mike)

QUESTION: Last one: Do you have a readout on the meeting that Administrator Green and Ambassadors Brownback and Silliman had with Prime Minister Barzani yesterday on protecting religious minorities?

MS NAUERT: That is a big thing for this administration. The Vice President has spoken about it numerous times. Secretary Pompeo I know is really looking forward to the religious ministerial – religious freedom ministerial that we'll hold here at the State Department later this month. And then Ambassador Brownback, in conjunction with Mark Green, Administrator Green from USAID, just traveled over to northern Iraq to take a closer look at the plight of religious minorities in that part of the country, the Yezidis, the Christians and others. So when they return, I know that they will be debriefing the Vice President, and we'll get a chance to hear from them too. So I'll just wait until they're able to return and get a chance to speak with the Vice President before reading that out.

QUESTION: Heather, just really quickly –

QUESTION: (Off-mike)

QUESTION: – on Iran. Have you seen – are you aware of this bizarre story about an Iranian diplomat being arrested in Europe for being involved in an alleged plot to bomb the rally of an Iranian opposition group?

MS NAUERT: I did see that story, yes.

QUESTION: Do you guys have any thoughts or anything to say about either (1) the arrest of the diplomat, but also the plot in general, because it appeared to target an event at which a lot of Americans were – or at least a number of prominent Americans were attending.

MS NAUERT: Yeah, I think we probably would not get ahead of what investigators in France would be looking into. They would certainly play the lead role in looking into this in conjunction with any U.S. support that may be taking place. We're closely monitoring that report; we're certainly aware of it. We all saw it yesterday when it first came out. Overall, I can just say that we strongly condemn the Iranian Government's use of terrorism, which has taken place around the world in many countries. We're all too familiar with the Iranian attacks that have taken place, and we continue to condemn acts of terrorism that Iran has been involved with in the past. Okay? Okay.

QUESTION: (Off-mike)

QUESTION: On Iran?

MS NAUERT: Go ahead. Sir.

QUESTION: Can we stay on Iran?

MS NAUERT: Okay. Go ahead.

QUESTION: Does the State Department have any information to back up the President's claim that the previous administration provided citizenship to 2,500 Iranians?

MS NAUERT: Yeah, I saw that report out earlier today. I – I'm certainly familiar with what you're talking about. That's under Department of Homeland Security. The Department of State does not grant citizenship to people from other countries, so I'd have to refer you to the Department of Homeland Security on that. Okay.

QUESTION: Do you have any announcement –

MS NAUERT: All right.

QUESTION: (Off-mike)

MS NAUERT: Go ahead, go right ahead.

QUESTION: NATO?

QUESTION: It's about President Trump's letter to NATO members about the increase of the military spendings. Did the State Department hear anything from the European countries about it? Their responses?

MS NAUERT: Their responses to which?

QUESTION: So President Trump's letter to those NATO members about demanding the increase of their – yeah, spendings.

MS NAUERT: So – regarding the letter in general, I would have to refer you both to the White House and the National Security Council on that. Any letter would not have gone out from the State Department, but rather from the White House or from the NSC, so they will have to answer the questions.

However, I can tell you that burden sharing is something that the President speaks about a lot. Having NATO countries pay two percent of their GDP into defense is something that's important to the President. The President feels that European security shouldn't be more important to the United States than it is to those countries themselves. And so that's one of the things that the President and others will be looking to ask of those European countries, to make sure they're living up to those commitments that were made under the Wales Agreement some years ago.

QUESTION: So just this department hasn't heard anything from the European countries about this letter?

MS NAUERT: I – listen, again, regarding this letter, if there was – if there is any letter, I'd have to refer you to the NSC and to the White House. I have nothing for you on that, but our policy about wanting countries to pay what they have already pledged to, what they have already promised to pay, is nothing new and that stance should come as no surprise. In terms of the Secretary – and I can speak to the State Department – we're looking forward to heading to Brussels in support of the President and the President's travels, and we'll have some sidebar meetings as well on other issues, but we're looking forward to be there backing the President. Okay.

QUESTION: (Off-mike)

MS NAUERT: Hi. Go ahead, go ahead.

QUESTION: Back on Iran, President Rouhani said today that the U.S. would not succeed in reducing Iranian oil exports and hinted at disrupting shipments from neighboring countries.

MS NAUERT: Yeah, I'm not – one thing you'll come to learn about me and what we do here is we're not going to comment on every comment that some foreign leader makes. You all heard the briefing – I think it was just yesterday – by Brian Hook. It feels like it was a week ago, but that was just yesterday, where Brian was talking about our goals and our goals regarding Iran and oil exports. And that's something that's important to us, an important part of our overall strategy, okay?

And we're going to have to wrap it up in just a minute. Go ahead – right ahead, miss. How are you?

QUESTION: Good. Yesterday, Mr. Brian Hook said the diplomatic effort right now is focused on negotiation with European allies, but China, as the largest Iran oil buyer – why not the United States is engaging China right now? Without China's support, how can you achieve your goal to reduce the oil export from Iran to zero?

MS NAUERT: Well, we have a lot of negotiations and conversations with the Chinese Government. In fact, Secretary Pompeo just spoke with the Chinese state councilor four or five days ago, four days ago or so. So we continue to have conversations with them on a lot of issues, from North Korea to Iran to other things as well. So we have a full plate that we're discussing with China on other things.

QUESTION: And critics in China are saying that trade policy actually is a sovereign decision.

MS NAUERT: I'm sorry, that what is?

QUESTION: Trade policy actually is a sovereign decision. Why the United States can demand other countries to decide what to buy and what not to?

MS NAUERT: I don't think that's what the United States is doing. What the President and the Secretary of State have talked about is free, fair, and reciprocal trade, and for far too long, we believe that the United States Government and the taxpayers and United States businesses have gotten an unfair deal. So the President is looking to rebalance trade deals in that fashion.

I've got to wrap it up and leave it there, guys. Thank you, and we will look forward to seeing some of you on the road tomorrow. And have a happy Fourth of July.

QUESTION: Happy Fourth of July.

(The briefing was concluded at 3:41 p.m.)

DPB # 34

The Office of Website Management, Bureau of Public Affairs, manages this site as a portal for information from the U.S. State Department. External links to other Internet sites should not be construed as an endorsement of the views or privacy policies contained therein.