

Press Releases: Press Briefing at the White House

Press Availability
Mike Pompeo

Secretary of State

James S. Brady Press Briefing Room
Washington, DC
June 7, 2018

SANDERS: Good afternoon. Thanks for being patient with us. Obviously, there's a great deal of interest on the upcoming summit with the North Koreans. We have Secretary Pompeo here, who will make some brief opening remarks and then take questions on that topic. As you know, the President has already done a press conference today, so we'll keep questions limited to that. And we'll be around the rest of the day to answer other news of the day.

Thanks. With that, Mr. Secretary.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Thanks, Sarah.

QUESTION: Sarah, are you going to take questions after (inaudible)?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yes, I'm going to take a couple questions. (Laughter.) A couple. Good afternoon. It's great to be joining you all here today. Early in his presidency, President Trump made a commitment to address the threat of North Korea, which has been a threat to our nation for far too long.

President Trump has been, and continues to be, committed to ridding the United States and the world of threats posed by North Korea's weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missile programs. These programs threaten our homeland, our allies and partners, and the broader non-proliferation regime. North Korea's past activities also make clear that it is proliferation to other actors that creates a risk, in addition to the primary risks. It has supporting infrastructure that is also of concern.

In early 2017, the Trump administration decided on a policy we have referred to as the "maximum pressure campaign." The campaign enacted the strongest economic and diplomatic sanctions against North Korea in history. The goal was to set the conditions for the DPRK to make a strategic decision to denuclearize as the best means by which it will achieve its own security.

American leadership rallied the international community to send a strong message to Chairman Kim Jong Un and the world that we would not stand for the DPRK's illegal weapons programs. The President's bold decision to meet with Chairman Kim Jong Un grew from this incredibly strong and targeted campaign. The President's policy directly led to the historic summit that will take place on June 12th in Singapore.

Back on March 8th, Chairman Kim Jong Un expressed his desire to meet with President Trump as soon as possible. And then on May 9th, I met with Chairman Kim Jong Un in Pyongyang and explained America's expectations for denuclearization.

At that time, we also secured the release of three Americans: Kim Dong-chul, Tony Kim, and Kim Hak-song. We view this as a sign of goodwill from Chairman Kim Jong Un.

The United States and North Korea have been holding direct talks in preparation for a summit, and North Korea has confirmed to us its willingness to denuclearize. A comprehensive whole-of-government effort in support of President Trump's upcoming summit is under way. White House- and State Department-led advance teams are finalizing logistical preparations and will remain in place in Singapore until the summit begins. The President continues to follow every development closely, and is getting daily briefings from his national security team.

The fact that our two leaders are coming to the table shows that the two sides are very serious. The diplomatic model we've used to date is different from past efforts. Our efforts give us hope that we can find real success where past efforts have fallen short.

President Trump is hopeful, but he's also going into the summit with his eyes

wide open. We've seen how many inadequate agreements have been struck in the past. And you can be sure that President Trump will not stand for a bad deal. The United States has been clear, time and time again, that complete, verifiable, and irreversible denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula is the only outcome that we will find acceptable.

The President recognizes that North Korea has great potential, and he looks forward to a day when sanctions on the DPRK can begin to be removed. However, that cannot happen until the DPRK completely and verifiably eliminates its weapons of mass destruction programs.

President Trump and Chairman Kim will certainly also discuss security assurances for the DPRK, establishing a peace regime, and improving relations between our two countries. Until we achieve our goals, the measures that the world, alongside the United States, has put on the regime will remain. In the event diplomacy does not move in the right direction, these measures will increase. Throughout the entire process, the United States has been unified with Japan and South Korea in response to the threats from North Korea.

I will be traveling with my – excuse me, I will be traveling to meet with my Japanese and South Korean counterparts after the summit to continue to coordinate with them. I will also stop in Beijing following the Singapore summit. I'll provide them with an update and underscore the importance of fully implementing all sanctions that are imposed on North Korea.

President Trump recognizes North Korea's desire for security and is prepared to ensure a DPRK free of its weapons of mass destruction is also a secure North Korea.

President Trump has made it clear that if Kim Jong Un denuclearizes, there is a brighter path for North Korea and its people. We envision a strong, connected, secure, and prosperous North Korea that is integrated into the community of nations. We think that the people of the United States and North Korea can create a future defined by friendship and collaboration, and not by mistrust and fear.

We believe that Chairman Kim Jong Un shares this positive vision for the future, and we are committed to finding a path forward. And we assume and hope that that belief is sincere.

We're looking forward to being in Singapore in just a few days.

SANDERS: As a reminder, we'll take just a few questions before the Secretary has to depart.

Roberta.

QUESTION: Thank you. What progress have you made in narrowing the gap in your understanding of denuclearization and North Korea's definition of denuclearization? Has there been progress in bringing that definition closer together?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yes.

QUESTION: Can you describe that a little bit?

SECRETARY POMPEO: No.

(Laughter.)

SANDERS: That was quick. Jon Decker.

QUESTION: Thank you, Sarah. Thank you, Secretary Pompeo. As you mentioned in your remarks, North Korea, in the past, has reneged on prior agreements that it's made with the U.S. government. So I have two questions for you. The first question has to do with your experience meeting with Kim Jong Un. Do you trust him? And my second question has to do with the negotiations that are upcoming with North Korea. Who, in your opinion, has the upper hand in the negotiations, and why?

SECRETARY POMPEO: So with respect to your first question, I've had the chance to meet with Chairman Kim Jong Un twice now. I can tell you he is very capable of articulating the things that he is prepared to do, present clearly the challenges that we all have to overcome. It's why the two leaders are meeting. It's the opportunity to lay those out clearly between the two leaders so that we can see if we can find a path forward together that achieves the outcomes that both countries want.

And your second question?

QUESTION: Who has the upper hand in the negotiations?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yeah. We don't think about it in terms of who has the upper hand. We know this has been a long, intractable challenge. It's gone on for decades. The President has said repeatedly: Previous administrations weren't prepared to do what we've done already. It's not about who has the upper hand. It's about trying to find a way where the two sides can come to an understanding, where we can get concrete steps, not just words, that resolve this challenge.

Pamela.

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, first of all, the President said that he doesn't believe he needs to prepare very much ahead of this summit. Do you think that's a prudent approach?

And also, I want to get your reaction to Rudy Giuliani's comments that "Kim Jong Un got back on his hands and knees and begged" for the summit to go back on – whether you think he should be weighing in on these international affairs and whether you agree with that assessment.

SECRETARY POMPEO: So back to your second question. I took him as it being a small room and not being serious about the comments. I think it was a bit in jest, and –

QUESTION: Do you think it could jeopardize the summit or –

SECRETARY POMPEO: We're moving forward. We're focused on the important things. I know Rudy. Rudy doesn't speak for the administration when it comes to this negotiation and this set of issues.

With respect to your first question, you know, progress – we're making progress, inch by inch. And we're going to travel there. This is different. The approach that President Trump is taking is fundamentally different. In the past, there have been months and months of detailed negotiations, and it got nowhere. This has already driven us to a place we've not been able to achieve before.

SANDERS: Dave Boyer.

QUESTION: Thank you, Mr. Secretary. The President said today that if the Singapore meeting goes well, he'd like to bring Kim Jong Un to Washington, possibly, for further meetings. Has Kim Jong Un invited the President to come to North Korea?

SECRETARY POMPEO: So I don't want to talk to you about the conversations that have been had between the North Korean side and the United States. I'll leave that for the President to talk to.

But I do want to get to – and this comes back to the other question that you asked about the President's preparation. So in my previous role – and I've said this before; you can look it up – there were few days that I left the Oval Office after having briefed the President that we didn't talk about North Korea. So over months and months, days and days, President Trump has been receiving briefings on this issue about the military aspects of it; the commercial, economic aspects of it; the history of the relationship. And in the past few months, there have been near-daily briefings, including today, where we have been providing the President all the information that he needs. And I am very confident that the President will be fully prepared when he meets with his North Korean counterpart.

QUESTION: Just having met the man twice now, what can you tell us about what opinions you've formed of Kim Jong Un as a person?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yeah. So I haven't spent that much time with him. What I have said publicly is he has indicated to me, personally, that he is prepared to denuclearize; that he understands that the current model doesn't work, that he's prepared to denuclearize.

And that, too, he understands that we can't do it the way we've done it before – that this has to be big and bold, and we have to agree to making major changes. We can't step through this over years, but rather need to acknowledge it will take some amount of time, that this doesn't happen instantaneously. But that the model for succeeding – security assurance; and political normalization; and denuclearization completely, verifiably, and irreversibly – for that to take place, we've got to make bold decisions.

And I'm hopeful that Chairman Kim Jong Un is prepared to make that decision for his country. A big shift in his strategic understanding of his security.

SANDERS: Ayesha.

QUESTION: Thank you. So you said that you – that the President is prepared to talk about security guarantees for North Korea. We have seen in this administration that you can – that when new administrations come in, they can undo things that prior administrations have done. How can President Trump guarantee long-term security for North Korea and for Kim, in particular?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Well, look, we're going to have to do things that convince Chairman Kim that that's the case. All right? That's what we'll have to do.

So let me give you an example. We are hopeful that we will put ourselves in a position where we can do something the previous administration didn't do. Right? They signed a flimsy piece of paper, and we're hoping to submit a document that Congress would also have a say in – that would give currency and strength and elongation to the process, so that when administrations do change, as they inevitably do, and this one will – six and half years from now – when that takes place, that Chairman Kim will have comfort that American policy will continue down the same path, on the course that we hope we're able to set in Singapore.

SANDERS: We'll take one last question. Zeke.

QUESTION: Thank you, Mr. Secretary. At the top of your remarks – first, to follow up briefly on your comments just about Asia. When you say a “document” that Congress would sign off on, are you referring to a treaty?

Then second, at the top of your remarks, you said that there's also this threat to the United States and its allies from the North Koreans' WMDs, as well as ballistic missiles. Is that a condition for the President in any negotiation agreement with Chairman Kim, that its ballistic missile program and chemical weapons also be part of that?

And third, finally, can you discuss the format of the meeting between the President and Chairman Kim? What will it look like? Who will be there?

SECRETARY POMPEO: So I'll leave it to the White House to talk about the format of the meetings when the time is right.

With respect to proliferation risk, it's very real. There is a history of that, with respect to North Korea and some of our other difficult challenges in the world today. They are connected. The reason you want complete, verifiable, and irreversible is precisely that. To the extent there remain stockpiles, knowledge bases, warehouses, systems, infrastructure, fissile material production facilities – I could go on – to the extent those remain, the risk of proliferation continues. And it's our aim, through the CVID process and providing the security assurances that Chairman Kim will want, that we can greatly reduce the risk that proliferation ever happens as a result of North Korean actions.

SANDERS: Thanks so much –

QUESTION: One more please, Sarah.

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, can you explain the President's shift – when he's gone from talking about defining success for this meeting as denuclearization of the Peninsula, to now talking about the need for more meetings? Can you explain what happened there and why this shift? And can you also describe your disagreements over North Korea internally with the national security advisor?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yeah, with respect to the second one, I've read a little bit about this. And I love good fiction as next as – as much as the next person, but it is without foundation, so much so that – I'll be polite, since I'm a diplomat now. Suffice to say, those articles are unfounded and a complete joke.

QUESTION: Surely, there had to be – must have been some –

SECRETARY POMPEO: Oh, sure. Ambassador Bolton and I will disagree with great, great consistency over time, I'm confident. Right? We're two individuals. We're each going to present our views. I'm confident that will happen on issues from how long this press conference ought to go – (laughs) – to issues that really matter to the world.

So it's absolutely the case that Ambassador Bolton and I won't always agree, and I think the President demands that we each give him our own views.

QUESTION: (Inaudible.)

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yeah. So you had a first – your first question, I'll try to answer. I'll try to answer your first question, too. I don't see the shift as disjunctive as you do. The President has always understood that this was a process. It's been very clear that there would – that it would always take a great deal of work to do this.

So I think your – you can interpret it how you will, but I think your characterization of that also doesn't reflect the President's understanding. I think his understanding about this process has been pretty consistent since I've been working with him now, almost a year and a half ago.

SANDERS: Thanks so much, guys.

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Press Releases: Dismissal of Director General of Montenegro's Public Broadcaster

Press Statement
Heather Nauert

Department Spokesperson

Washington, DC
June 7, 2018

The United States is disappointed by the dismissal today of Adrijana Kadija, the director general of Montenegro's public broadcaster, RTCG. This decision by the public broadcaster's governing council undermines media freedom in Montenegro, the reform and preservation of which is central to Montenegro's integration into the Euro-Atlantic community. Montenegro must do more to safeguard media freedom and the editorial independence of its public broadcaster.

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Press Releases: Joint Statement on Australia – New Zealand – United States Pacific Security Cooperation

Dialogue

Joint Statement
Office of the Spokesperson

Washington, DC
June 7, 2018

The text of the following statement was released by the Governments of the United States of America, the Government of Australia, and the Government of New Zealand on the occasion of the inaugural Australia – New Zealand – United States Pacific Security Cooperation Dialogue.

Begin Text:

On June 6 and 7, Deputy Assistant Secretary Matt Matthews with Australian First Assistant Secretary Daniel Sloper and New Zealand Assistant Secretary Andrew Needs led the inaugural Australia – New Zealand – United States Pacific Security Cooperation Dialogue at the Department of State in Washington, DC.

The Pacific Security Cooperation Dialogue is a trilateral forum that brings together civilian and military representatives from the three governments to discuss a wide range of security issues and identify areas to strengthen cooperation with Pacific Island countries on common regional challenges. The Dialogue complements bilateral discussions each participating country has with Pacific Island countries. Delegations included officials from the three governments responsible for foreign affairs, defense, law enforcement, coast guard, homeland security, development and trade.

Dialogue participants reaffirmed a common interest in the prosperity, stability and security of the Indo-Pacific region, and their shared Pacific neighborhood. All three countries emphasized the importance of strengthened cooperation with Pacific Island countries, including in the context of Pacific Islands Forum initiatives to enhance regional peace, stability and prosperity.

The Dialogue identified opportunities for enhanced collaboration among trilateral partners, Pacific Island countries and regional organizations on a range of targeted areas, including: strengthening port security in support of open trade and commerce; increasing maritime domain awareness in the Pacific through enhanced information sharing; supporting the Australia Pacific Security College and associated opportunities for building institutional capacity and cooperative links; combatting transnational organized crime; and military-to-military cooperation. The next round of the Pacific Security

Cooperation Dialogue is expected to be held in Canberra, Australia in May 2019.

END TEXT

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Press Releases: Secretary Pompeo's Travel to Canada, Singapore, South Korea, and China

Press Statement
Heather Nauert

Department Spokesperson

Washington, DC
June 7, 2018

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo will travel to Charlevoix, Quebec, Canada on June 9 to join President Donald Trump as the President and leaders from Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, and the United Kingdom, as well as the European Union, convene for Group of Seven (G7) meetings.

Secretary Pompeo will then accompany President Trump on his travel to Singapore. The Secretary will make additional stops in the Republic of Korea and China. The Secretary's trip demonstrates the Administration's focus on the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula and commitment to our alliances and partnerships in the Indo-Pacific Region.

The Secretary will travel to Singapore, June 10–13, where he will participate in the President's summit with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un and bilateral events with Singaporean Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong.

Secretary Pompeo will then travel to Seoul, Republic of Korea, June 13–14. He will meet with senior Korean and Japanese officials to discuss the U.S.-Republic of Korea alliance, the U.S.-Japan alliance, our shared priorities, and next steps in our shared approach to North Korea.

On June 14, the Secretary will visit Beijing, China. Secretary Pompeo will have discussions with Chinese officials on bilateral, regional, and global issues that affect both countries.

Follow @StateDept and @SecPompeo for updates and live tweets from the road.

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[Press Releases: Senior State Department Official On Afghanistan Ceasefire Announcement](#)

Special Briefing
Senior State Department Official
Via Teleconference
June 7, 2018

MODERATOR: Thank you, ma'am, and good afternoon, everyone, and thank you for joining us for today's background call on the ceasefire in Afghanistan. Joining us today on the call is [Senior State Department Official]. We will refer to him as a senior – the Senior State Department Official. As a reminder, this call is on background and the contents of the call will be embargoed until the end.

So with that, I'll turn it over to [Senior State Department Official] for some opening statements, and then we'll take some questions.

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: Great, thank you very much. Nice to be with

all of you remotely here today. I assume you've all seen Secretary Pompeo's statement welcoming President Ghani's offer of a temporary ceasefire with the Taliban during the upcoming Eid al-Fitr holiday. This offer of a ceasefire and an intent by the Afghan Government and Afghan Security Forces to temporarily suspend offensive operations against the Taliban during the Eid holiday comes in response to a call earlier in the week from the Afghan Ulema for reductions in violence, an end to the violence and the conflict overall, and I think underscores the Afghan Government's continued commitment to searching for ways to bring this conflict to a close and, in the meantime, to look for ways to reduce its horrible impact on the Afghan people.

We understand that prior to announcing the ceasefire offer, President Ghani consulted with leaders of the prominent organizations and groupings that participated in the jihad against the Soviets and received pretty much unconditional, uniform support from them for this concept. And in so offering this ceasefire opportunity, I think President Ghani is responding to and indeed reflecting the desire of a wide cross-section of Afghans – both geographically, ethnically, and in terms of both urban and rural populations – in desiring to see a reduction in violence and a way forward to an end to the conflict.

So with that, we obviously – as you saw in Secretary Pompeo's statement, we're calling on and looking to the Taliban to respond favorably, and we certainly hope that other countries who have supported the Afghan Government's efforts to promote a peaceful settlement to the conflict would also be encouraging them to do so.

And with that, I'll pause and take your questions.

MODERATOR: Thank you. We'll go to our first question.

OPERATOR: Our first question comes from the line of Ryan Browne with CNN. Your line is open.

QUESTION: Hi, yes. Thank you for doing this. I just wanted to ask whether or not the U.S. played any role in the run-up to this announcement of kind of getting – making Pakistan aware or working with Pakistan. And have you seen any signs running up to the announcement itself or since the announcement that the Taliban are receptive to this?

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: Thank you. So to your first question, this is an Afghan Government initiative responding to desires from within Afghan society, and we're certainly hopeful that both the Taliban and those organizations or countries that have some degree of influence with the Taliban will equally support this limited duration ceasefire.

I think the fact that the Taliban has not yet rejected the offer – just as they have not formally rejected President Ghani's offer of a settlement process provided back in February at the Kabul Process – indicates they may be prepared to entertain it and observe it. And we certainly hope that will be the case, but we'll have to wait and see how they respond.

MODERATOR: Thank you. We'll take the next question, please.

OPERATOR: Once again, if you have a question, please hit *1. Our next question comes from the line of Spencer Ackerman with The Daily Beast. Your line is open.

QUESTION: Thanks very much for doing the call. Will the United States negotiate with the Taliban directly, as the Taliban has requested? And how will you answer the criticism that the Afghan Government, supported by the United States, is essentially taking a position of unilateral ceasefire here, given that the Taliban hasn't responded to it and wasn't a party to negotiating a ceasefire?

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: Well, we believe anything that reduces the violence in Afghanistan, whether it's temporarily or more importantly in the long term, is a good thing. Now, in this case, we have the Government of Afghanistan expressing a willingness to reduce violence, because frankly most of the violence in Afghanistan these days comes in response to operations and violence perpetrated by the Taliban or Daesh, by ISIS Khorasan.

With respect to the Taliban, they have an opportunity here to respond to calls from a wide cross-section of Afghans asking for a reduction in violence, which we think would show that it's possible in the course of this long conflict to reduce violence. Obviously, it would be better in the long term if a ceasefire stemmed from a negotiated political settlement, but a temporary ceasefire for an Eid certainly doesn't preclude that possibility down the road and hopefully helps contribute to realizing that objective.

MODERATOR: Thank you very much.

QUESTION: And on the question of whether the U.S. will negotiate with the Taliban directly, as the Taliban has requested.

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: Well, I'd refer you back to statements that colleagues have made previously to that question.

MODERATOR: Next question, please.

OPERATOR: The question comes from the line of Nicholas Wadhams with Bloomberg News. Please, go ahead.

QUESTION: Hi, thank you. [Senior State Department Official], do you have any sense for how long, given the current situation in Afghanistan, you expect U.S. troops to remain in the country?

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: Well, as you know from the strategy that the administration put in place last year, we're frankly focused less on a specific duration and more on the conditions in Afghanistan that would enable us to reduce a footprint. And Afghan Government officials, President Ghani, Dr. Abdullah the chief executive, they're focused on the same things. No one in Afghanistan wants to see the Afghan Government devoting the bulk of its own resources to security as opposed to the other critical needs in the society to promote economic development, to promote improvements in health

care and education and all the things that most people want to see in a stabilized society.

We certainly don't want to sustain force levels and operations in Afghanistan any longer than is absolutely necessary. And what we're all focused on is trying to find the right formula that enables us to reduce operations, and that comes from a political settlement where the Taliban is no longer posing a threat to the Afghan people and no longer creating the conditions under which ISIS Khorasan or other international terrorist organizations can take advantage of instability in Afghanistan to plot and plan attacks against the United States or our allies.

QUESTION: But does it discourage you that after 17 years you haven't been able to find that formula yet?

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: I think everybody involved in this effort, whether they were part of it at the outset or whether they've come to it later in the process, is mindful of the complexity of the challenges but very much desiring to find that formula. And I think under the current environment in the region, in the wider region, we're focused on producing the results that achieve the outcomes we're all seeking.

MODERATOR: Thank you very much. We'll go to the next question now.

OPERATOR: Our next question comes from the line of Missy Ryan with *The Washington Post*. Go ahead.

QUESTION: Hi, [Senior State Department Official]. Missy Ryan from the *Post*. Can you tell us – it sounds like from what you said earlier that this ceasefire came together after the Ulema gathering this week. Can you tell us how much heads-up was the United States given before the announcement today? And do you worry at all that the announcement of the ceasefire could be detrimental to the morale of Afghan forces, if they make sacrifices on the battlefield? Thanks.

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: Sure. So with respect to your first question, as you've seen, U.S. forces will be supporting the Afghan Government's efforts in this regard, in terms of suspending certain – well, suspending offensive operations during the ceasefire, but being prepared to respond if fired upon in self-defense. And I understand U.S. forces also will be continuing offensive operations or supporting offensive operations against ISIS Khorasan because this does not apply to them. Obviously, there was a bit of discussion in advance to ensure that U.S. forces and coalition forces, which are there to support Afghan Security Forces, were – would be in a position to be able to support this initiative and to do a bit of work to figure out how to put it into place.

With respect to the impacts on morale, I think that's a question better posed to Afghan leaders. My impression has been that Afghan forces, just like U.S. or coalition counterparts, would prefer not to be fighting if they have an alternative. They're fighting when they need to. They've been conducting significant operations, offensive operations, this year with a great deal of

persistence and bravery. But I think in this case, to get an operational pause and to see if the Taliban is willing to take up that offer and reduce violence for a period of time, I imagine they would welcome that.

MODERATOR: Thank you very much. We'll go to the next question now.

OPERATOR: Our next question is coming from the line of Gardiner Harris with *The New York Times*.

QUESTION: Hi. The Secretary spoke with the Pakistani military chief last night before the ceasefire was announced. Did they talk about the ceasefire? Obviously one of the questions in Afghanistan is what role Pakistan played in this ceasefire announcement and what role the Americans played in this ceasefire announcement. I think you keep emphasizing that this is an Afghan Government initiative. There is suspicion throughout Afghanistan that it was pushed by the Americans and the Pakistanis. Can you address that and specific – and be very specific about whether it was a topic of discussion yesterday between the Secretary and the chief of staff?

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: I can't speak to that specific conversation. I don't – I wasn't privy to the call. I don't think it's accurate to say that the ceasefire is a U.S. initiative, but I think it's accurate to say, obviously, as you've seen from our statements, that we welcome the initiative that President Ghani has taken in this regard. And I think the fact that it has been welcomed by a cross-section of leaders and is responding to a call from a significant voice in Afghan society in the form of the Ulema speaks to the strong desire across the country for reduced levels of violence and for the government to be exploring new ways to try to get a settlement process going and to see if there are ways the Taliban can be encouraged to drop their opposition to sitting down and talking with the legitimate Government of Afghanistan. That continues to be the only obstacle at this point to starting a settlement process that would lead over time, we would expect, to permanently reduced levels of violence.

MODERATOR: All right. Thank you. We'll go on to the next call.

OPERATOR: Our next question comes from the line of Conor Finnegan with ABC News.

QUESTION: Hey. Thank you, [Senior State Department Official], for doing this. I just had a quick question about something that General Nicholson said last week. He alluded to – sorry, sorry for the noise. He alluded to some secret peace talks between the Taliban and the Afghan Government, saying there was a robust dialogue with tremendous potential. Can you update us on whether or not there are peace talks going on between the two sides, and if so, whether the U.S. supports that?

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: I'm not going to speak to specific diplomacy because, obviously, its potential success is dependent in part on a degree of confidentiality of that type of process. What I would say is that we continue to support and explore, along with our allies and other partners in the coalition, the best ways to promote a political settlement that would

stem from talks between the main parties to this conflict in the form of the Taliban and the Afghan Government. We strongly supported the efforts that resulted in President Ghani's unprecedented offer and framework for what a settlement process could look like that he provided at the Kabul Process Conference back in late February. And then I think it's important to remember it was endorsed by every country in the region and all the members of the coalition and all the other significant interested parties and countries trying to find that formula that brings about a peaceful settlement.

So really, the question here is how we can all best continue to work to create that settlement process in a way that brings the conflict to a close. And obviously, a number of governments have a role to play in producing that result, and there are a range of ongoing conversations between the United States and allies and partners and other governments about how we can best achieve that result.

MODERATOR: All right. Thank you. And we'll take our last question now.

OPERATOR: Our next question comes from the line of Mirwais Rahmani, Voice of America. Your line is open.

QUESTION: Yes. Thank you, [Senior State Department Official], for your time. So the peace, the ceasefire will include the Haqqani Network. Both the Haqqani Network and its leader are listed as designated terrorist organization and individual, so how the U.S. troops in Afghanistan will deal with this?

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: Well, as noted in our statement, we're going to approach this with the perspective of supporting the Afghan Security Forces in implementing the ceasefire. What this means is that during the ceasefire period, the Afghan Security Forces won't be conducting offensive operations, and the U.S. Government – U.S. military forces therefore will be in a similar posture with respect to the Taliban. However, if Afghan Security Forces are attacked or if there are attacks by the Taliban or its constituent elements in this period, certainly Afghan Security Forces can and will respond, I would imagine, and U.S. forces will be postured and poised to support them in doing so.

MODERATOR: All right. And that concludes our call today. Thank you, everyone, for joining us. The embargo is now lifted, and enjoy the rest of your afternoon.

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