

[Press Releases: Statement on Georgian Territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia](#)

Press Statement
Heather Nauert

Department Spokesperson

Washington, DC
May 30, 2018

The United States strongly condemns the Syrian regime's intention to establish diplomatic relations with the Russian-occupied Georgian regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. These regions are part of Georgia. The United States' position on Abkhazia and South Ossetia is unwavering. We fully support Georgia's sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders, and call on all states to be mindful of their obligations under the UN Charter and do the same. And once again, the United States urges Russia to withdraw its forces to pre-war positions per the 2008 ceasefire agreement.

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[Press Releases: Addressing the Challenge of Returning Families of](#)

Foreign Terrorist Fighters: Workshop Held in Madrid, Spain

Media Note

Office of the Spokesperson

Washington, DC, United States

May 29, 2018

The United States and the Kingdom of the Netherlands, under the auspices of the Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF), held the third and final regionally-focused workshop of the *Initiative on Addressing the Challenge of Returning Families of Foreign Terrorist Fighters* in Madrid, Spain on May 28-29, 2018.

The yearlong Initiative brought together national and local governments, international organizations, health and social community support entities, and family support organizations over a series of three regional workshops. The first workshop was held in Tunis, Tunisia on February 8-9, 2018 and the second took place in Bali, Indonesia on May 7-8. Each workshop solicited input from regional organizations, national governments, and expert practitioners to ensure the resulting good practices document is as universally applicable as possible.

Participants in the Madrid workshop discussed the threat of returning families of FTFs in Europe and shared case studies and best practices through a roundtable discussion series. The sessions in Madrid were dedicated to reviewing the draft good practices document.

The *Families Initiative* is one of the many efforts the GCTF is working on to address the problems posed by returning foreign terrorist fighters and the family members who accompany them. Addressing the challenge can be difficult, as some may have engaged in terrorism in Syria and Iraq, while some may themselves be victims of ISIS. The good practices document will be put forward for endorsement at the 2018 GCTF Ministerial Meeting in September 2018. It is intended to provide a basis for international engagement, assistance, and training to address this challenge.

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

Heather Nauert
Spokesperson

Department Press Briefing
Washington, DC
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Index for Today's Briefing

- [VENEZUELA](#)
- [DEPARTMENT](#)
- [SYRIA](#)
- [DEPARTMENT](#)
- [SYRIA](#)
- [NORTH KOREA](#)
- [ISRAEL/PALESTINIANS](#)
- [SYRIA](#)
- [TURKEY](#)
- [SYRIA](#)
- [CUBA](#)
- [PAKISTAN](#)

TRANSCRIPT:

3:13 p.m. EDT

MS NAUERT: Hi, everybody. How are you today?

QUESTION: Hello.

QUESTION: Hi.

MS NAUERT: Hope everyone had a nice weekend. It's good to see you again. Get comfortable. I have a bunch of announcements for you.

You probably – I know many of you followed this closely over the weekend, and that was the release of our U.S. citizen from Venezuela, Josh Holt. He had been held at a prison for nearly two years. This was a case that we continued to call for his release on humanitarian grounds for a very long time. You heard us speak about that frequently here. I'd like to thank our colleagues at our U.S. embassy in Caracas, I'd like to thank my colleagues in Consular Affairs, and especially I'd like to thank our Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Tom Shannon for his efforts on this case over the past two years.

Under Secretary Shannon helped lead the efforts of the entire department, to include CA, Legislative Affairs, and Western Hemisphere Affairs teams, to secure the humanitarian release of the Holt family from Venezuela. Under Secretary Shannon coordinated with members of Congress, advising them on what proved to be a successful strategy on the part of our colleagues. Such teamwork and trust is essential to managing these incredibly difficult cases and seeking progress however we can.

Next, I have another announcement related to an under secretary, and that is Andrea Thompson. I look forward to introducing each of you to her at some point in the near future. She is the Under Secretary for

Arms Control in International Security, otherwise known here at the State Department as the T family. Andrea Thompson represented the United States at the 15th anniversary of the Proliferation Security Initiative on May 15th along with senior representatives from 77 nations. At the – at that event, Under Secretary Thompson delivered President Trump's letter acknowledging the contribution of PSI in the fight against the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. More than 58 states endorsed four joint statements which communicated the signatories to specific actions such as strengthening domestic legal authorities to take strong action and timely actions under PSI and enhancing critical capabilities and practices.

The Under Secretary also participated in the ministerial meeting of the Partnership Against Impunity for the Use of Chemical Weapons. That was hosted by the French Foreign Minister Le Drian on May the 18th. That included the UK Foreign Minister Boris Johnson. The partnership issued a joint statement, which included specific references to the Syrian regime's use of chemical weapons in Douma, Syria, and the Russian attack in Salisbury, UK. The meeting highlighted the international coalition's determination to hold a special OPCW conference of state parties meeting on attribution in late June.

Next, I have some more news from our seventh floor, and that is I'm pleased to make a personnel announcement today. We're pleased to announce the appointment of Ambassador Michael McKinley as senior advisor to Secretary Pompeo. Ambassador McKinley brings a broad range of experience on global issues. He most recently served as the U.S. ambassador to Brazil and has previously served as ambassador to Afghanistan, Colombia, and Peru. He's also served as deputy chief of mission at the U.S. Mission to the European Union in Brussels and deputy assistant secretary in the Department of State's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration. He's a senior Foreign Service officer.

Ambassador McKinley was born in Venezuela. He grew up in Brazil, Mexico, Spain, and the United States, and he has a doctorate from Oxford University and has published a book on the colonial history of Venezuela. I know the Secretary's looking forward to having him join him on the seventh floor as a senior advisor.

In addition, I'd like to extend my congratulations to Randy Evans, who was confirmed late last week as the new U.S. ambassador to Luxembourg; David Cornstein, confirmed as the new U.S. ambassador to Hungary; Jonathan Cohen, confirmed as the deputy representative of U.S. Mission to the United Nations with the rank and status of ambassador and the deputy representative of the U.S. in the Security Council of the United Nations.

And finally, Francis Fannon, who was confirmed as the first assistant secretary of state for energy resources. He will lead the department's efforts to forge international energy policy, strengthen U.S. and global energy security, and respond to energy issues on behalf of the U.S. Government.

Next, I'd like to talk about Syria, and that is the assumption of the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament. Andrea, this is what you had asked me about earlier. Syria's turn to serve as president of the Conference on Disarmament from May 28th to June the 22nd – we are outraged at the Syrian regime's blatant disregard for human life, its serial violations of and contempt for its international obligations, and its audaciousness in assuming the presidency of an international body committed to advancing disarmament and nonproliferation. Syria lacks the credibility to assume the presidency, a point tragically illustrated by Assad's repeated regime – repeated use, pardon me, of chemical weapons against the Syrian people. The regime's blatant violation of the Chemical Weapons Convention, the failure to correct its violation of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, and its violation of its safeguards agreement with the International Atomic Energy Agency all demonstrate the regime's disregard for its obligations in nonproliferation and disarmament.

It will not be business as usual while Syria presides over this body. During the next four weeks, we will limit our participation during CD plenaries. However, we will still represent and protect the interests of the United States. We encourage other responsible nations to work with us to counter Syria's presidency and to hold the regime accountable for its brutal attacks on the Syrian people and its disregard for international arms control and nonproliferation obligations.

A couple more announcements. We're still – got a few more. Today marks the 70th anniversary of UN Peacekeeping, so I'd like to pay tribute to the sacrifice of more than 3,700 peacekeepers who have given their lives in the name of peace. The United States commends the efforts of more than 100,000 troops, police, civilians currently serving in UN Peace Operations. UN Peacekeeping Operations are an essential tool for the maintenance of international peace and security and a powerful mechanism for addressing many of today's global crises. Over 70 years, the international community has worked together in U.S. Peacekeeping to bring stability, to protect civilians, to mitigate the expansion of terrorism and illicit activities, and also help alleviate human suffering – objectives that we all share.

The United States will continue to strive for better, smarter peacekeeping operations that are more effectively and efficiently able to address conflicts, support political solutions, and meet the needs of people on the ground. We're committed to reforms that create a culture of performance in U.S.¹ Peacekeeping, reforms that enhance the safety and security of peacekeepers and increase the operational effectiveness of missions. Through programs such as the U.S. Global Peace Operations Initiative, GPOI, and the International Police Operations Support, we build partner country's capacity to train, to equip, to deploy, and sustain military and police personnel. We emphasize effective leadership, peacekeeping competency, and gender integration. So today, we'd like to thank the men and women who have served and continue to serve under the flag of the United Nations with peace.

And lastly, I'd like to provide an update on the Secretary's trip to New York tomorrow. Since the President's May 24th letter to North Korean leader Kim Jong-un, the North Koreans have been engaging with the United States. The United States continues to actively prepare for President Trump's expected summit with Leader Kim in Singapore. President Trump will meet with Prime Minister Shinzo Abe of Japan on June the 7th at the White House. I know Secretary Pompeo looks forward to being a part of those meetings.

North Korean Vice Chairman of the Central Committee Kim Yong-chol is arriving in New York and will meet with Secretary Pompeo later this week. We also have a U.S. delegation meeting with the North Korean delegation in the DMZ. The United States delegation consists of Sung Kim, U.S. Ambassador to the Philippines, Allison Hooker, Director of Korea for the NSC, and Randy Schriver, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Asian and Pacific Security Affairs at the Department of Defense. They plan to have additional meetings later this week.

Separately, Joe Hagen, the White House Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations, and the U.S. pre-advance team, including members from the State Department, are in Singapore this week, where they're conducting logistics of the expected summit.

And with that, I'd be happy to take your questions. Thanks for bearing with me through all of that.

QUESTION: Pre-advance team?

MS NAUERT: Pre-advance team.

QUESTION: Can't it just be an advance team? (Laughter.)

MS NAUERT: Grammarian. Go right ahead, Matt.

QUESTION: Well, I don't know. I just had one thing on the Syria and the COD, the Disarmament Conference. When you say you're going to limit your participation, what does that mean?

MS NAUERT: Well, I think that means – and pardon me, I almost called – or Ambassador Haley referred to this earlier today. She put out a statement in which she talked a little bit about her concerns about this. I think that means that the United States may not as fully cooperate as it normally does. However, we will continue to address and represent U.S. interests at those meetings.

QUESTION: Well, does that mean you're not going to go to certain meetings or you'll have a lower level representative or –

MS NAUERT: I'm not going to get ahead of what that exactly is going to look like. But we remain very concerned about this issue. And I would refer you to Ambassador Haley's statement and our statement as well for that.

QUESTION: Okay. On North Korea – what day is the meeting in New York with the Secretary? And what exactly – you’ve got two different teams, one in the DMZ with Sung Kim and the other one the pre-advance in Singapore. Can you give us a – what is each group doing, specifically?

MS NAUERT: So I know all of you would like a detailed play-by-play of all the meetings, the conversations that we’re having, what happened when, what did they eat, what kind of flowers were there and all that.

QUESTION: No, I don’t actually care about –

MS NAUERT: We’re not going to get into all of the nitty-gritty and conduct that here from this room. I can just tell you that the Secretary looks forward to his meetings. He will be heading up to New York tomorrow. I believe a media note is being put out to all of you, if it hasn’t gone out already, that we are still finalizing exactly what these meetings will look like, but the Secretary will be heading up to New York tomorrow and I believe returning some time on Thursday.

QUESTION: So does that mean the meeting is – hasn’t been set yet?

MS NAUERT: We have meetings scheduled. We’re still working out all the final details of that.

QUESTION: All right. And you can’t really even get into just what the basket of issues that each – I mean, I hope they’re not all talking about the same thing, right. I mean, that would seem to be –

MS NAUERT: For each of the groups that are meeting?

QUESTION: Yes.

MS NAUERT: I think that each of the groups that are meeting, such as our colleagues who are in Singapore right now, our colleagues who are at the Demilitarized Zone, are all having meetings about different pieces in which they have an expertise.

QUESTION: Right. So –

MS NAUERT: I’m not going to get into all of the details of that, but I think it’s pretty impressive, thinking about where we were one year ago – where we were even six months ago, for that matter. And now we have three simultaneous meetings taking place on this matter to talk about the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.

QUESTION: All right. The last one. Is it your view – is it the administration’s view that none of this flurry of activity would have happened but for the letter the President sent?

MS NAUERT: Matt, I’m not going to get into that. We are where we are today. We know we’re looking forward to participating in those meetings as we prepare for President Trump’s summit in June. Okay.

QUESTION: Follow up on this?

MS NAUERT: Lesley. Hi.

QUESTION: A follow-up. Apparently – well, according to the Treasury’s website, this official, Kim Yong-chol, is under U.S. sanctions. Did he need to get a special waiver to come to New York?

MS NAUERT: My – and we’ve talked about these types of things before: When people from certain countries come to the United States, how exactly does that all work? There is an interagency process that allows for this kind of travel, this type of official travel to take place. We are making sure that we are in compliant with all of our own rules.

QUESTION: Which means that he did get a waiver, then?

MS NAUERT: I would imagine that whatever was necessary was, in fact, done.

Hi.

QUESTION: And can I have a follow-up –

MS NAUERT: Yeah, sure.

QUESTION: – from this morning’s briefing with the ambassador?

MS NAUERT: Let’s – is this about North Korea?

QUESTION: Yeah.

MS NAUERT: Okay.

QUESTION: It’s just something that he said that’s left a little bit of confusion. When he was asked specifically whether rights abuses were going to be raised with the North Koreans, he said “it is a matter of discussion.”

MS NAUERT: Well, I think what he meant is that he’s not going to get ahead of the Secretary’s meetings and isn’t going to get ahead of the President’s meetings on this. We have a lot of very important matters to discuss with the Government of North Korea, chiefly the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. Beyond that, I’m not going to get into any of the specifics. We’ll see how all of this goes. Okay?

QUESTION: So you don’t think it’s going to be included?

MS NAUERT: I’m not saying that it will be; I’m not saying it won’t be. We’re just not going to get ahead of the Secretary’s meetings that start this week.

Hi, Andrea.

QUESTION: Can you let us know whether the acknowledged expert on North

Korean nuclear facilities, Dr. Sieg Hecker from Stanford's report, is at all part of the information that is being looked at by the administration going into this?

MS NAUERT: I can tell you I'm not personally familiar with the report that you referenced. I can look into that and see if I have anything for you on that.

QUESTION: It's a report today that says that it would take 15 years to denuclearize.

MS NAUERT: Ah, okay. I haven't reviewed it; I'm not sure if anyone here at the State Department has reviewed this outside professor's report. If we have anything on it – for that on you, I'll let you know.

QUESTION: And can you give us some idea of what we can expect in terms of any kind of public press coverage of these meetings in New York?

MS NAUERT: I can tell you there will be press engagement. We're still working through all the details. We are heading up there tomorrow sometime in the day, and I'll let you know as we get more clarity on what those exact timelines will look like, and the events.

QUESTION: Heather –

MS NAUERT: Okay. Hey, Nick, I think you were next.

QUESTION: Do you have any sense for what accounted for the North Koreans changing position? I mean, the Secretary testified last week that all the U.S. was getting was dial tones, and now suddenly there seems to be this fulsome dialogue.

MS NAUERT: I'm not going to presume to know why the North Koreans and the United States started having conversations again. It's not my place to do so. I can just tell you now that we are looking forward to having these meetings, and I think we've seen a tremendous amount of progress over the past few days alone.

QUESTION: Okay. And just one more. Is it your belief now or the State Department's belief that the Singapore summit will go ahead on June 12th?

MS NAUERT: That is what we're planning for, but we'll see what happens. Okay?

Francesco.

QUESTION: Just a follow-up to Matt question. Can you at least tell us if Secretary Pompeo meeting in New York will be about setting the agenda and talking about what denuclearization mean for each part and each country?

MS NAUERT: Well, this will be the Secretary's third meeting with Kim

Yong-chol. They've had obviously very deep conversations, where they've talked about a lot of detail about what the United States expectations are. Again, I'm not going to get ahead of those meetings. I'll let the Secretary handle it with him, and I'm not going to debate it here from the podium with all of you.

QUESTION: But it's not on logistical matters; it's more on the agenda?

MS NAUERT: We'll see. We will see. I have not asked the Secretary that question personally, what exactly is going to be discussed. I think the primary conversation is going to be as we lead up to this meeting that we're planning for June the 12th. Okay.

QUESTION: Can I follow up?

MS NAUERT: Yeah, go ahead.

QUESTION: Yes. If he's – if Kim – Yong-chol is provided with a waiver by the State Department, has he also been approved to travel anywhere other than New York within the U.S.?

MS NAUERT: I believe that if anyone were to travel beyond New York that they would need additional waivers for that. I don't have any – or they would need some sort of an approval for that. I don't have anything for you more on that.

Go ahead.

QUESTION: And why have the meetings in the U.S. and not elsewhere?

MS NAUERT: That's where they're being held. I think it's great. Easy trip up to New York, and you all can get up there easily too.

QUESTION: Heather?

MS NAUERT: Hi, Janne.

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

QUESTION: Hi, thank you. North Korea asking United States to guarantee their safety. Is it a system – system guarantee for North Korea or regime guarantee? What is it?

MS NAUERT: A what guarantee?

QUESTION: What is the – yeah, guarantee for the what?

MS NAUERT: I'm sorry, state the last part again?

QUESTION: Guarantee for the what? Is that a system guarantee for their regime, or what is –

MS NAUERT: Will they be protected while they're here in the United States? Is that what you're asking?

QUESTION: Yes.

MS NAUERT: Yes, that is something that our security apparatus affords to every foreign leader coming into the United States when they come in for meetings.

QUESTION: But why is it – why it's guaranteed for the – what is it? I mean –

MS NAUERT: Pardon me?

QUESTION: Is it security guarantees or economic –

MS NAUERT: There is no talk about economic guarantees, but we do provide, to answer your question, security, security protection, when foreign officials do travel here to the United States, especially at a high level.

Hey, Nick.

QUESTION: Hi. There's reporting today that the U.S. was prepared to unveil a new round of sanctions on North Korea but has postponed that indefinitely. It was set to be unveiled as early as today. Do you think that kind of contradicts the idea or the notion that maximum pressure will continue until there is complete, verifiable –

MS NAUERT: No, I think this was something under discussion at the Department of Treasury. I'd just have to refer you to them on that. I think it speaks volumes the fact that we're having meetings right now and the importance of the denuclearization, our policy on that.

By the way, while we're talking about this issue, I just want to highlight the great work that the Government of Singapore has done and how much assistance that they have provided to the United States, especially Prime Minister Lee in particular, who has been gracious with his time, gracious with all their efforts in helping the United States to plan for this summit. They're obviously our strategic partner, and they have just been incredibly generous in agreeing to host an upcoming meeting, so I just wanted to highlight that and thank the Government of Singapore for that.

QUESTION: On that point –

MS NAUERT: Yeah.

QUESTION: – can we assume that the other side did show up in Singapore, that our pre-advance group is actually working with North Koreans?

MS NAUERT: I don't have any information for you on that, but if I do, I'll let you know.

QUESTION: Can I move on?

MS NAUERT: Hi, Said.

QUESTION: Yes.

MS NAUERT: Can we do one more question on Korea?

QUESTION: Sure.

MS NAUERT: Oh, sure.

QUESTION: Can we just go back to the location for a second? Just in light of symmetry, why is this meeting happening in New York versus D.C., and why isn't there an opportunity for the equivalent of Pompeo to meet with Trump when Pompeo did meet with Kim Jong-un?

MS NAUERT: I think it's important that we're going up to New York. I know the Secretary looks forward to engaging him in New York, and that's all I have for you on that, that we're going to be in New York and we look forward to those meetings.

QUESTION: But what message does that send that it's New York and not D.C.?

MS NAUERT: I don't think it sends any kind of message. I mean, if you're the North Koreans, you're traveling a really far distance regardless of whether it's Washington, D.C. or New York City. And I think it shows the importance of this meeting to look forward and look ahead to the planned meetings that the President would have with his counterpart in the future.

Said, hi.

QUESTION: Can we move to the Palestinian issue?

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

MS NAUERT: Okay, final one on DPRK, then we're going to move on.

QUESTION: How long are you going to be at the UN in New York?

MS NAUERT: Sir, I don't have any information for you on that. As I said, we're still finalizing all the details. Okay.

Hi, Said.

QUESTION: Just very quickly on the Palestinian issue, two quick questions. The Israelis are introducing a bill that would ban photographing soldiers in action, apparently while they're putting down the demonstrations and so on. Does that concern you in any way? Does that in any way compromise the integrity of the press?

MS NAUERT: Said, you have a hard enough time getting me to comment on pending legislation here in the United States. We're certainly not going to comment on that pending legislation. I would just have to refer you

to whoever proposed that, the sponsors of that legislation.

QUESTION: But you're a champion of the free speech and freedom of the press. Would you – I mean, would you – how do you –

MS NAUERT: Said, I don't have the specifics on that matter. I'd just have to refer you back to them.

QUESTION: Okay, one last question. It seems that the Palestinian intelligence chief, Majid Faraj, has met with Secretary Pompeo before he became Secretary most recently. Are these talks ongoing? Is there any kind of talks between the Palestinians and the Secretary now?

MS NAUERT: Well, first I would say you presume that that did, in fact, happen. I don't speak for the Central Intelligence Agency. I'd have to refer you back to the Central Intelligence Agency for anything related to the Secretary's time before he became Secretary of State, when he was still serving as that director.

QUESTION: But that was in April sometime, mid-April.

MS NAUERT: Said, I don't have anything for you on that. You'd have to contact the agency for that.

Okay. Hi, Laurie.

QUESTION: Hi. On Friday, you warned Russia and the Syrian regime about moving into the southern de-escalation zone in Syria. Do you still have concerns about that, or do they seem to have taken your warning into account?

MS NAUERT: Yeah. First, let me just say this remains a tremendous concern of the United States Government. How many times have you heard me standing at this podium talking about the success of the de-escalation zone, what we often refer to as the ceasefire zone, the one in southwestern Syria. This has been successful; for the most part, the ceasefire has held since July of last year. This is the most crowded population area that has been the safest in all of Syria. Again, I'm saying a populated area.

The notion that anyone would attack or threaten to attack is tremendously concerning to the United States Government. This is an issue that we have raised with the Russians through our Amman monitoring channel. Those conversations are ongoing. I know we're continuing to talk with the governments.

But this area has helped keep this section of Syria stable. It has also undoubtedly saved lives. We have been able to get humanitarian aid in that area. And so the idea that any country would threaten that stability is very shameful and is of great concern to the United States.

Let me also just mention that Russia, in agreeing to this ceasefire zone, has agreed to help bolster it and protect it and all of that. So

that's something that we continue to remind the Russian Government of their responsibility as a unique guarantor of the ceasefire zone and having a very special relationship, indeed, with Government of Syria.

QUESTION: Thank you. And if I could ask you about Turkey.

MS NAUERT: Yeah.

QUESTION: Turkey and the U.S. –

QUESTION: Can I stay on Syria?

MS NAUERT: Hold on. I'll come back to you, Laurie. Go right ahead.

QUESTION: On Syria. I don't know if you are aware of some reports circulating that there is a Russian-Israeli deal whereby they will push the Iranians and Hizballah militia from the border of the Golan Heights about 25 kilometer. Is this something that's being discussed with the State Department, considering also there's some reports that an Israeli official's meeting with the National Security Advisor, Mr. Bolton, at the White House today.

MS NAUERT: Sorry. I'm sorry, I don't have anything for you on that. If I do, I'll let you know.

QUESTION: There is nothing at all in terms of –

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

QUESTION: Okay.

MS NAUERT: Laurie, go right ahead.

QUESTION: Yes. Turkey and the U.S. seem to have reached agreement on a roadmap for Manbij, but the Turkish account of that agreement goes further than the U.S. account. Turkish press has said the SDF will – the Syrian Democratic Forces will withdraw from Manbij, and Turkish and U.S. troops will provide security, but your account just says we've agreed on a roadmap. Is the Turkish account correct that there'll be no role for the Mabij military council?

MS NAUERT: Here's what I can tell you. We don't have any agreements yet with the Government of Turkey. We announced previously that the United States and the Turkish working group met in Syria – I'm sorry – the group on Syria met in Ankara on Friday of last week. We're continuing to have ongoing conversations regarding Syria and other issues of mutual concern.

The two sides then had outlined the contours of a roadmap for further cooperation, and that includes on Manbij. I know that the Secretary looks forward to hosting Foreign Minister Cavusoglu on June 4th here in Washington for those conversations to continue.

QUESTION: And final question. Turkey's interior minister today slammed the U.S. ambassador to Afghanistan, who before was in Turkey, saying he was responsible for the flow of drugs and refugees from Afghanistan. What's your response to that?

MS NAUERT: I think it's an absolutely ridiculous accusation.

QUESTION: Heather, Syria?

MS NAUERT: Okay. Hi, sir. Go right ahead.

QUESTION: Do you have anything –

MS NAUERT: I'm sorry. You are – what is your name?

QUESTION: My name is David. I'm from Georgian television, Washington bureau, Rustavi 2.

MS NAUERT: Hi, David. Welcome.

QUESTION: Do you have anything to – oh, thank you so – thank you very much. Do you have anything to say about the decision of the Assad regime to recognize Russian-occupied Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent states?

MS NAUERT: Yes, we certainly do. Bear with me one second while I just find my information in this big old book here. Thank you.

Yeah, I think in terms of the news why Syria has now recognized Abkhazia and South Ossetia, this isn't a complete surprise to us simply because Bashar al-Assad is propped up by the Russian regime. The Russian-occupied regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia are integral parts of Georgia. We continue to support Georgia's sovereignty, its independence, its territorial integrity, within its internationally recognized borders; and the Assad regime's – we'd call it an ill-advised decision, to say the least – has nothing to do to change the reality or our position on the matter.

Okay, thank you.

QUESTION: Heather.

MS NAUERT: Hi. Yeah, go ahead.

QUESTION: Thank you very much. Today was the report on International Religious Freedom. You can give us any idea regarding Cuba? And you also had mentioned that you would be checking with Western Hemisphere regarding the trips or the visas that will be extended to Cubans who travel to Guyana. Do you have any update on that, please?

MS NAUERT: Yes. So first, our International Religious Freedom Report is posted online, so you can take a look at the report and you can go country by country to see the information that our colleagues have

compiled over the past year. So I'd just refer you to that report on where things stand in the country of Cuba. With regard to your question about visas, I'll have to check back with my colleagues from Western Hemisphere to see if we have anything new on that. Okay?

Hi, Michel.

QUESTION: Thank you.

MS NAUERT: Way in the back here. Go ahead, Michel.

QUESTION: Yeah. On Libya, rival factions have agreed today in Paris to hold parliamentary and presidential elections on December 10th. Do you have any comment on that?

MS NAUERT: I'm afraid I don't have any updates for you, but I'll get back with you and let you know. Okay?

QUESTION: And another one on Syria: Russia called for a meeting with the U.S. and Jordan to discuss the future of the southern Syria. Are you willing to attend the meeting?

MS NAUERT: Is this the meeting that you're referring to in Sochi? Is that what you're –

QUESTION: No, in Jordan, maybe –

MS NAUERT: Oh, the – this is what you're referring to, the southwestern ceasefire –

QUESTION: Yes.

MS NAUERT: – that we just spoke about. Yeah, we just covered that. We continue to have conversations through that channel where we talk with the Jordanians and the Russians and remind everybody involved that they are responsible for upholding the ceasefire arrangement that's held since last summer.

QUESTION: Thank you.

MS NAUERT: Okay. And we're going to have to wrap it up pretty soon. Go ahead.

QUESTION: Thank you. Thank you so much. Jahanzaib Ali from ARY News TV, Pakistan. Just wanted to get some update on already tense relations with Pakistan, while secondly an American diplomat was involved in a traffic accident in Islamabad, Pakistan. One person was injured there; another was seriously injured. We know that he got the diplomatic immunity in Pakistan but he's now back in the town – Mr. Joseph, I think, the name of the American diplomat. So is there any kind of investigation at the department level on that?

MS NAUERT: I will have to look back into that for you and see what I can

get for you on that one, okay? I don't have any updates to provide beyond what we've provided already. Okay?

QUESTION: Thank you so much.

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

MS NAUERT: Yeah. Hi, sir. Sorry, the gentleman in the back. He's new here.

QUESTION: My name is Wajid. I'm with Geo TV Pakistan. While we are on Pakistan, the –

MS NAUERT: Welcome. This is your first time here, right?

QUESTION: Yes.

MS NAUERT: Okay.

QUESTION: The current government is completing its term in two days and the general elections have been announced for July. What are U.S. expectations and are you going to send any observers on the ground?

MS NAUERT: I'm not aware if we would send any observers on the ground. We tend to support international organizations that do participate as observers. The United States supports free, fair, and transparent, accountable elections in Pakistan as we do in other countries around the world. The United States along with other international partners has supported Pakistan's implementation of its historic 2017 electoral reforms law. My understanding is that this is the first time that that law will actually be put into effect for these elections. We hope that the new comprehensive and transparent legal framework facilitates the peaceful transfer of civilian power to a democratically elected government. I'll let you know if we have anything on monitors for you.

Okay, hi, sir. Go right ahead.

QUESTION: Thank you. Claudio Salvalaggio, Italian news agency ANSA. One question about the situation in my country: Do you have any fears about the political and economic crisis in Italy, about the trouble to form a new government in Italy after almost three months since the last general election? Are you monitoring the situation because –

MS NAUERT: We always monitor those – those issues. I'll check with our Italian desk officer to see if we have anything new for you on that. Okay?

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

QUESTION: Do you have any fear about the –

MS NAUERT: Pardon me?

QUESTION: Do you have any fear about a potential populist government?

MS NAUERT: Sir, I'm not going to get into it right now. I'll check with our officers to see if we have anything new on that.

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

MS NAUERT: We always monitor those situations. Thank you, everybody. We have to leave it there.

(The briefing was concluded at 3:43 p.m.)

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[Press Releases: Commemoration of International Day of UN Peacekeepers](#)

Press Statement
Mike Pompeo

Secretary of State

Washington, DC
May 29, 2018

Today, on the annual International Day of United Nations Peacekeepers, we mark 70 years of UN peacekeeping, and the service and sacrifice of thousands of uniformed and civilian personnel. UN peacekeepers serve under dangerous and uncertain circumstances, and too often pay the ultimate sacrifice. We honor in particular today the more than 3,700 peacekeepers who have lost their lives in the service of peace over the past seven decades.

As we mark the past and present of UN peacekeeping, the United States is

committed to a future with better, smarter peacekeeping operations that more effectively and efficiently address conflicts, support political solutions, and meet the needs of people on the ground. That commitment includes remaining the world's top financial contributor to UN peacekeeping, as well as the leading provider of training and equipment to troop- and police-contributing countries.

Today we recognize the powerful role peacekeeping missions have played in supporting sustainable transitions to peace in countries from Sierra Leone to Cambodia, Timor-Leste to Namibia, Liberia to Cote d'Ivoire. As President Trump affirmed during remarks at last year's UN General Assembly, "I am confident that if we work together and champion truly bold reforms, the United Nations will emerge as a stronger, more effective, more just, and greater force for peace and harmony in the world."

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[Press Releases: Release of the 2017 Annual Report on International Religious Freedom](#)

Remarks

Mike Pompeo

Secretary of State

Press Briefing Room

Washington, DC

May 29, 2018

MS NAUERT: Good morning, everyone, and welcome to the State Department. Thank you for coming in so early this morning for the unveiling of the [International Religious Freedom Report](#). I'd like to first introduce Secretary Pompeo, who will give some brief remarks and an announcement. And then Ambassador Sam Brownback, who is our global ambassador for religious freedom, will then unveil the report and take some of your questions. And I'll moderate, since we all know one another, so I'll call on you. And then we'll have to wrap it up.

Thank you so much. Secretary Pompeo, go right ahead, sir.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Thank you. Thanks, Heather.

Good morning, everyone. It is my great privilege to join you this morning and to release the [2017 International Religious Freedom Report](#). This report is a testament to the United States' historic role in preserving and advocating for religious freedom around the world.

Religious freedom is in the American bloodstream. It's what brought the pilgrims here from England. Our founders understood it as our first freedom. That is why they articulated it so clearly in the First Amendment. As James Madison wrote years before he was president or secretary of state, quote, "conscience is the most sacred of all property," end of quote.

Religious freedom was vital to America's beginning. Defending it is critical to our future.

Religious freedom is not only ours. It is a right belonging to every individual on the globe. President Trump stands with those who yearn for religious liberty. Our Vice President stands with them, and so do I.

Advancing liberty and religious freedom advances America's interests. Where

fundamental freedoms of religion, expression, press, and peaceful assembly are under attack, we find conflict, instability, and terrorism. On the other hand, governments and societies that champion these freedoms are more secure, stable, and peaceful.

So for all of these reasons, protecting and promoting global respect for religious freedom is a priority of the Trump administration. As our National Security Strategy so clearly states: "Our Founders understood religious freedom not as the state's creation, but as the gift of God to every person and a fundamental right for a flourishing society." We're committed to promoting religious freedom around the world, both now and in the future.

And Ambassador Brownback and I will talk about that today. We have underscored that commitment with his appointment. It's great to have a friend and a fellow Kansan up here with me today. International religious freedom deserves to be a front-burner issue, and Ambassador Brownback and I, with him leading the way, will ensure that it continues to be so.

The ambassador and our team in our Office of International Religious Freedom have been working tirelessly throughout the federal government and with our colleagues here at the department and in embassies overseas with NGOs, foreign partners to defend religious freedom in the farthest corners of the globe.

This report demonstrates the hard work of American diplomats to protect American and universal values. I'm proud of my team in completing this report. The release of the 2017 International Religious Freedom Report is critical to our mission to defend religious liberty. It brings to light the state of religious freedom all over the world. It documents, across 200 countries and territories, reports of violations and abuses committed by governments, terrorist groups, and individuals so that we may work together to solve them.

I have a number of examples here. For the sake of time, I'm going to pass through them. But know that we are working in countries around the world to ensure that religious freedom remains the case, and where it is not, that it becomes so.

Governor – or excuse me, Ambassador Brownback will provide to you more details. But we are very ignited^[1] to announce that later this year we will celebrate the 20th anniversary of the International Religious Freedom Act, a law that reinforces America's commitment to religious freedom and to helping the persecuted. It is also the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the UN, which proclaimed the importance of human rights, including the right for religious freedom.

The world has made important strides, but we still have a lot of work to do. In that regard, I am pleased to announce that the United States will host the first ever Ministerial to Advance Religious Freedom at the Department of State on July 25th and 26th of this year.

I look forward to hosting my counterparts from likeminded governments, as

well as representatives of international organizations, religious communities, and civil society to reaffirm our commitment to religious freedom as a universal human right. This ministerial, we expect, will break new ground. It will not just be a discussion group. It will be about action. We look forward to identifying concrete ways to push back against persecution and ensure greater respect for religious freedom for all.

The ministerial will also be my first to host as a Secretary of State, and that's very intentional. Religious freedom is indeed a universal human right that I will fight for, one that our team at the department will continue to fight for, and one that I know President Trump will continue to fight for. The United States will not stand by as spectators. We will get in the ring and stand in solidarity with every individual who seeks to enjoy their most fundamental of human rights.

Thank you all for your time. Ambassador Brownback, thank you for this putting this together. I look forward to working with you on it.

QUESTION: Sir, what about the religious prisoners in North Korea? Are you going to discuss that? Are you going to meet in New York?

QUESTION: Sir, do you plan to meet with Kim Yong-chol?

[\[1\]](#) excited

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