

# Press Releases: Suzanne Lawrence, Special Advisor for Children's Issues On the Release of the Fiscal Year 2017 Annual Report on Intercountry Adoption

Special Briefing

Suzanne Lawrence, Special Advisor for Children's Issues

Via Teleconference

March 23, 2018

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**MR GREENAN:** Thank you. Thank you, everyone, for joining us this morning for this on-the-record conference call with Suzanne Lawrence, who's the Special Advisor for Children's Issues here at the Department of State. And she'll be talking this morning about the release of the Fiscal Year 2017 Annual Report on Intercountry Adoption. Suzanne will make some opening remarks and then take your questions. Both the report and the call are embargoed until the conclusion of the call.

So thank you again for joining us, and I'm happy to turn it over now to Suzanne Lawrence.

**MS LAWRENCE:** Thank you, Robert. And good morning, everyone. Thank you for joining us for this call. It's a real pleasure to be with you this morning so that I can present the Fiscal Year 2017 Annual Report on Intercountry Adoption. The report will actually also be publicly available on our website later this afternoon; I'm sure a number of you are familiar with [travel.state.gov](http://travel.state.gov).

You may be wondering a little bit about the report and the history of the report. It's a report that we do submit annually, as required by the Congress, through the Intercountry Adoption Act of 2000. And what we do in the report is we outline our continued efforts to establish or maintain intercountry adoption as a viable option for children who are in need all over the world.

I know Robert gave you my name and my title, but I thought it would be helpful to know a little bit more about me. I've worked for the Department of State for 28 years as a Foreign Service officer and came into this role as the Special Advisor for Children's Issues for the Department of State in September of 2017. I work in the Bureau of Consular Affairs, and again, many of you are probably familiar with the bureau and its work. Maybe you don't know that one of its most important roles is its responsibility for

intercountry adoptions.

As a special advisor, I spend a lot of time on the road, and I'm traveling constantly. And as part of that travel, I am meeting with and working with foreign governments directly on this issue. We share best practices, we talk about how we can work better together as partner countries, and I listen to their concerns, bring them back to the Bureau of Consular Affairs, and hopefully we are able then to respond to their concerns.

In addition to the Intercountry Adoption Act of 2000, the United States became a party to the Hague Convention on Intercountry Adoption in 2008. And those are two pieces of legislation that guide us each and every day – that, and the really important goal of ensuring that every child deserves the security and love of a permanent family. It's – that in itself is inspiring, but we are also inspired by the adoptions that we help complete every day. And that inspiration further fuels our dedication as we work with the foreign countries, with the adoption service providers, with families, and with the broader adoption community.

We know that we owe it to all of those people, to – especially to the adoptive families and to the children who are being adopted, as well as the birth parents – that intercountry adoptions are ethical and transparent. And what that means, really, in a practical sense, is that we're out there each and every day, here in Washington and around the world through our embassies and consulates, advocating for children and putting in place safeguards so that we can protect against any abuses of the intercountry adoption system.

I know you've received a copy of the report, and maybe you've had some time to look at it. I thought it would be helpful to provide a little bit of context and also to focus on three areas that I thought would be of most interest.

So let's start with the numbers. You've seen that the report has a lot of numbers in it. The overall number of adoptions to the United States in Fiscal Year 2017 was 4,714. And that does represent a decline of 658 from the previous year. And again, to provide some context for this year's numbers, I think the most important thing to note is that this is a decrease in intercountry adoptions, which is a global trend over the last decade. Other receiving countries report similar reductions in the number of children adopted internationally.

I think another thing that is hopeful – or helpful in looking at the numbers is that even with those lower overall numbers due to the global decline, U.S. families consistently provide homes to 50 percent of the adopted children who are placed internationally. I think that speaks a lot to Americans and the families that are continuing to open their hearts and their homes to children in special situations. The United States actually receives the most special needs children, the most sibling groups, and the most children over age nine, and that's worldwide.

The other thing I would say about the numbers is that when you look at that decline in 2017, it was primarily driven by internal changes in just two

countries. The first is China, and the reason for that is something that I'm sure many of you are aware of, that there has been a growing, a rising middle class in China. And so we've seen an increase in domestic adoptions, and so that would explain China's role in that decline. And the other country that represents the primary drive behind the reduction in last year's report is that – that in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and that's really an internal decision that was made there where the country actually no longer issues exit permits to adopted Congolese children who are seeking to depart the country with their adoptive parents. So I hope that's been helpful in understanding all those numbers and drawing out what we think are some of the more significant facts.

The other thing that I would point out are the barriers. What are the barriers to intercountry adoption? And when we look at what those barriers are, we find the most common one is that, unfortunately, we do continue to hear from families who are harmed by illicit and illegal practices in intercountry adoption. Sadly, even one case of corruption or fraud reduces confidence in the system. And you know these are families that just want to give a child a loving home, but unfortunately, they would lose that chance because of corrupt or unethical practices.

We work together with these families to identify and address the vulnerabilities, and then in the work that we carry out every day, we look to provide appropriate monitoring and oversight of adoption service providers, and that's really to protect these families' children, both birth and adoptive, and again, to preserve the future of intercountry adoption.

The last thing that I wanted to draw out from the report is really what can we do? What does the Department do? What is our response to these barriers? Because I think this is an area where the Department of State can and does make a difference. We take very seriously our legal mandate to ensure appropriate monitoring and oversight of these adoption agencies and service providers so that we can preserve the future of intercountry adoption. And we work very closely with Congress to ensure that we fulfill our obligations under the law.

We work – as I said, I travel all over, but we have many people in the Bureau of Consular Affairs who travel regularly. We have our ambassadors and our missions overseas, and we work through diplomatic engagement to advocate for intercountry adoption. We also collaborate with the adoption community and we are all looking for ways that we can serve the best interests of children as we work to overcome these concerns that are raised by the sending countries so that we can ultimately improve confidence in the U.S. accreditation system.

So before we move to questions – and I'm hoping that you'll have some good questions that will allow us to talk a little bit more about this topic – again, I just wanted to emphasize that this is one of the most important roles in the Bureau of Consular Affairs, and we really are guided by the thought that every child does deserve the security and love of a permanent home.

I hope in the explanation of the numbers that you can see that even in the face of a global decline in intercountry adoptions, U.S. families consistently provide homes to 50 percent of the children who are adopted internationally, and that harm to even one adopted child is unacceptable and it does undermine confidence in the U.S. system.

So with that, I would be happy to take your questions.

**MR GREENAN:** All right. Thank you very much, Suzanne. We'll now go to our first question.

**OPERATOR:** Thank you. Ladies and gentlemen, once again, if you'd like to ask a question on the phone lines, you may press \* then 1 on your touchtone phone.

For our first question we'll go to the line of Rich Edson with Fox News. Please, go ahead.

**QUESTION:** Hey, good morning, Suzanne and Robert. Just a question on the global trend that you'd mentioned and the fact that there was a reduction in U.S. adoptions this year. Would you say that the trend is largely credited to demand? Are there – I know you talked about some other factors that are country-specific, but the overall trend, would you say it's mostly credited to demand? And on top of that, would you say that the administration has – with the incoming Trump – or now incoming and serving for the past year Trump administration – how has that administration changed policy towards adoption in the U.S.?

**MS LAWRENCE:** Thanks for your question. There are many, many people who write on intercountry adoption and there are many views on really what is, I would say, the changing landscape of intercountry adoption. I think it reflects a lot of trends that have been discussed in previous annual reports, and some of the things that we've written in this year's report. I think what we see is that there have been many positive changes for children as some countries really begin to reduce some of the stigma associated with unwed mothers or they promote domestic adoption, or they themselves strengthen measures to prevent illicit practices.

As I discussed with China, you have a number of countries that have a growing middle class and there's a demand within those countries who were traditionally sending countries; there's a domestic demand in those countries for adopted – for adopting children. So I think that that is the changing landscape. And there's also a changing demographic of children that are eligible for intercountry adoption, and I touched a little bit on that when I talked about the special needs, the sibling groups, the older children. I think that what we see is something that mirrors what's happening here in the United States in foster care, that most children are older or they are part of a sibling group, and the vast majority of them may have some kind of special need.

All that being said, again, our focus really is on maintaining and preserving intercountry adoptions because even though the demographics are changing, even though the landscape is changing, we know that there are a lot of

children who live without family care, and ultimately, they would benefit from placement and permanency, we hope, with a loving U.S. family, but ultimately with a family. So that's why I spoke about our efforts to focus on maintaining and strengthening the capacity and policy framework in the countries of origin so that we can include intercountry adoption as a viable option when there are children in need.

And I think if you look back, just in response to sort of policy, again, those seminal sort of documents are that the U.S. Government is a party to the Hague Convention, which is an international convention, and many, many countries have seen that as the most reliable tool for the kind of ethical and transparent adoption that we all want, and that's since 2008 that we actually acceded to the convention or became party to the convention, and then, as I say, the congressional act was from 2000. There's also another piece of legislation that regards the accrediting of adoption service providers and that's from, I think, 2012.

So these things are really all from previous years and are mostly in response to being part of an international community that's looking really to safeguard intercountry adoption for all the parties that are involved.

**MR GREENAN:** Okay. Thank you very much. We'll move on to the next question.

**OPERATOR:** Thank you, and once again, if you would like to ask a question, please press \* then 1 at this time. Our next question will come from the line of Kylie Sertic with Kyodo News. Please, go ahead.

**QUESTION:** Hello, can you hear me?

**MR GREENAN:** Yes, we can hear you.

**QUESTION:** All right, great. So my question is: Do you at all monitor numbers of outgoing U.S. children who are adopted abroad? There's been trends in past years of, like, black children especially being adopted out of the U.S. internationally.

And then second question: Do you have any sort of outreach with adopted children, especially as they grow into adulthood and, like, do you take their concerns or commentary into account as you monitor these programs?

**MS LAWRENCE:** Thank you, Kylie. The report does give some information about children who are adopted from the United States, so you may have seen that statistic in Fiscal Year 2017. It's a small number, 83 children, that were adopted from the United States and they went to seven different countries – the vast majority to Canada, the next group to the Netherlands, and then the third ranking there would be Ireland.

Again, I would go back to those – that changing landscape that we talked about in the previous question. There has been a huge push in the United States to increase foster care, and we know that in many instances, foster care does lead to adoption. And I don't have the statistics and the State Department is not the responsible party for domestic adoptions, but there has been an increase in domestic adoption here in the United States. So I think

that really is what we know about the number of children that are adopted from the United States to countries overseas, and again, we don't handle domestic adoption, but it has increased as far as I am aware.

In terms of taking into account the concerns of adult adoptees, we do some stakeholder calls, and we do those on a regular basis. In fact, we just did one – I feel like it was this month – but I've been on the road a lot so I'm losing track of time. We had over 300 people call in to our stakeholder call and we cover a full range of topics. And I've been involved with two of the stakeholder calls since I assumed this role, and in both calls, there have been a number of people who represent adult adoptee groups, or just individually, they call in to raise their cases. When we do the stakeholder calls, we include USCIS, Citizenship and Immigration Services, because of course, many of the adult adoptees raise concerns that are related to their citizenship status, and that is the responsibility of USCIS.

So we are aware that there are a number of concerns. Indeed, I've actually met with some of these groups when I was in Korea at the end of 2017. And so yes, we are familiar with a lot of the issues that they like to bring to our attention and share their concerns with us. Thank you.

**MR GREENAN:** All right, thank you very much. We'll go on to the next question now.

**OPERATOR:** Thank you. Next question will come from the line of David Crary with the Associated Press. Please, go ahead.

**QUESTION:** Thanks, Suzanne, for taking this call. I – if I can sneak in two questions here, that would be grateful. With China, you correctly mentioned the increase in domestic adoptions as a major factor in the dropping numbers of intercountry adoptions. But in the written report, it has some more technical reason to do with nongovernmental organizations and new regulations in China. I guess my question is if you look at the overall drop from China, I mean, which is the bigger factor? Is it the domestic adoptions or this technical change or a mix?

And then my other questions is: You know a lot of U.S. adoption agencies are upset by the recent change in the accrediting agencies – the end of the relationship with COA and the formation of this new organization. Without delving into all the details, do you folks at State Department feel that this – concerns and frustration are well founded or are they perhaps based on misunderstanding and exaggerated? I'd just like to get your sense of what you folks at DOS make of the unhappiness in the adoption community.

**MS LAWRENCE:** Thank you, David. I'll go to the China question first, and then we can move over to the accrediting entities and some of the concerns in the adoption community. So as I've said, the changes in the middle class and the ability to have increases in domestic adoptions is something that I think has been happening over time. So I wouldn't be able to really say whether or not that had more to do with the decline as opposed to the domestic laws that were related to the governance of nongovernmental organizations, which I think is what you were referring to in the report, which is actually

something that happened in the last year.

And just to explain a little bit more – maybe you know already, but for those who might – that the laws themselves, which were, again, related to NGOs in China, were not targeted specifically at adoption, but they have indeed had a detrimental impact on the partnerships that have existed for a long time between U.S. adoption service providers and specific provinces that were designed to improve opportunities for children with special needs. So I think that – and in fact, 98 percent of the intercountry adoptions from China involved children with special needs. So we've met with Chinese counterparts.

We – I think they were here in January, so we had a day-long or two days of meetings with them. Again, our embassy in Beijing, our consulate in Guangzhou, many of our colleagues are constantly meeting with and sharing information with the Chinese counterparts who work on intercountry adoption. And we will continue to explain how this law has affected adoption service providers, but again, the law itself was not targeted specifically at intercountry adoption. And so that's that piece.

And I know you mentioned the accrediting entity, so what I would say is that what we do, as I mentioned in my opening statement, is we want to ensure that the practice of intercountry adoption is ethical and sustainable. And so these are really the cornerstones of what we're working towards. So our efforts – because legally we have the obligation to provide oversight for the accrediting entity that works with adoption service providers to monitor their activities. All of that is part of a long-term plan to ensure the viability of intercountry adoptions, again by ensuring the system is ethical and transparent. That benefits adoption service providers, it benefits the adoption community, it benefits children and families here in the United States and internationally.

As I mentioned earlier, the ability to work with foreign governments who are sending countries is determined by their confidence in what we do. And that's why we need to build that confidence through our monitoring and oversight. If we don't do that, they can consider suspending placement of children with U.S. families or even closing intercountry adoptions altogether. Because there was a number – there were concerns about the move to a new accrediting entity, we have had numerous calls with stakeholders, with adoption service providers, with adoption advocacy groups, with members of Congress, with their staffers. So we have done a lot of information. They have had the opportunity to talk to the leadership of the new accrediting entity. And you might be interested in a message from our assistant secretary that went onto our website where he actually goes into some great detail about the designation of the accrediting entity and what they do, which is supervision of the adoption service providers. But there is a fairly lengthy letter there from him that I think would go to some of the concerns that you have pointed out.

And again, I think overseeing intercountry adoptions is one of our most important roles. We must get that right. Every child deserves the security and love of a permanent home, and we have to accept that harm to even one adopted child is simply unacceptable and it will undermine confidence in the

U.S. system.

**MR GREENAN:** Thank you very much. We'll go on to the next question.

**OPERATOR:** Once again, if you'd like to ask a question, you may press \* then 1 at this time. Our next question will come from the line of Lesley Wroughton with Reuters. Please, go ahead.

**QUESTION:** Yeah. Good morning. Sorry, I missed the top, so if you've already addressed this, my apologies. Can you just explain – seen the first intercountry adoptions in a year or more from nine countries, including Yemen, Zimbabwe, and Laos. Is that because of the conflict in Yemen?

**MS LAWRENCE:** I really couldn't say if that was due to the conflict in Yemen.

**MR GREENAN:** Thank you. Go on to the next question, please.

**OPERATOR:** Thank you. Our next question will come from the line of Dmitry Kirsanov with TASS. Please, go ahead.

**QUESTION:** Good morning and thank you for doing the call. I'm looking at previous overall numbers of adoptions in the United States, and it looks like this new number in a new report is a record low. Please correct me if I'm wrong. For instance, I'm looking at the financial year 2015, and it was 5,648, and it was the lowest since 1981, I think. Can you give us a broader picture?

**MS LAWRENCE:** Thank you, Dmitry. I think, again, as I described, this is part of a worldwide trend, and we've seen this trend over the last 10, 12, 13, 14 years. So what I tried to emphasize is that the percentage of the children who are adopted internationally, even in the face of what is a global decline – and you can see there are many different sources that show graphs where there was a peak period globally for intercountry adoption – but the fluctuations other than that peak period have been really very minimal. And so, again, I think this is part of a global trend, but the percentage of children that are placed in homes in the United States continues to be about 50 percent, and that's even in the low years as well as in the peak years. That percentage has really not changed.

**QUESTION:** But is my understanding correct that this is a new record low, or I'm wrong in that regard?

**MS LAWRENCE:** We would have to look at many, many years of statistics, so I don't have an easy answer for you on that.

**QUESTION:** Okay. Thank you.

**MR GREENAN:** Thank you, everyone. With that, we'll conclude our call this morning. Thank you for joining us, and we now lift the embargo on the call and the report. Have a good day. Thank you.



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## **Press Releases: On the Occasion of Greek National Day**

Press Statement  
John J. Sullivan

Deputy Secretary of State

Washington, DC  
March 23, 2018

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On behalf of the Government of the United States of America, I congratulate the people of Greece on the 197th anniversary of your independence.

The United States and Greece share a commitment to freedom and liberty rooted in democratic values. We work together to promote regional stability and security, trade and investment, and the diversification of energy resources.

Our two nations maintain strong cultural and economic ties: Over the course of 2018, we will celebrate the strength of our bilateral relationship as the United States will be the Honored Country at the Thessaloniki International Fair, showcasing American technology, enterprise, and innovation. This year also marks the 70th Anniversary of the Fulbright Program in Greece, which, as the U.S. government's flagship educational exchange program, has facilitated academic and cultural linkages between our two countries for over 5,500 participants.

I wish all Greeks a joyous Independence Day celebration and look forward to the continuing expansion of the U.S.-Greece friendship.

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## **Press Releases: Under Secretary for Political Affairs Thomas Shannon Travels to Tashkent, Uzbekistan**

Media Note  
Office of the Spokesperson

Washington, DC  
March 22, 2018

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Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Thomas Shannon will travel to Tashkent, Uzbekistan, on March 25-27, 2018. He will meet with Uzbekistan President Shavkat Mirziyoyev and Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdulaziz Kamilov to review progress made under President Mirziyoyev's reform agenda, reaffirm support for Uzbekistan's initiative and valuable contributions to leadership in the region, and underscore the United States' commitment to stability in Uzbekistan and throughout the region.

Under Secretary Shannon will then lead the U.S. delegation to the Tashkent Conference on Afghanistan, hosted by the Government of Uzbekistan. The 21 delegations at the Conference will build on progress made at the February 28 Kabul Process Conference in a continued demonstration of international support for a peaceful political settlement in Afghanistan.

For further information, please follow @State\_SCA or contact [SCA-Press@state.gov](mailto:SCA-Press@state.gov).

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# Press Releases: Department Press Briefing – March 22, 2018

Heather Nauert  
Spokesperson

Department Press Briefing  
Washington, DC  
March 22, 2018

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TRANSCRIPT:

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2:57 p.m. EDT

**MS NAUERT:** Hi, everybody. How are you today? Good to see you. Okay, a couple announcements I'd like to start out with this afternoon. Where's your colleague, Matt Lee? Where'd he go off? Well, we can't start without you. (Laughter.)

**QUESTION:** I'm sorry.

**MS NAUERT:** Okay.

**QUESTION:** Get my glasses.

**MS NAUERT:** I hear ya. The other day I actually walked down here with mismatched shoes.

**QUESTION:** Really?

**MS NAUERT:** Yeah. One shoe was leopard and the other shoe was gold. And I've just misplaced my toppers. I'm so sorry. So could you bear with us for one second? My apologies.

How's everybody?

**QUESTION:** Good.

**QUESTION:** Pretty good.

**MS NAUERT:** Okay. Pretty good.

**QUESTION:** Isn't wearing mismatched shoes a fireable offense in your former profession?

**MS NAUERT:** It probably would be, yeah. (Laughter.) I thought about

getting away with it. I said, "Nobody's going to care here." But my male colleagues convinced me otherwise.

**QUESTION:** You could've started a new trend.

**MS NAUERT:** Gold and leopard, I don't know.

**QUESTION:** The State Department's happening.

**MS NAUERT:** Thank you so much. Sorry about that.

Okay. A couple things going on today. First, I'd like to announce a project that we're pretty excited about, and this is in – over in Jordan. We're pleased to announce today that the Department of State and the Government of Jordan have inaugurated a new regional counterterrorism academy in Jordan. The department was represented for the opening by the Assistant Secretary for Diplomatic Security Michael Evanoff and the U.S. Embassy in Amman's Charge Henry Wooster. The academy was funded, constructed, and equipped through the department's Antiterrorism Assistance Program. Once it's fully operational, the new training center will double ATA's regional counterterrorism training capacity in the country of Jordan.

Through the ATA program, Jordan has become a regional training hub for Jordanian police and police from at least 21 other nations. The department's ATA program receives funding and policy guidance from the Bureau of Counterterrorism and is ministered by the Bureau of Diplomatic Security and its Diplomatic Security Service. So we're pleased to announce the opening of that.

Secondly, it had to be moved from yesterday because of the weather, it will now be held tomorrow, and that is the International Women of Courage Awards here at the State Department. Tomorrow our Deputy Secretary of State John Sullivan will present the 2018 Secretary of State's International Women of Courage Award, with remarks from First Lady Melania Trump, to honor 10 extraordinary women from around the world. It's now in its 12th year. The Secretary of State's IWOC Awards recognizes women around the globe who have demonstrated exceptional courage and leadership in advocating for peace, justice, human rights, gender equality, and women's empowerment, often at great personal risk and sacrifice. Since the inception of this award in 2007, the State Department has recognized more than 120 women from 65 countries.

Following the award ceremony in Washington, the honorees will travel individually to Austin, Texas; Cleveland, Dallas, Pensacola, Phoenix, Raleigh, Salt Lake City, San Antonio on the International Visitor Leadership Program. American organizations and businesses will host the awardees and collaborate with them on strategies and ideas to empower women in both the United States and abroad. The awardees will reconvene in Los Angeles for a closing ceremony before returning home to their home countries. We congratulate these 10 extraordinary women, and we look forward to honoring them here tomorrow. That event is open press,

so we hope to see you there.

And then lastly, a short while ago, you probably saw and heard Secretary Tillerson speaking to our State Department colleagues, thanking our colleagues and their family members for their service. He reminded us that people make the difference here at the State Department in the work that we do each and every day. So on behalf of the building, I'd like to thank Secretary Tillerson for his service and sacrifice that he has made for the country. It's a lot to leave family, to leave a good job, to leave grandkids and a beautiful ranch. So that is a reminder of the sacrifice that he made.

The other day, in a brief reception with some staff, he mentioned that becoming secretary of state helped him fill a hole, and by that he meant sacrificing to serve his country. It was a way that he did that, and that has now been satisfied. So, sir, I would just like to say that we would wish you all the happiness, success, joy in your new life, and thank you for your service as you now return to normal life.

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

**QUESTION:** Thanks. Just on that really briefly, you – did you speak with him today? I mean, does he still feel that that – given the manner of his dismissal and the fact that he was the subject of so much rumor, speculation, a lot of it what he called or alluded to as “mean-spirited” in his remarks, does he still feel like the sacrifice that he made was – filled the hole that –

**MS NAUERT:** I only said a quick word to him today at the reception, or at the – before he left the building. But the other day he was talking about that. That was just two days ago that he said that it – how much it meant to him.

**QUESTION:** Can I ask you – this is a bit unusual – this report about the charges being dropped against President Erdogan's bodyguards. Was the State Department involved or did the State Department seek for these charges to be dropped on Valentine's Day, the day before Secretary Tillerson met with President Erdogan?

**MS NAUERT:** I can tell you that the department had no role in the decision to drop those charges. That was entirely coming out of the Department of Justice.

**QUESTION:** Okay. Did you have any – you said you don't have – didn't have any role. Was there any contact, any cooperation, any coordination with them?

**MS NAUERT:** Not that I'm aware of. This is completely a Department of Justice decision.

**QUESTION:** And was the Secretary or were members of his team aware that this had happened?

**MS NAUERT:** I am told that the Secretary was aware of the decision before he met with President Erdogan in Turkey. He noted that the timing was coincidental, but he also noted it was a good example of how we have an independent judiciary in our country and that the Department of Justice made those decisions and took it from there.

**QUESTION:** So he did raise it in his meeting with President Erdogan?

**MS NAUERT:** I am told that the Secretary did not discuss this issue with President Erdogan in any type of a quid pro quo, that the Secretary was certainly aware of it and believed it was a – noted that it was just an example of how our judicial system works here and that it was a coincidence in timing. He went on to talk about – apparently, I'm told – that courts operate free of political influence.

**QUESTION:** Okay. So, but he didn't talk about it in terms of how this is a way that the U.S. can show that it's willing to improve relations with –

**MS NAUERT:** I am told the answer to that is unequivocally no.

**QUESTION:** Okay. So you are – you keep prefacing this with "I am told, I am told," which is fair enough –

**MS NAUERT:** Well, I didn't ask this question. The story just came out this morning. I've not spoken to him today.

**QUESTION:** No, no, I guess –

**MS NAUERT:** And I was not there.

**QUESTION:** Right. Well, no – this is the – this is one of the problems. No one else was there except for the foreign minister.

**MS NAUERT:** I understand.

**QUESTION:** Which was noted as unusual, as being unusual, at the time. And I would just wonder that wouldn't it have helped to have at least one other U.S. Government official in the room when this meeting was going on so that there could be – this kind of thing wouldn't – you wouldn't have to say, "I am told." It would be coming straight from –

**MS NAUERT:** Matt?

**QUESTION:** Yeah.

**MS NAUERT:** I understand.

**QUESTION:** All right.

**MS NAUERT:** I completely understand.

**QUESTION:** Heather, can I have –

**MS NAUERT:** Yeah.

**QUESTION:** I think I've just one bit on Tillerson. He's meant to – is he still officially leaving or leaves this – the position on March the 30th?

**MS NAUERT:** March 31st will be his last day as Secretary of State, so he still retains that title, that commission. The deputy secretary is handling everything else day-to-day.

**QUESTION:** And was it always a plan for him to leave this early? I mean actually leave the building.

**MS NAUERT:** This was something that was under consideration. At what point this decision was made, I don't know.

**QUESTION:** Oh, so it wasn't a surprise, like as in the last few hours that he would then leave or –

**MS NAUERT:** Well, this wasn't a sudden thing that all of the sudden he decided –

**QUESTION:** Oh, okay.

**MS NAUERT:** – to pack a backpack and head on home. This was something that he was considering for some time.

**QUESTION:** And then on another issue, on China. As you saw the President today launched – signed a presidential memorandum on kickstarting a process that could – could see up to about \$50 or \$60 billion in tariffs in – on Chinese goods. What was the U.S. role in – the U.S. State Department's role in this decision? And do you believe that this could – in fact, a lot of people think, believe, that this could begin some kind of trade war. Do you believe that this could in any way affect your relationship with China as you're trying to tackle regional issues such as North Korea?

**MS NAUERT:** Well, let me take the last part of your question first. We have a longstanding relationship with China. There's a lot of work that is left to be done with two massive, massive countries. One of the key things that we will be dealing with with regard to China is the DPRK, and let me remind you that they voted in support of UN Security Council resolutions on sanctions for North Korea. So we don't believe that that has changed, that we ask them to continue to adhere to those resolutions.

And so we have a complex relationship certainly with China, but we have a lot of areas where we have to work together with them. And they recognize that it's not just in the United States' best interest, but it's in China's best interest. And I think the President overall has been very clear from the first day on the campaign trail, longstanding concerns that he has and administration-wide people have, with China's unfair trade practices. Two large economies – it's natural for us to



have to address things that we don't agree on. One of them is certainly trade. The President has fought very hard for advancing opportunities, economic opportunities for American businesses, but also the American – also the American people.

**QUESTION:** Do you believe that the President –

**QUESTION:** (Off-mike.)

**MS NAUERT:** Okay.

**QUESTION:** The President didn't actually impose those restrictions today, as many had said or reported before. Do you believe that this could be leaving some kind of door open to the Chinese to negotiate some kind of –

**MS NAUERT:** I'm not going to speculate on that. The U.S. Trade Representative issued a pretty thorough report about their concerns with China's unfair trade practices. I can give you a copy of that if you like. And so they are handling much of this.

**QUESTION:** I'm just trying to get to the relationship, which is a foreign policy in a diplomatic relationship –

**MS NAUERT:** Sure.

**QUESTION:** – which also affects – those moves also affect this building. So do you see any kind of impact on your – on the relationship between this department and China?

**MS NAUERT:** Well, as I said, I think China recognizes and we recognize that we have to work together on a lot of areas of mutual interest. But the President has made very clear from the beginning – remember it was a year ago – I think it was a year go this time that he sat down with President Xi when – at Mar-a-Lago. And one of the issues that was brought up, that the President brought up with President Xi, was China's unfair trade practices. We had our four strategic dialogues last year, all of them completed. One of them specifically was on China's unfair trade practices. So this would – announcement would come as no surprise to the Chinese. The President is looking out for the best interests of the American public and American companies, and this is one step that the administration has decided to make.

**QUESTION:** May – well, can I just follow up quickly?

**MS NAUERT:** Yeah. Hi, Elise. Sure.

**QUESTION:** Thank you. He also has been saying all along that he was holding off on doing – the President – holding off on such measures because he was seeking North Korea – Chinese cooperation on the North Korea issue. And then you just kind of noted that China has signed on to several resolutions working with the United States on these type of sanctions. So isn't that a little bit of an inconsistent message? He got

the cooperation and then imposed the tariffs anyway.

**MS NAUERT:** No, I – look, China has engaged in unfair trade practices for years and years, and this President has decided to call them out on it and to hold them to account.

**QUESTION:** But don't you think – that's a fair point, but at the same time, do you think it was wise to kind of tie the imposition of these type of tariffs to Chinese cooperation on other national security issues, which you are getting?

**MS NAUERT:** Look, China has been cooperating with us for the most part – we always say that they can do more – on the issue of North Korea and denuclearization. This is not just something that the United States is asking for, cooperation on denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. Many countries are, including China. So it's not just in our interest to get Kim Jong-un to give up his weapons programs. It is in the interest of China as well, and we think that China recognizes that.

**QUESTION:** No, I totally see your point. But now that the President has been making Chinese cooperation on North Korea such a big issue and he's imposed the tariffs anyway, aren't you concerned that perhaps that cooperation will wane?

**MS NAUERT:** Look, China recognize it – that it is also in their best interest to push for denuclearization on the Korean Peninsula, and I don't think that they're going to back away from that because we impose tariffs – rightfully so – to benefit and to help out American workers and American companies. This is no surprise. We should not act as though this is any surprise.

**QUESTION:** Has the State Department heard from the Chinese today?

**MS NAUERT:** Not to my awareness.

Okay. All right.

**QUESTION:** (Off-mike.)

**MS NAUERT:** Hey, Nick.

**QUESTION:** Just on Tillerson.

**MS NAUERT:** Yeah.

**QUESTION:** Can you just explain what he's doing until the 31st-ish, since he still has the title of Secretary of State?

**MS NAUERT:** My understanding is that he's headed back home, and beyond that, I'm unaware, but he – when he met with Director Pompeo the other day, he offered to stay in touch and provide assistance if Director Pompeo should need any assistance.

**QUESTION:** But if there's no sort of formal duty, why is he retaining that title for –

**MS NAUERT:** My understanding is that because his commission is up on March the 31st.

**QUESTION:** Okay. And then just to follow up on the redesign, what is the status now of the redesign, now that he's left the building? Is that being frozen, or –

**MS NAUERT:** It's called the Impact Initiative now. The status of it is that it goes forward. We will largely maintain sort of an even course, a steady course, between now and the time that if Director Pompeo – if the secretary-designate does become the next secretary of state, we want to keep things calm for him, ensure an orderly transition, hand things over to the secretary-designate, if he becomes the secretary of state. Hopefully the Senate will confirm him. We would certainly like a speedy confirmation if they agree that he is the best person for that. And then we'll hand over all the information to Director Pompeo, and he can make a decision about what he would choose to do with the redesign. We talked about this the other day. Some things are sort of no-brainers, like getting us in the cloud, getting us up to speed with our IT. Other things he may want to do away with, but that would be his choice.

**QUESTION:** But the groups that have been meeting between USAID and State and the money that was spent on outside consultants and things like that, is that going to continue to be spent? Will those groups continue to meet?

**MS NAUERT:** I would imagine that any contracts that we have in place would continue to go forward until those contracts – I mean, this is just a guess – that contracts would stay in place until those contracts expire. But if there's anything more for you I have on that, I'll let you know, okay?

**QUESTION:** When you say the deputy secretary is doing all the day-to-day duties, that means that he's handling anything that would be at the Secretary's level involving interagency or foreign governments.

**MS NAUERT:** That's correct.

**QUESTION:** The Secretary, although he retains the title, does not speak on behalf of this administration to foreign leaders anymore.

**MS NAUERT:** That is correct.

**QUESTION:** That is correct?

**MS NAUERT:** That is my understanding.

**QUESTION:** So –

**MS NAUERT:** I mean, he may get a phone call from somebody congratulating

him on his future, but –

**QUESTION:** On being fired? (Laughter.) I'm just curious because, I mean, he's going to keep security while – for the – as long as he's – even though he's not doing anything that is related to the nation's business, he's still going to have Diplomatic Security agents. He'll still, presumably, have access to classified information and the SCIF –

**MS NAUERT:** My understanding is that he –

**QUESTION:** – in his house –

**MS NAUERT:** My understanding is that he was processed out today.

**QUESTION:** Oh, okay. So all of that is gone and he does not have security provided by the State Department anymore?

**MS NAUERT:** I don't know about security. That's a very good question. I will look into that. I'll ask our DS and get back with you on that.

**QUESTION:** Okay. So literally the only thing he still has is the title?

**MS NAUERT:** That is my understanding, yes.

**QUESTION:** Got you. Thank you.

**MS NAUERT:** And the deputy secretary is handling all the meetings, all the bilateral meetings, all the big decisions that are now being made at the State Department. It's all on his plate, so he's doing two jobs.

Hi. Go right ahead.

**QUESTION:** Yeah. On Turkey. The situation – the military operation from Turkey in Syria is still going on.

**MS NAUERT:** Yes.

**QUESTION:** You expressed your concerns last week. How about working group announced by Secretary Tillerson in Ankara last month? Is it working? Is it meeting? Is it working towards a solution for Manbij? I saw the readout of President Trump call with President Erdogan a few minutes ago. There wasn't even a mention about Syria, about this situation. What are the steps you can –

**MS NAUERT:** Well, as you well know, just because a readout states a certain number of things or issues were addressed does not mean that other things weren't discussed as well. Often more delicate things we will handle in private conversations. So I'd have to –

**QUESTION:** It means they didn't think it was worth mentioning (inaudible)  
–

**MS NAUERT:** Not necessarily. No. No, no, no. Don't – you cannot make that assumption. It sometimes means that things are delicate and we choose to

not put it in a readout because it's delicate, and we sometimes think that we can best handle complicated negotiations in a more private fashion. In some countries it's – that's more important than with other countries. I'd have to refer you to the White House though for any additional details on the President's call with President Erdogan.

But I can tell you that was something – the mechanism was something that was agreed to between Secretary Tillerson and Secretary – Erdogan about a month ago. We did have the first of that joint – not joint mechanism – the first of that mechanism meeting here in Washington about two weeks ago. We had about two dozen Turkish officials who came to the United States meeting with about two dozen State Department officials – was on – I think it was a Thursday or Friday. And that was here at the State Department, so I'm guessing you all missed that, right? We snuck – got them in and out the doors without you guys all realizing, right? So those conversations are happening.

Deputy Secretary Sullivan spoke with his counterpart over the weekend and then the President spoke to President Erdogan. So clearly those conversations are very important. As a NATO ally with a lot of stuff going on in Syria, we have a lot to talk about with the Turkish Government.

**QUESTION:** But Heather, you're not saying that readouts of conversations that are issued by this administration should not be taken as faithful representations of the content of what was discussed?

**MS NAUERT:** I'm just saying, look, a readout gives a broad overview of what was discussed, but not everything in the readout is going to be what was discussed. Some things we don't put in every single detail about that, and that's private diplomatic conversation, and that's standard, normal from administration to administration. You know that.

**QUESTION:** Does the mechanism plan to meet again or –

**MS NAUERT:** We – when we have a meeting to announce, we'll certainly let you know.

**QUESTION:** Can we move on –

**QUESTION:** Turkey. Turkey.

**MS NAUERT:** Okay. Okay. Hi. Yeah. Go right ahead. I'll come back to you.

**QUESTION:** I often ask you about the Palestinian teenager, Ahed Tamimi.

**MS NAUERT:** Yes.

**QUESTION:** Yesterday, the Israeli court, behind closed doors, sentenced her to eight months in prison for slapping an Israeli soldier. On the same day, they reduced the sentence of an Israeli soldier who killed an incapacitated Palestinian in cold blood to almost the same amount of time. Is, in your view, the Israelis sort of deal with the Palestinians

with a different scale of justice altogether?

**MS NAUERT:** Said, I think I'm not going to answer that question. That would be entirely up –

**QUESTION:** You –

**MS NAUERT:** No. That would be entirely up to law enforcement. I'm not there to see all the details of the case, so it would be very unfair for me to comment on that. You know we have talked many times about the importance of fair trials, about the importance that all individuals be treated humanely, that – I mean, this is nothing new. We've had this conversation many times before.

**QUESTION:** So you think that by sentencing this young girl to eight months in prison for slapping a soldier is basically – justice was being served?

**MS NAUERT:** How many times have I said this? We believe that all people, especially children, should be treated humanely and fairly and their human rights should be respected. We've talked about that many times before. My – our position has not changed.

**QUESTION:** So you're not appalled by any measure by the fact that a young girl gets sentenced to eight months in prison and a person who killed another person in cold blood be – serve almost the same amount of time?

**MS NAUERT:** I am not saying that. I am just saying I'm not going to weigh in on a case that took place in another country. That would entirely be a matter for them to address with you, okay?

Laurie, hi.

**QUESTION:** To go back to Turkey –

**MS NAUERT:** Sure.

**QUESTION:** – the foreign minister yesterday said in response to your comment that there may not be an agreement on Manbij but there is an understanding. Is there an understanding? If so, could you explain it?

**MS NAUERT:** We're going to start splitting hairs here, right, between agreement, understanding, all of that. I can just tell you that our talks with the Turkish Government are ongoing. Those talks have not been concluded at this point, and we look forward to continuing our conversations with the government.

**QUESTION:** Okay. They also seem to threaten an attack on Manbij as well. What is your response to that?

**MS NAUERT:** U.S. forces are located in Manbij. We have made it very clear with the Turkish Government that we continue to operate there. We have made our concerns very clear with the Turkish Government that we have a

right to defend ourselves, the U.S., along with its coalition partners on the ground there. And we have encouraged Turkey to de-escalate overall, and that's why we continue to have conversations with that government.

**QUESTION:** And you have no intention to leave?

**MS NAUERT:** We have no intention to leave, but beyond that I'd have to ask you to talk to DOD.

**QUESTION:** Okay. And the Iraqi Kurds are very happy now that the airports have been opened. But there's one important issue outstanding, and that's visa regulations. Up until now, people with American and EU passports could travel to the Kurdistan region airports without visas, if you had a U.S. or EU passport. That now may change. Do you have a reaction to that, and are you concerned that a country like Iran, which has influence with the Iraqi interior ministry, might be exercising control over this?

**MS NAUERT:** I can tell you I've just heard that report. It's still hypothetical, so I just don't want to comment on something that's a hypothetical like that. Okay? Hey, Abbie.

**QUESTION:** Hi. Do you have any information on reports of the death of a U.S. citizen – Andrew Dorogi, an Amherst college student – in Mexico City?

**MS NAUERT:** Yes. I just heard about this as I was coming out here, that a young man had died in Mexico. And I just want to express our condolences. Anytime an American citizen should lose his or her life overseas, that is certainly a tragedy. I'm not able to comment on any specifics of his case, but our thoughts and prayers go out to the family. I know that we are offering or at least have – or have provided assistance to the family. Our consular officers who are so compassionate and do such a great job of helping families in very difficult circumstances, and I know we're offering our assistance to them.

**QUESTION:** Are you able to say whether the U.S. is at all engaged with Mexican authorities on the nature of the death –

**MS NAUERT:** I'm sorry, I'm just not aware of that at this point. But I would imagine that we would have conversations with Mexican officials.

**QUESTION:** India?

**MS NAUERT:** Hey, how are you?

**QUESTION:** Good. Do you have any comments on or update on the Government of India reaching out to their U.S. counterparts about the details about this big scandal that has broken in India about – involving Cambridge Analytica or their suspended CEO Alexander Nix? Have they reached out to you for any cooperation?

**MS NAUERT:** Not that I'm aware of. I'd just have to refer you back to the Government of India on that if they had a contract with them. I'm just unaware. Okay?

**QUESTION:** (Off-mike.)

**MS NAUERT:** Okay. Hi. Nike, hi.

**QUESTION:** Yeah. If I may, I would like to switch gear to Africa, Kenya. Do you have anything on – the embassy of Kenya is starting a campaign to help locals to identify fake news, and then to help them to stop, reflect, and verify before forwarding any misinformation. First, on that, and secondly, is any other – are any other American embassies doing the same thing?

**MS NAUERT:** Yeah. So I'm aware of that program that's taking place out of our embassy. I believe it's being run out of one of our American centers, which if you're traveling overseas and you've never been to one of our American centers, it's a pretty neat place to go. It's a place where young people or older people can go and kind of hang out and work on college applications and all that. I had the opportunity to visit one in Bangladesh, which was a neat opportunity.

So I believe it's being run out of our American center. The idea, I think the genesis came from our ambassador who is serving there. And the idea is if you ever talk to somebody who, no offense, but in their early 20s, they don't know how to identify legitimate news sites. I have these conversations with our babysitters all the time, and they'll come to me –

**QUESTION:** It's not just people in their early 20s.

**MS NAUERT:** (Laughter.) They'll come to me with a piece of news saying, "Hey, Heather, take a look at this." And I ask, "What is the source of that news?" And they'll say it's some blogger or vlogger who apparently is a YouTube star, and I've never heard of him, but I'm much older than they are so what do I know? The point being is that that seems to be an issue, especially with younger people nowadays, perhaps with folks around the world as well, where they don't know how to go to legitimate sites or they don't ask the questions and verify themselves what the source is of this information.

So I think the ambassador was just trying to help teach young people in particular how to identify real news and how to identify fake news. And so I think it's probably a good idea. If it's going on in other embassies, I'm just not aware of it. Okay? Janne, hi.

**QUESTION:** Thank you very much. On North Korea. Excuse me. I'm sorry. South Korean Government proposed that U.S. and South Korea-North Korea three-partner – trilateral party talks. Will the U.S. accept this, trilateral talks?

**MS NAUERT:** I can tell you – and you've seen – probably seen this report



in the news by now, that South Korea and North Korea are planning to have a meeting ahead of our summit, which – we have not announced any dates yet at this point. They're planning to have a meeting. We are in close coordination with the South Koreans and the Japanese, for that matter, about all of these meetings and all of these talks. So we have no comment or plans on a possible three-way summit, but we're still going under the operating premise that we will be meeting with North Korea.

**QUESTION:** Yeah, only bilateral talks with the North and –

**MS NAUERT:** Yes.

**QUESTION:** – United States –

**MS NAUERT:** Yes.

**QUESTION:** Do you have – anything heard from North Korea regarding the –

**MS NAUERT:** Not at this point, not at this point. I don't have anything for you on that. I'll let you know.

**QUESTION:** So can I just follow up? A quick question on the – on Janne's question.

**MS NAUERT:** Yeah, sure.

**QUESTION:** So you don't have anything from North Korea. Are you just basically kind of making plans going ahead on what the North Koreans are telling you? I mean, wouldn't you like to hear from the North Koreans that they're –

**MS NAUERT:** Well, that's why I go back to our close relationship with South Korea. I mean South Korea has been our – perhaps our best interlocutor in dealing with this issue. As neighbors, as two countries that had preliminary meetings already, they worked out some of this framework at the Olympics. And so we trust our allies and partners, and so we trust South Korea certainly.

**QUESTION:** But don't you feel a little bit uncomfortable about going ahead and making preparations for a meeting with another country that you haven't even had an official confirmation directly from?

**MS NAUERT:** This is just complicated diplomacy, Elise, and I think that's just the way it works. We are looking forward to having these meetings and conversations, and we trust our South Korean allies, and we trust the Japanese. And this is – U.S. Government-wide program which we're standing by.

**QUESTION:** I understand, but don't you need, at some point, some kind of official confirmation –

**MS NAUERT:** Look, I'm not going to get ahead of that.

**QUESTION:** – from North Korea?

**MS NAUERT:** I'm not going to get ahead of that; I'm not going to speculate. I think where we are right now, we're doing just fine. Okay?

**QUESTION:** Syria?

**QUESTION:** Jordan?

**QUESTION:** Question on Syria.

**MS NAUERT:** Okay. Hold on. Connor, go ahead.

**QUESTION:** Just get your response to the budget that was passed yesterday or today, the President is expected to sign. They actually gave you a four percent increase over last year's budget, not the nearly one third cut that the administration had proposed. Just your response to that, and if you plan on actually spending all of that money.

**MS NAUERT:** I guess I would say thanks, Congress, and thanks to U.S. taxpayers, and we will take our lead from OMB and from Congress on that. Okay.

**QUESTION:** (Off-mike.)

**QUESTION:** Syria?

**QUESTION:** What does that mean? You'll take your lead from OMB on –

**MS NAUERT:** Well, what we end up being given –

**QUESTION:** Yeah?

**MS NAUERT:** – we look forward to that.

**QUESTION:** Well, the White House says it's going to sign it, so this almost \$56 billion, which is as he mentioned, almost four percent more than last year, and a lot more than what the administration was asking for, that Secretary Tillerson – or soon to be ex-Secretary Tillerson – endorsed. So can you assure the people who are working for this building that this money will – that you will take it and you will spend it?

**MS NAUERT:** I'm not aware if we ever just sit on money, but look, I can just say we thank the Congress and thank them for their work, and for the faith in the State Department. And a lot of folks complained last year when we didn't have enough money, and now if we're getting more money, I don't see the need for complaints.

**QUESTION:** But you're not – I get – what I'm getting at is that you're not opposed to this, the building. The administration is not opposed to an increase in funding for the function 150. I can't imagine that we would be imposed to –

**QUESTION:** Opposed.

**MS NAUERT:** I'm sorry, I can't imagine that we would be opposed to an increase in funding. We have – we're in a transition period now where we will hopefully have a new secretary coming in, and he can make some of those determinations at that point.

**QUESTION:** (Off-mike.)

**MS NAUERT:** Wait, hold on. Go ahead, Rich.

**QUESTION:** Syria.

**QUESTION:** Just really quickly.

**MS NAUERT:** Yeah.

**QUESTION:** Is the transfer of the \$40 million from the Pentagon to the State Department for the Global Engagement Center complete, and is there a status update on getting the expansion of that office started?

**MS NAUERT:** Sure. So part of what we're doing is awaiting the funds from the Department of Defense for the Global Engagement Center. That's \$40 million. That memorandum of understanding was signed a few weeks back. Last I checked as of Tuesday or so, that money had not been sent over yet, but I know that DOD had to look through some of its various programs and decide where it was going to take that money from. I think it wasn't just sitting in a pot earmarked for the Global Engagement Center. So what we are doing is taking a look at our overall priorities. Look, one of the big issues that has been going on for far too many years now is the horrific fight against ISIS. And so the Global Engagement Center has been engaged in fighting ISIS and trying to turn around that messaging.

We don't want more people to join ISIS; we want to turn people away from ISIS. So that has been one of their priorities. And then, about a year and a half ago or so, an additional priority was added to the Global Engagement Center, and that is countering state-sponsored propaganda. So that is something that's still getting ramped up. Part of my job here will be to really focus on this. I see that as a very important issue. When we look at the propaganda that we see coming out of governments, including Russia, including Iran, including China. And there are others out there that exist, but those are just the top three that come to my mind. When we see that propaganda coming out that we believe needs to be corrected, changed, influenced in some way, that is a priority of ours, and so we really look forward to staffing up this operation and resetting that as a priority for the Global Engagement Center. I've had a lot of conversations every single day since I got back here from Israel with my counterparts over at the NSC and here in the building about the importance of that and what our plans are.

So when we have something more about our intentions and our goals and achievements on the Global Engagement Center, I'd be more than happy to bring that to you.

**QUESTION:** Heather –

**QUESTION:** And as you've gotten into the details of it, do you think 40 million is sufficient or –

**MS NAUERT:** Well, look, it certainly sounds like a lot of money to me, but I think it's a good place to start. Okay?

**QUESTION:** (Off-mike.)

**QUESTION:** (Inaudible) on Syria? Syria?

**QUESTION:** (Off-mike.)

**MS NAUERT:** Okay, okay, okay. Go ahead. Said, I already called on you. Go ahead, sir.

**QUESTION:** So on –

**MS NAUERT:** Hold on. Come on. We can go to somebody else, right?

**QUESTION:** Turkish jets –

**MS NAUERT:** Our Kurdish friend. Yeah, go ahead.

**QUESTION:** Thank you. Turkish jets attacked three Kurdish villages in northern Iraq and killed four civilians. I am just wondering if you are aware of those reports. And also Iraqi foreign ministry called it a violation of the sovereignty of Iraq. Do you share that view?

**MS NAUERT:** I am not familiar with that report. I'm sorry. I just haven't seen that yet. I will take a look at it and see what we can get for you about that. Okay?

**QUESTION:** (Off-mike.)

**MS NAUERT:** Okay, okay.

**QUESTION:** You made a Jordan announcement.

**MS NAUERT:** Yes, I did.

**QUESTION:** Yes. So can you tell us more about this so-called counterterrorism site? Jordan – if you look at human rights organizations, there's use of torture in Jordan. What is the State Department position on torture, including methods like waterboarding? Does the State Department regard that as illegal?

**MS NAUERT:** I think that the United States' long-term cooperation with our strong partner in the Middle East, Jordan, is very well known, very well established. Our relationship with Jordan is as strong today as it was a few years ago, as it was 10 years ago, 15 years ago, and much further back than that. They have an excellent military. They have an excellent police force. They are close cooperating partners of the

United States and, frankly, many other countries as well. I think our position –

**QUESTION:** (Off-mike.)

**MS NAUERT:** I think our position on that, on the part of the U.S. Government, is very clear. We will work with this government and we work with many other governments around the world in the fight against terrorism, in the fight against ISIS.

**QUESTION:** So you're fine with torture, including waterboarding, with cooperating –

**MS NAUERT:** Are we doing this again? Are we doing this? Are we rolling back the clock to 15 years ago again today?

**QUESTION:** Well, it's just that the CIA –

**MS NAUERT:** It's my friend from The Nation here.

**QUESTION:** – the CIA nominee destroy – among other things oversaw a site in Thailand that's been accused of conducting torture and destroyed the video evidence of it –

**MS NAUERT:** I'm pretty sure that I work for the State Department –

**QUESTION:** Right.

**MS NAUERT:** – and not the Central Intelligence Agency. So if you have –

**QUESTION:** So – but I'm not winding back the clock –

**MS NAUERT:** So if you have any questions about that –

**QUESTION:** This administration is –

**MS NAUERT:** – I'd refer you over to that building.

**QUESTION:** This administration is winding down the clock, so I'd like an answer to the question rather than a divergent that I'm winding back the clock, because this administration is winding back the clock.

**MS NAUERT:** I don't know – I don't know how you –

**QUESTION:** So you don't want to answer the question.

**MS NAUERT:** I don't know how you think that. I think our position on torture, on human rights, is very well known.

**QUESTION:** What is it?

**MS NAUERT:** We support the Government of Jordan. We do not support, we do not encourage, any of that kind of use that you – that you allege.

**QUESTION:** Is waterboarding legal, in your view?

**MS NAUERT:** The U.S. Government has declared that. I don't recall the exact year, but a few years back, maybe it was seven or eight years ago, said that that is not a technique that the U.S. Government endorses. There was a time that the U.S. Government had told personnel that it could use that.

And I will remind you, let me just remind you and go on a little sidetrack here, that our military forces, when our Special Ops go through that training to become Special Forces, Navy SEALs, all of that, they go through that training. They go through what you're referring to as torture. I just want to put that out there, that that still exists today.

**QUESTION:** So the State Department view is that waterboarding is torture and is illegal?

**MS NAUERT:** I'm not going to go back and have this conversation –

**QUESTION:** It's a simple question.

**MS NAUERT:** – with you once again. Okay?

**QUESTION:** It's a simple question.

**MS NAUERT:** I think we've taken enough time on this and let's move on.

**QUESTION:** (Off-mike.)

**QUESTION:** On Syria, what is –

**MS NAUERT:** Said, go right ahead, and then we'll come to China.

**QUESTION:** What is your – can you share with us what is the update on Ghouta? Because the Syrian Government and the Russians claim that 90,000 civilians have departed the – Eastern Ghouta and the militants are being moved to the north and so on. Could you update us on what is the situation?

**MS NAUERT:** Yeah. Overall, I think the humanitarian situation in Eastern Ghouta remains dire. We've seen the reports of many thousands of people attempting to leave. We've also heard reports about people attempting to leave and then being killed as a result.

We continue to call for the ceasefire that was supported by 15 other countries at the United Nations Security Council almost a month ago.

**QUESTION:** Fourteen.

**MS NAUERT:** Pardon me?

**QUESTION:** Fourteen.

**MS NAUERT:** Fourteen countries?

**QUESTION:** Fourteen other countries.

**MS NAUERT:** Fourteen other – oh, pardon me, Matt, fourteen other countries. Fifteen – that includes the United States.

**QUESTION:** Okay. So –

**MS NAUERT:** So we continue to call for that ceasefire to be put into – in force, and that has not happened just yet. Most importantly right now, aside from that ceasefire, is getting the humanitarian aid in that needs to be gotten in. By the way, did anyone see that video of Bashar al-Assad driving around Syria, as though it was a normal place, like he was just some normal dude going out for a drive? It was like Car Talk. I don't know what was up with that, but what that man should do is stop killing his own people – stop killing innocent civilians, adhere to the UN-led ceasefire resolution that was passed by 15 countries, Matt, which included the United States.

**QUESTION:** So, you're – it's not –

**MS NAUERT:** Adhere to that, let the humanitarian aid get in.

**QUESTION:** Yeah. You cannot independently confirm that 90,000 people have left Istanbul?

**MS NAUERT:** I cannot confirm that. We're not there. We're not on the ground. But we talk to aid groups all the time, and I just don't have the recent updates on any numbers.

Conor, go ahead.

**QUESTION:** Can you update us, though, on what the U.S. is doing to try to implement the ceasefire? Have you made any more calls to other leaders in the region or to Russia?

**MS NAUERT:** Yeah. So this is something that is – comes up all of the time. The U.S. Government is in constant communication with our foreign allies and partners about the situation here. We have – Ambassador Haley is hard at work on some activities and actions at the United Nations. There may be – and I don't want to get ahead of anything that she could announce, but certainly looking at other resolutions, and that may be something that we can put in sort of our arsenal, if you will.

One of the important things is holding someone responsible for the use of chemical weapons. We know that those have been used in Syria on innocent civilians. Russia destroyed the Joint Investigative Mechanism at the United Nations. That was the mechanism that would hold an individual accountable – an individual country accountable – for chemical weapons violations. Russia stood in the way of that. We are looking at other types of mechanisms that could be used. JIM, the Joint Investigative Mechanism, was the gold standard. So we hope that we can

get something else in place to hold them accountable. I mean it's a – it's a government-wide effort here on the part of State Department, having communications with the Department of Defense, the National Security Council, and many other countries overseas. So we're working on it, hoping that we can get something going. Yeah.

**QUESTION:** Speaking of chemical weapons –

**MS NAUERT:** Yeah.

**QUESTION:** – I assume it goes without saying that you guys would support an OPCW investigation into this spy poisoning case in –

**MS NAUERT:** Well, OPCW is investigating the spy poisoning case.

**QUESTION:** Yeah. But the Russians have said that they – they don't buy – that they won't –

**MS NAUERT:** Yeah. Okay. So, as many of you know, Russia – yeah, I think it was yesterday – said that this could have come – the poisoning could have come from yet another country, which is ridiculous. I mean, we put out a statement about that, saying that is a joke that it could have come from another country. We've seen Russian claims like this before, when Russia claimed not to be responsible for its little green men in Ukraine, where Russia claimed to not be responsible for the downing of the Malaysian Air flight in 2014 over Ukraine. We've seen Russia continue to perpetuate the conflict in eastern Ukraine. They make a lot of claims. I think it's pretty clear we stand by the Brits, as do many other countries, that Russia's responsible for this.

Okay. We're going to –

**QUESTION:** (Off-mike.)

**QUESTION:** Heather –

**QUESTION:** (Off-mike.)

**MS NAUERT:** We're going to have to wrap it up and leave it there.

Go right ahead, sir.

**QUESTION:** Thank you very much, madam. As far as China actually is concerned, finally this president took action against China, because I have been saying for many, many years, according to the press report, China has been using as far as prison labor and also cheap labor. So my question is: Are you sending message to China that respect human rights and rule of law, freedoms of press and freedom of religion, among others? And also, stop arresting the prison – the innocent people for their cheap labor.

**MS NAUERT:** Yeah. Sir, despite what our friend here from *The Nation* may think, the United States consistently stands up for human rights. China



is one of those countries where we have those conversations, where we talk about the importance of freedom of religion, human rights, fair trials, and all of those other things and ideals that the United States Government holds near and dear to our hearts, because that's fundamentally what we believe in. We speak to other governments, China in particular, about media freedoms and all of those things consistently in all our diplomatic conversations.

**QUESTION:** (Off-mike.)

**MS NAUERT:** I'm going to have to leave it at that.

**QUESTION:** One more.

**MS NAUERT:** Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

**QUESTION:** Heather, can you tell us about Saudi Arabia?

**QUESTION:** I want to ask you about –

**QUESTION:** Can you talk about the meetings with Saudi Arabia –

**QUESTION:** Bahrain.

**QUESTION:** – since Bahrain was just invoked?

**MS NAUERT:** Go right ahead. Go ahead.

**QUESTION:** Or, do you –

**QUESTION:** Heather, I've got one –

**QUESTION:** Before you get to – before –

**QUESTION:** So she's mentioning my name and not respond –

**QUESTION:** Excuse me. Before you get to Saudi, can you –

**MS NAUERT:** Yeah.

**QUESTION:** I have this question I've been trying to ask for three days now about this case in Bahrain, about Duaa Alwadaei, who was convicted yesterday and sentenced to two months in absentia. Do you have anything to say about that, given what you just said about the calls for free – fair trials and –

**MS NAUERT:** Yeah. Sure. And that is something that we talk with our partners in Bahrain. We have those conversations with the Government of Bahrain, with Saudi Arabia. We have difficult conversations with countries that we also have relationships with. That is a fact. We hold our ideals near and dear to our hearts. Those consistently come up in our private conversations with other governments, who don't adhere to those ideals that we believe are so important. You ask about – you ask –

**QUESTION:** (Off-mike.)

**MS NAUERT:** Excuse me. I'm talking to Matt here. You ask about Duaa Alwadaei. She is residing in London. So we saw the report that a Bahraini criminal court sentenced her in absentia to two – I believe it was two months in prison for allegedly insulting a state institution. Really? For allegedly insulting a state institution, they sentenced her to two months in prison. So we would say to the Government of Bahrain – and this is a way that we can deliver a message to governments around the world – we strongly urge the government to abide by its international obligations and commitments to respect human rights and fundamental freedoms, and that includes the freedom of expression.

Okay.

**QUESTION:** Heather, when you were – earlier, about Israel you refused to comment.

**QUESTION:** Heather, yesterday –

**MS NAUERT:** Go ahead. Go ahead. Go ahead. Go ahead.

**QUESTION:** Excuse me, sir. Excuse me.

**QUESTION:** You refused to comment on Israel.

**QUESTION:** Heather, yesterday Susan Thornton met with an official from Taiwan. Can – do you have a readout of that?

**MS NAUERT:** I do not. I do not. I'm sorry. I don't.

**QUESTION:** There was a tweet and a photograph of them meeting yesterday.

**MS NAUERT:** Okay. I'll see if I can provide a readout of that meeting for you, okay? Okay.

**QUESTION:** (Off-mike.)

**MS NAUERT:** Sir, I will let you take that last question. Then we got to go. Go ahead.

**QUESTION:** So you talk about – first of all, could you address Saudi Arabia and why is it that your closest ally in the region seems to be Saudi Arabia and Israel? You talk about a trial in Bahrain, but you don't address it when it comes to the – when the – when it comes to Israel. Why is that?

**MS NAUERT:** Look, that is a very sensitive matter, and we handle conversations with different governments differently about sensitive matters. We don't take the same approach with every single government, the kinds of conversations we have.

**QUESTION:** So Israel's off the hook?

**MS NAUERT:** No, I'm not saying that at all. Not saying that at all. We have to leave it there. Thank you.

**QUESTION:** Thanks, Heather.

(The briefing was concluded at 3:42 p.m.)

DPB # 19

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## **[Press Releases: Remarks at the International Advisory Council's Closing Luncheon](#)**

Remarks

John J. Sullivan

Deputy Secretary of State

United States Institute of Peace

Washington, DC

March 22, 2018

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**DEPUTY SECRETARY SULLIVAN:** Good afternoon, and thank you, Nancy, for that kind introduction and for your leadership. Thank you to the United States Institute of Peace and to the International Advisory Council for inviting me here today. As Nancy mentioned, I'm honored to have been selected to serve on the board as the representative of the State Department.

Before I begin my remarks on humanitarian assistance, I wanted to just note that today is a bittersweet day for me because Secretary Tillerson is actually returning to his home in Texas today. He'll remain as Secretary of State through the end of the month, but he's departing the building today, and we'll have a ceremony for him in the lobby as he departs. But I wanted to take this opportunity to tell you how much he's meant to the department and to me personally. His work for our country, leading the department, his voice for peace, for humanitarian assistance has been an inspiration for me. And I was honored – have been honored to work for him, to have been selected by him to serve as deputy secretary of state. And I think if it's all right with you, if we could offer him a round of applause in tribute to his service. (Applause.)

He is moving back to a more familiar climate in Texas, which I know suits him well.

But I'm delighted to be here at the U.S. Institute of Peace. For three decades, the institute has been a strong partner of the State Department and USAID as we work to promote greater prosperity and peace throughout the world. As a new member of the board, it's a particular honor for me to address the International Advisory Council.

Today, as Nancy mentioned, I want to provide a few thoughts on the U.S. – United States role as a global leader in providing humanitarian assistance. I know we don't hear a lot about that topic in the news today, the U.S. role in

providing humanitarian assistance; but as we know, all of us in this room know, helping those in need is and always has been one of our country's core values and very much in our national interest. How we assist people in times of conflict, distress, and natural disasters reflects how we see the world and is integral to how we execute our foreign policy.

The United States is committed to its role as a global leader on humanitarian issues. We understand the importance and necessity of humanitarian assistance, even as we work to preclude the crises that spawn the need for assistance. By helping those who bear the brunt of war, natural disaster, or the failure of good governance and policy, we preserve that chance for a more prosperous and more peaceful world for generations to come.

Today, the United States remains the single largest donor of international humanitarian assistance. Last year, we delivered more than \$8 billion in life-saving aid around the world. This includes assistance for basic necessities – food, education, health, and protection against violence.

But it's no secret that humanitarian challenges are multiplying around the world, including in countries that once flourished. I'm sorry to say that we have a tragic example in the Southern Hemisphere, in Latin America, in the crisis in Venezuela, which is entirely man-made, created by a corrupt regime that denies its people not only ability to choose their leaders, but also the ability to meet their basic needs. UNHCR estimates that 1.7 million Venezuelans have fled their country since 2014 – increasingly in search of basic needs such as food and medicine. What's even more striking is that over 1.5 million Venezuelans are expected to flee that country in this calendar year.

To help the people of Venezuela and those refugees who are crossing borders into Colombia and Brazil, and all those others affected by the regime's malfeasance, we are supporting regional humanitarian operations that provide vulnerable people in impacted border areas with life-saving health and nutrition, shelter, livelihoods, and protection. Venezuelan President Maduro could help his people by opening his country to humanitarian aid, but instead chooses to tightly limit and control that flow of assistance. We will continue our diplomatic pressure on his regime, but until he decides to make the right choices, we will support the region through humanitarian assistance, including through our announcement on Tuesday that we are providing an additional \$2.5 million for aid to Venezuelans who have crossed into Colombia.

We also continue to support areas where conflict and terrorism have long uprooted families and taken lives. Just a few weeks ago, we announced over \$500 million in additional humanitarian assistance for affected populations in Ethiopia, Somalia, South Sudan, and Nigeria, as well as other countries in the Lake Chad region. This announcement, along with our programming in South Sudan, Somalia, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, will continue to help millions of people in Africa who are facing life-threatening food insecurity and malnutrition as a result of ongoing conflicts and prolonged drought.

Earlier this year I had the opportunity to visit Iraq for the fifth U.S.-Iraq Higher Coordinating Committee. Our military has made great progress at rooting out ISIS, and today 4.5 million Iraqis have been freed from that tyranny, but 3.5 million internally displaced persons – excuse me – 2.5 million internally displaced persons are still seeking to return to their homes. Effective reconstruction is critical to ensuring ISIS can never return, and we are committed to working with our partners in the region to help the government in Iraq rebuild. Since 2014, the United States has provided more than \$1.7 billion in humanitarian assistance for Iraq, and we continue to provide support to promote a safe, voluntary, and dignified return of Iraqis still displaced by the conflict. This assistance also supports the rehabilitation of schools, legal aid to restore housing and property rights, and help millions of Iraqis re-establish their livelihoods.

The United States is the largest single country humanitarian donor for the Syrian response as well, providing nearly \$7.7 billion since the start of the crisis in that country. Each month, this assistance helps Syrians in every governorate, in addition to the over five and a half million Syrians in neighboring countries.

And in Yemen, the U.S. has provided nearly \$768 million in humanitarian over the – humanitarian assistance over the past two years. That includes food, water, emergency medical care, hygiene kits, treatment for malnourished children, and other aid. At the same time, we have repeatedly called on all parties to ensure rapid, safe, and unhindered access for humanitarian and commercial goods, including food, fuel, and medicine, as well as aid workers, into and throughout Yemen.

Turning to Asia – the United States has provided more than \$177 million to help those affected by conflict in Burma, including as many as one million refugees displaced to Bangladesh. This assistance provides protection, emergency shelter, food, and nutritional assistance, as well as medical care and psychosocial support for so many who have suffered from ethnic cleansing.

Well, that's a long list, and I wish that list was shorter. But it's really just a fraction of the humanitarian needs that exist across the globe. And despite our best efforts, most of these crises, conflicts, and natural disasters are not going to stop anytime soon. Most will ultimately require a diplomatic solution – results that we are working toward each and every day. But until those solutions arrive, you can count on the United States to help everyone where we can to alleviate suffering and save lives.

But one government or one entity can't tackle these issues alone.

We all know that the urgency of the crises we face demands a global response. And as we continue this humanitarian leadership, we will also continue to emphasize the importance of coordinated, effective, and efficient international responses, as well as the need for other governments and other actors in the private sector to step in to contribute to humanitarian efforts.

This multifaceted advocacy – including through our engagement with the United

Nations and directly with partner nations around the world – focuses on expanding the number of donors, increasing the global contributions to humanitarian appeals and responses, as well as advocating for humanitarian access wherever necessary.

We need other governments, NGOs, and the private sector to work together to respond to humanitarian crises at every phase.

The United States is working with international partners to provide funding, technical assistance, and other forms of support that help leverage humanitarian and development investments.

And most importantly for this audience, we need USIP to highlight these issues wherever they arise and promote preventative diplomacy and peaceful resolutions.

We also believe the private sector has great potential to provide meaningful support and engagement in humanitarian responses. We hope that organizations like USIP can help us partner with the private sector to help the vast number of people around the world who are affected by crises and to address long-term sustainability challenges.

A global response, with increasing financial support of multiple nations and groups, is essential to effectively moving more help to the many who are in need and to ensure a greater regional stability across the globe.

Those are some preliminary thoughts from me. I know I've thrown out a lot of numbers and countries, but it's important for me to come here and emphasize the importance to the Department of State of our humanitarian mission through our colleagues with USAID and working through our own bureaus.

So I think there's an opportunity now for questions. I'd like to turn it back over to Nancy. If there are topics you'd like to talk about, I'd like to continue our discussion. (Applause.)

**MS LINDBORG:** Thank you, Deputy Secretary Sullivan. And we especially appreciate your taking the time to come over during such a busy day and such an important day, and I know this will greatly increase your responsibilities. Thank you also for a rather sobering tour globally and for the leadership that the United States continues to provide on humanitarian assistance.

So you just described an overwhelming number of crises with increased flows, increased needs. How does this make you at the – and colleagues at State and the administration think about what the U.S. should be doing to think about tackling the causes of these crises and of these outflows of refugees? How do we begin to get more upstream on these issues?

**DEPUTY SECRETARY SULLIVAN:** Well, as I suggested in my remarks, just looking at humanitarian assistance, which is – once the crisis has already developed and people are in danger or hungry, just meeting those immediate needs is something that the U.S. Government and certainly not just the Department of State can do. Getting at the deeper root of the problem requires an even

greater, broader support.

Looking at what we do in the U.S. Government, I'd focus, for example, in – on Africa, particularly in countries like Nigeria, the countries in the Sahel and Northern Africa, the tragic scenes that we have seen of refugees and migrants leaving Libya, Tunisia, Algeria for southern Europe. And those people are coming from countries farther south in Africa, where there is conflict, poverty, et cetera. So we've got to have – from the U.S. Government's perspective, it requires an integrated strategy with our colleagues at the Department of Defense to partner with host governments. For example, the countries in the Sahel, the so-called G5 – working with them to address the terrorism problems that are presented in the region, to establish a baseline of security so that humanitarian assistance, development assistance can flow into the region, and remove the causes of people who are fleeing those countries, risking their lives to cross the Mediterranean to get to hope for a better future in Europe.

So it's a whole-of-government effort. It sounds trite to say, but it's certainly true. We work closely with our colleagues at the Department of Defense, USAID, the State Department. I was in Abuja, Nigeria a few months ago, and the challenges are enormous. The threat from Boko Haram and ISIS West Africa, particularly in northwestern Nigeria, is very serious, as we've seen just in the last few weeks with the kidnapping of another 110 schoolgirls, most of whom have been released, but only on the condition that they not be allowed to go back to school, which is astounding on its face. But we're thankful that at least most of those young girls have been released, but we've got to address the security situation.

But there are deeper problems, economic and social, that require not just U.S. Government assistance but assistance from a wide array of private organizations, other countries, the United Nations. So that's what we're looking to mobilize to address the causes of the refugee flows out of that area and prevent these crises from developing.

**MS LINDBORG:** So just building on that a little bit, you mentioned in your remarks the entirely man-made causes of what's going on in Venezuela. Sadly, you could say that about any number of places around the world. And I'm very taken by the statistic that notes a decade ago, 80 percent of our humanitarian assistance went to victims of natural disaster. A decade later, that's flipped. You alluded to it in some of your previous answer, but if we could just go a little further in terms of: How does that, therefore, change how we think about the response? It's not only humanitarian assistance, but necessarily thinking differently about how some of our other assistance and activities work together, not just to meet the suffering but to resolve the sources of the conflict.

**DEPUTY SECRETARY SULLIVAN:** Sure. I think one of the sources of – one of the reasons why those numbers flipped was the persistence of the security – not just security threat, but the actual manifestation of the carnage inflicted by organizations like ISIS and al-Qaida in Syria, Iraq, Libya, you name it. This conflict with these terror organizations actually started before September 11th, but for most of us in our consciousness was really



crystallized on September 11th. But that conflict has continued for the last 17 years, and I don't know that we see an end in sight.

We may have defeated the so-called caliphate, removed almost all of their territorial ambitions in Iraq and in Syria, but they've dispersed. They've moved to other countries. There are still pockets of ISIS left in Syria, particularly in eastern Syria, that are – remain a threat. Our mission in Syria, in northern Syria, remains the complete eradication of ISIS. But as we move down – just using Syria as an example, as the U.S. military moves down the Euphrates River Valley, supporting – providing support to our partner forces in the SDF – when we liberate – when we remove ISIS from those areas, there's an enormous need for assistance for just stabilization, demining, removing all of the booby traps, mines, and so forth that ISIS has left behind in places like Raqqa and elsewhere in Syria and Mosul in Iraq.

Beginning the resumption of basic services like water and electricity – we're not really talking about nation-building here. We're talking about the resumption of basic stabilization operations so that people can return to their homes, be safe – removing rubble from streets; for buildings that have been damaged and are dangerous to return to, knocking them down and clearing away dangerous obstacles; demining as I mentioned – that type of – those types of assistance and stability operations is something that's very necessary for us to provide. As soon as our military moves out, we're looking to move in USAID, State Department, other U.S. Government entities to provide that type of stabilization assistance so that refugees can return to their homes as soon as possible, not before they're ready to but when they're ready to. We don't want to force people back into situations that are still dangerous. Refugees should return home when it's safe for them to do so. And it's incumbent upon us and partner countries and nations and organizations to do all we can to repair that damage that's been done, once our military and partner forces have eliminated the security threat.

So it's a huge challenge for us, just in Iraq and Syria – enormous challenge. Number of internally displaced persons is in the millions in Iraq and in Syria. So just in that region alone, we have a huge challenge.

You mentioned Venezuela, a different situation but one that's been persistent over a number of years with first the current Maduro administration, but its predecessor administration really governing in ways that have driven what was once a vibrant economy over the brink into an economic disaster, at this point a country so rich in natural resources, but now its people are suffering. They're fleeing by the – fleeing in enormous numbers across the borders of Brazil and Colombia, creating – straining the resources of those countries. Also the outbreak of disease in Venezuela now – you may have seen that the incidence of tuberculosis in Venezuela has spiked. It's really a very tragic situation, and we're not able to get humanitarian assistance in because the Maduro government won't allow it.

**MS LINDBORG:** You mentioned the number of Venezuelans who are fleeing across the border into Colombia. And Colombia, of course, is itself in a precarious place struggling to implement a peace accord that ended 50 years of its own very bloody civil war. And we have other examples of that. You talked about

Syria, and of course the number of Syrian refugees who have fled to Turkey, Jordan, and Lebanon far outweighs the numbers that are hosted by anywhere else in the world.

What are the obligations and the opportunities for the U.S. and our international partners to help ensure that those neighbors aren't pushed into their own new cycles of crises because of the burden of the refugees? And of course, we're seeing that this has even affected our allies in Europe, these outflows.

**DEPUTY SECRETARY SULLIVAN:** Well, we see in our media stories about the refugee crises in Europe, for example, and in the Mediterranean, but there are any number of examples I could cite. For example, Pakistan, which hosts an enormous number of Afghans who have fled violence in Afghanistan, and it's a strain for the Pakistani Government. It's something they cite to us as a burden on them in what they are doing in trying to support reconciliation in Afghanistan. There are any number of examples in this hemisphere and around the world of refugees crossing borders, straining the resources both of partner countries and NGOs, and the numbers are staggering – millions of people displaced.

And this administration is focused on – the President has made it a point of – the media's focused on defense spending, but we're also pushing at the State Department for other countries and organizations to do more to support humanitarian relief and assistance. We'll remain the leader in humanitarian assistance – we the United States – but we want to see other countries stepping up and addressing that problem which is global in scope and staggering in the numbers of people affected.

**MS LINDBORG:** And you mentioned several times the importance of working with partners, and I think we've seen U.S. leadership has always been important in mobilizing that kind of joint effort to address needs. Are you seeing that there's a willingness to join together not just on the provision of humanitarian assistance but on really tackling those root causes as well?

**DEPUTY SECRETARY SULLIVAN:** Yes, in certain areas. We had a very good conference a few weeks ago in Brussels to address the situation in the Sahel. The G5 conference in Brussels attracted, I think it was 70 governments, many heads of state. It was sponsored by the EU.

But as an example of the United States working with partners, including the French have been great leaders in this, to address that crisis in the Sahel and surrounding areas – the Lake Chad Basin – is an example of work by a large number of countries from around the world, not just the region, not just European countries, but countries from around the world to address the security situation, supporting the G5 nations as they try to build their security services to protect themselves, but also providing humanitarian assistance, stabilization assistance, and development assistance for that region. And I just like that as an example of where the world community has come together to address a serious problem.

**MS LINDBORG:** And I want to go back to Iraq. You noted some of the efforts

that are underway. I actually just was there recently with our board chair Steve Hadley and we were struck by what a pivotal moment this is for Iraq. And there have been three million internally displaced who have already returned home, and of course, as you noted, two million more, especially from some of the hardest-hit areas like Mosul. We have elections coming up in May. There are a lot of challenges left in Iraq.

What do you see as the critical, most important issues alongside humanitarian assistance that have to be addressed and the most important role that the U.S. can play in helping those two million displaced Iraqis still go home, and also to keep Iraq from falling into yet another cycle of conflict?

**DEPUTY SECRETARY SULLIVAN:** Certainly. Well, we have – we've worked very closely with the government in Baghdad, with the Abadi government and their military and security forces in defeating ISIS, moving through Anbar province up to Mosul and the liberation of Mosul. But that was really just the – it was just the start of what is a much larger undertaking which is now going to require long-term efforts for, first, stabilization, as I've mentioned; demining large swaths of urban areas; making places habitable again for internally displaced persons to return. And we – the Emir of Kuwait hosted a reconstruction conference at the end of January seeking support from other countries for development in Iraq. We were pleased that there were commitments of over \$30 billion, but that's probably a third of what's needed to rebuild by what has been destroyed by war and terror in Iraq.

Our most immediate focus in Iraq is seeking a peaceful election in May, as you mentioned. We have been working with Prime Minister Abadi and the government in Erbil to reconcile the government of the KRG with the national government in Baghdad. I was actually in Baghdad and Erbil about a month ago – six weeks ago now – to encourage a rapprochement between the Kurds and the national government.

We've seen some progress recently. Steps have been made to reopen the international airports in Iraqi Kurdistan. It was very sad to go back to Iraq. I had traveled there a number of times when I served in the Bush administration to Erbil. And to the – when I was last there in 2008, which was the – to travel there, I arrived at the new international airport, which had just, just opened. But because of the dispute between Baghdad and Erbil, the airport had shut down. So when I flew in in late January, my plane was the only plane on the tarmac, with all of these gates emptied, no international flights in.

We've worked hard to get the government in Baghdad to work with the government in Erbil. The airport's being reopened. The government in Baghdad is going to be paying salaries for KRG employees, which is important. Many of – many hospital workers, teachers, et cetera, haven't been paid in months, so trying to develop – improve that relationship and assist the Iraqis in conducting a free, fair, and credible election in May to continue the development of democracy in Iraq.

**MS LINDBORG:** Yeah, we were struck by the shared understanding that without a more inclusive, more accountable government, then Iraq will surely not be

able to stay on a positive pathway. So I know that all eyes are on this election, with hopes that they'll be able to forge that kind of a government.

**DEPUTY SECRETARY SULLIVAN:** It's going to be difficult for Prime Minister Abadi to form a new government, if he were to get enough votes to be in a position to form a new government, if there isn't more inclusivity, particularly with the Kurds and others. So it's absolutely necessary for the democracy in Iraq to develop. We've seen very hopeful signs, and we've been working closely on a daily basis with the prime minister and his staff. They've come for – I had meetings last week with his deputy chief of staff on this issue, and we have worked very closely with them on it. So we're – we're hopeful that the election will proceed in a free and peaceful way in May and lead to a secure government that will lead to greater prosperity for Iraq.

**MS LINDBORG:** And of course, we're seeing in all the countries that you've mentioned corruption is one of the most corrosive aspects of contributing to the kind of conflict that leads to humanitarian needs. Do you see this as an area where we have effective tools for beginning to address that?

**DEPUTY SECRETARY SULLIVAN:** Well it's certainly a pervasive subject. We can shift geographically to – to Ukraine. I was in Kyiv last month. Corruption is an enormous problem in Ukraine, and the Poroshenko government is trying to address it. It's very difficult; it's a difficult challenge for the government there, with the security problems that Russia and Russian-supported organizations pose, occupying territory in the Donbas, and of course, Russia's annexation of Crimea.

But for Ukraine to survive and to prosper, corruption has to be rooted out. And it's really a legacy of the transition from the Soviet Union to a – to an independent Ukraine. Corruption was allowed to flourish. It's a very difficult system to purge of that – of that scourge. But it's something that's absolutely essential for that democracy – also focused on upcoming elections for its parliament and president. But corruption diminishes popular support and confidence in government, and that ultimately undermines democracy. So it's a priority for us around the world promoting free and fair elections and eliminating corruption.

**MS LINDBORG:** So I know we don't have a lot more of your time. What keeps you up at night more than anything else? (Laughter.)

**DEPUTY SECRETARY SULLIVAN:** I could channel my inner Marine four-star general and quote Secretary Mattis and say nothing keeps me up at night; I keep other people up at night. (Laughter.) But I don't have the wherewithal to back up that boast.

What keeps me up at night is – and I've said this at town halls when I've visited embassies, our embassies around the world – it's not any of these crises that we've discussed. It's managing the Department of State and our personnel issues, personnel and people of our department. It's the heart of our department. We don't have tanks. We don't have carrier strike groups. We have people, men and women in the Civil Service and Foreign Service, and making sure that they are supported, treated fairly, inspired – that's what

keeps me up at night, making sure that they are supported and given the respect they deserve, they've earned – women and men who have served for decades in – many of them in very, very difficult places, and acknowledging their service, supporting them, and keeping the department on a solid footing.

That's my greatest – it's not a worry. It's my priority. So that's what – in answer to your question, that's my highest priority.

**MS LINDBORG:** Again, I want to thank you for joining us during such a very, very busy time. I know we asked you long before some of the recent changes, so we very much appreciate your coming over. Thank you for your leadership during this critical moment. We look forward to having you on our board. We're quite appreciative of your agreeing to do that. And please join me in thanking Deputy Secretary Sullivan for being with us today.

**DEPUTY SECRETARY SULLIVAN:** Thank you, Nancy. (Applause.)

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