

Press Releases: Respecting Religious Freedom in Russia

Press Statement
Heather Nauert

Department Spokesperson

Washington, DC
July 19, 2017

The Russian Supreme Court's decision this week against the Jehovah's Witnesses is the latest in a disturbing trend of persecution of religious minorities in Russia. We urge the Russian authorities to lift the ban on Jehovah's Witnesses' activities in Russia, to reverse the closing of the Jehovah's Witnesses Administrative Center, and to release any members of religious minorities that continue to be unjustly detained for so-called "extremist" activities.

We further urge Russia to respect the right of all to exercise the freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief. All religious minorities should be able to enjoy freedom of religion and assembly without interference, as guaranteed by the Russian Federation's constitution.

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Press Releases: U.S. Announces New Iran-related Sanctions

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The United States remains deeply concerned about Iran's malign activities across the Middle East which undermine regional stability, security, and prosperity. Iran continues to support terrorist groups such as Hizballah, Hamas, and Palestinian Islamic Jihad that threaten Israel and stability in the Middle East. Iran has maintained its steadfast support for the Assad regime, despite Assad's atrocities against his own people. Iran also continues to provide the Houthi rebels in Yemen with advanced weaponry that threatens freedom of navigation in the Red Sea, has been used to attack Saudi Arabia, and is prolonging the Yemen conflict. Additionally, Iran continues to test and develop ballistic missiles, in direct defiance of UN Security Council Resolution 2231. The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) states the anticipation of JCPOA participants that "full implementation of this JCPOA will positively contribute to regional and international peace and security." However, Iran's other malign activities are serving to undercut whatever "positive contributions" to regional and international peace and security were intended to emerge from the JCPOA.

In response to these continued Iranian threats, the Administration today announces that it has designated 18 entities and individuals supporting Iran's ballistic missile program and for supporting Iran's military procurement or Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), as well as an Iran-based transnational criminal organization and associated persons. Today's actions were taken pursuant to Executive Order (E.O.) 13382, which targets proliferators of weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery and supporters of such activity, as well as E.O. 13581, which targets transnational criminal organizations.

Specifically, the U.S. Department of State designated two entities pursuant to E.O. 13382 for engaging, or attempting to engage, in activities or transactions that have materially contributed to, or pose a risk of materially contributing to, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction or their means of delivery. The State Department designated the IRGC Aerospace Force Self Sufficiency Jihad Organization (ASF SSJ0), which is involved in Iranian ballistic missile research and flight test launches. In addition, the State Department designated the IRGC Research and Self Sufficiency Jihad Organization (RSSJ0), which is responsible for the research and development of ballistic missiles.

Additionally, the U.S. Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets

Control (OFAC), designated seven entities and five individuals for engaging in activities in support of Iran's military procurement or the IRGC, as well as an Iran-based transnational criminal organization and three associated persons. Today's action targets three networks supporting Iran's military procurement or the IRGC through the development of unmanned aerial vehicles and military equipment for the IRGC, the production and maintenance of fast attack boats for the IRGC-Navy, or the procurement of electronic components for entities that support Iran's military. OFAC also designated two Iranian businessmen and associated entities who orchestrated the theft of U.S. and western software programs which, at times, were sold to the Government of Iran.

The Iranian regime also continues to detain U.S. citizens and other foreigners on fabricated national-security related charges. We call upon Iran to release U.S. citizens Baquer Namazi, Siamak Namazi, and Xiyue Wang, and all other unjustly detained U.S. citizens, so that they can be reunited with their families. The United States is deeply concerned about reports of the declining health of the Namazis, Wang, and other detained U.S. citizens. Iran should immediately release all of these U.S. citizens on humanitarian grounds. It has also been more than a decade since Robert Levinson disappeared from Iran's Kish Island. Iran committed to cooperating with the United States in bringing Bob home and we call on Iran to fulfill this commitment. The United States remains unwavering in its efforts to return Bob to his family. The Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) has offered a \$5 million reward for any information that could lead to Bob's safe return. We call on anyone with information about this case to contact the FBI at <http://tips.fbi.gov> or email the FBI at levinsonfbireward@ic.fbi.gov. Information will be kept confidential and can be provided anonymously.

Iran's regime has an egregious human rights record, which includes denial of the freedom of religion or belief as well as other human rights and fundamental freedoms to individuals in Iran. Notably, arbitrary arrest and detention of members of religious minorities and political activists, is common as is the use of torture and other forms of abuse in detention. On June 27, the United States released its annual report on Trafficking in Persons. In the report, Iran is again ranked as a Tier 3 country because it does not take significant steps to address its extensive trafficking problem nor does it fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking and is not making significant efforts to do so. Iran is a source, transit, and destination country for men, women, and children subjected to sex trafficking and forced labor. Notably, Iran also coerces Afghan refugees into participating in combat in Syria, deporting those who refuse to do so, and it supports militias fighting in Iraq that recruited and used child soldiers. These abhorrent abuses only fuel conflict throughout the Middle East.

The Administration is continuing to conduct a full review of U.S. policy toward Iran. During the course of this review, the United States will continue to aggressively counter Iran's malign activities in the region. While the review is ongoing, the United States will also continue to expect strict Iranian adherence to Iran's nuclear commitments under the JCPOA and

look to the International Atomic Energy Agency to continue to monitor and verify all of Iran's nuclear commitments. In addition, the United States will continue to comply with its commitments under the JCPOA. As a result, we communicated to the U.S. Congress on July 17 that the United States continues to waive sanctions as required to continue implementing U.S. sanctions-lifting commitments in the JCPOA, and is certifying to Congress that, based on available information, the conditions of Section 135(d)(6) of the Atomic Energy Act of 1954 (AEA), as amended, including as amended by the Iran Nuclear Agreement Review Act of 2015 (Public Law 114-17), enacted on May 22, 2015, are met as of July 17, 2017. We also note Iran's continued malign activities outside the nuclear issue undermine the positive contributions to regional and international peace and security that the deal was supposed to provide. The United States will continue to use sanctions to target those who lend support to Iran's destabilizing behavior and above all, the United States will never allow the regime in Iran to acquire a nuclear weapon.

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Heather Nauert
Spokesperson

Department Press Briefing
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TRANSCRIPT:

2:23 p.m. EDT

MS NAUERT: Good afternoon, everybody. This is a full room today. Is everyone back and rested from their trips overseas? Yes? Not all at once.

QUESTION: I was here.

MS NAUERT: Okay, you were here. Okay. Well, good to see you this morning.

A couple things going on today, and first, I want to welcome – we have a more packed room than usual – we have some very special guests here, and they are joining us from Iraq, ladies and gentlemen, sitting in the back of the room. They work for the Iraqi Government, and they've been here visiting the United States, learning more about journalism, but also the work of a spokesperson. And that's what they do for their government: work as spokespeople and media directors. Twelve of you are here. We'd like to thank you for coming to the United States. You've made a long trip, especially after a very difficult time and a hard-fought battle in Mosul. So we welcome you here. Thank you.

As part of their trip here, I want to mention that they were at the D-ISIS meetings that took place here at the State Department last week. Our Iraqi friends toured the Department of Defense's Defense Media Activity Center at Fort Meade, and yesterday they had some briefings here at the State Department. And they've done some press along the way, so perhaps you might pepper them with some questions so they can see what U.S. journalists are really like. But I ask you to be nice – be nice to our guests. They also did a joint press briefing with the coalition spokesperson, Colonel Ryan Dillon, and we are honored to have our Iraqi partners and friends here, especially so soon after that Mosul victory. So welcome to the State Department.

Second thing: I know that a lot of you have asked a lot of questions about Middle East peace and the State Department's cooperation and

coordination with the White House, specifically the President's Special Representative for International Negotiations Jason Greenblatt, and also Mr. Kushner. Yesterday, a team from here, myself included, we went over to the White House and sat down with Mr. Greenblatt and his team and learned a little bit more about what they are doing from our point of view and from their point of view. So we want to thank them for inviting us over to the White House for that meeting. He provided us with a short readout on the meeting that he held – the meetings that he held last week in Israel, so let me just go over a little bit of that with you.

Mr. Greenblatt continued efforts to advance President Trump's goal of a comprehensive Israeli-Palestinian peace deal. I don't have any additional travel to read out for you at this time, but Mr. Greenblatt provides – plans to provide regular visits to the region and coordinate with the Department of State and also the National Security Council. At the conclusion of Mr. Greenblatt's visit, it coincided with the terror attack that took place at Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif that left two Israeli police officers dead and one wounded, and that dominated the news cycle while he was there. The horrific attack should not detract from the push for peace, but rather remind us all that – more that – more so that there is a need for peace.

We can't let the actions of a few undermine the prospects for both Israelis and Palestinians to secure a more peaceful and prosperous future. To that end, last week, Mr. Greenblatt helped senior Israeli and Palestinian officials reach important agreements on key issues of water and electricity that will make the lives of both people materially better. We continue to urge the parties to undertake efforts to promote an environment that is conducive to advancing peace and that the two agreements are another indication that mutually beneficial arrangements can be made. We hope they're a harbinger of things to come and we'll keep you apprised of future progress and also travel for Mr. Kushner and Mr. Greenblatt.

And then finally, a third thing I'd like to bring to your attention: You may have seen what took place in Turkey in recent days, and the United States strongly condemns the arrest of six respected human rights activists and calls for their immediate release. This includes Amnesty International's director in Turkey, Idil Eser, and several foreign nationals. Prosecutions like these with little evidence or transparency undermine Turkey's rule of law and the country's obligations to respect individual rights. We urge Turkish authorities to drop the charges, release those who have been detained, and remove the provisions of the state of emergency that allow indiscriminate prosecution of individuals. So we will continue to keep an eye on that.

And with that, I'll take your questions. Matt, do you want to start?

QUESTION: Thanks. I'm sure we'll get back to Middle East and Turkey –

MS NAUERT: Yeah.

QUESTION: – but I want to start with Iran and the – yesterday's certification.

MS NAUERT: Okay, yes.

QUESTION: Can you put this into very plain English? Does the administration believe, yes or no, that Iran is complying with the terms of the JCPOA?

MS NAUERT: So we had sent the notes up to Congress certifying that Iran is in compliance with the JCPOA. However, the United States firmly believes that it is in violation of the spirit of the law^[1] with regard to an important part of it. And part of what the JCPOA agreement says is it's supposed to contribute to regional and international peace and security, and we believe that some of the actions that the Iranian Government has been involved with undermines that stated goal of regional and international peace and security.

Iran remains – and we all know this – one of the most dangerous threats to the United States – not only our interests here, around the world, but also to regional stability. And I've got a whole list of things that we can go over here that Iran is responsible for. Their full range of activities extend far beyond the nuclear threat, and I think we are all full aware of that: ballistic missile development and proliferation; support to terrorism and militancy; it's complicit in the Assad regime's atrocities against its own people; unrelenting hostility to Israel that continues and has continued for quite some time; they have consistently threatened freedom of navigation, especially in the Persian Gulf; cyberattacks on the United States, and I can go on. I mean, these are no surprise, and this is something that this administration wants to get Iran to try to adhere to the spirit of that agreement, the regional, international peace and security.

QUESTION: Okay. But the – when you said – I just want to clarify one thing you said – that the spirit – they're violating the spirit of the law first time, you mean agreement, not law?

MS NAUERT: The agreement, yes.

QUESTION: Okay. And then this is not related to that, but it's Iran. Is there any update on the Chinese American who was sentenced?

MS NAUERT: Yeah. Mr. Xiuye Wang. So we are aware of the reports that Mr. Xiuye Wang, a U.S. citizen, has been detained in Iran. For privacy reasons, we can't really get too much into the specific details of that case. As you all know, one of the things we consistently say here is that the safety and security of U.S. citizens remains a top priority for this administration, and I would think for all administrations here in the United States. We continue to use all means at our disposal to advocate for U.S. citizens who need our assistance overseas, especially for the release of any unjustly detained U.S. citizens who are held overseas.

Mr. Xiuye Wang is a United States citizen. We remain very concerned about his case, continue to keep an eye on that. As you all know, we don't have folks on the ground there; we work with the Swiss foreign interest section. They are considered to be our protecting power in Iran, and they have granted consular access to Mr. Wang. So we've regularly sought that consular access to him, and the Swiss have visited him now four times.

QUESTION: So do you know when you guys were informed of his arrest?

MS NAUERT: Yeah.

QUESTION: Because it's not – it's almost, I would say, rare for Iran to allow consular access, since they don't recognize dual citizens, usually when they're Iranian Americans. Is it your understanding that because he's Chinese American and not Iranian, that's why they're letting the Swiss –

MS NAUERT: My understanding is that he's American American. He's not a dual citizen of China and the United States.

QUESTION: Gotcha. All right.

MS NAUERT: He's an American.

QUESTION: And do you know when it was that you found out, were notified about his initial arrest?

MS NAUERT: I can check into that for you. I don't have an exact date in front of me.

QUESTION: Great. Thanks.

MS NAUERT: Anything else on Iran? Hi, Carol.

QUESTION: Can we go to where you started?

QUESTION: About the prisoners. In the statement this morning, you said – you specifically mentioned Mr. Wang, the Namazis, you said, and all other U.S. citizens who are detained wrongfully in Iran. Could you tell the American people how many other U.S. citizens are detained, beyond those three?

MS NAUERT: I can't at this time. The United States cautions American citizens against travel there. There are certain nations where if an individual is a dual nationality, dual citizenship, that Iran does not – like other countries sometimes does not – acknowledge that and accept that somebody is a dual national. They think of them as a full national of their country. We caution people to avoid that country and for the obvious reasons.

QUESTION: Well, why won't you give a number? I understand you can't, for privacy reasons, give names. But why can't you give a number, or a rough

number? More than a dozen?

MS NAUERT: I wouldn't give any kind of an estimate at all. If I have something specific for you that I can give to you, I certainly will.

QUESTION: Heather?

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

MS NAUERT: Thanks. Let's stay on Iran.

QUESTION: Iran.

MS NAUERT: Okay. Hi, Said.

QUESTION: Can we go to where you started?

MS NAUERT: One second. Pardon me?

QUESTION: Can we go where you started, on the Middle East peace topic?

MS NAUERT: Let's come back to that. Let's stick with Iran first, please. Hi.

QUESTION: (Inaudible.) So can you say – you certified the compliance last night, but did the administration also sign a round of sanction waivers to keep the deal in place as well?

MS NAUERT: Yes. So sanction waivers – there are some that are in place right now. I can definitely confirm that.

QUESTION: So was there a signing last night though? I know there's a deadline, I think, today.

MS NAUERT: Well, we were – we are in compliance with our end of the deal. We had until I believe it was midnight to certify that and then provide the information to Capitol Hill, and that was all done.

QUESTION: Okay. And the last time the Secretary signed a round of sanction waivers he said that the administration was beginning a 90-day review of all Iran policy. That would be ending today. Is that review ongoing? Has the deadline been pushed back?

MS NAUERT: The overall review – like we have a lot of policy reviews, on Afghanistan for example, Pakistan for example – Iran is one of them where we have an ongoing policy review that is taking place. We believe that while they – while Iran is in compliance with the JCPOA, that there are still a lot of things that Iran is doing that is very troubling to this administration. And so we're going to try to push on that – on the Iranian regime to stop its destabilizing activities.

QUESTION: One last question. When the Secretary signed the certification last time, he also said that – he criticized the deal, saying that it kicked the can down the road of a non-nuclear Iran. So is it the

position of the administration then that Iran should never be allowed to have any nuclear energy whatsoever?

MS NAUERT: I think nuclear energy and nuclear weapons are different matters. I'm not an expert in that area in particular, but they are separate matters.

QUESTION: So you would accept a nuclear-powered Iran, but not one that had a –

MS NAUERT: I'm not going to get ahead of what the policy review is going to contain; that has people at the White House and people here at the State Department and others all involved in that. So I just don't want to get ahead of anything that they're going to do.

QUESTION: China?

MS NAUERT: Anything else on Iran?

QUESTION: (Inaudible) Iran?

MS NAUERT: Yeah. Hi.

QUESTION: When it comes to the Secretary's engagement with European partners who are also part of the JCPOA, the administration was talking about how it wanted to get stronger enforcement and perhaps, in a sense, almost an addendum to the current agreement when it came to some of the sunsets. Does the administration believe it has willing partners in European allies? I mean, they've got some businesses who are doing business in Iran right now and it's profitable. Has the administration or the Secretary gotten pushback? And what have his engagements been like on that front?

MS NAUERT: It's interesting, because some would think that our European allies and our partners and our friends would only be interested in adhering to the JCPOA, but that's not our experience at all. Our experience is that they remain just as concerned, as the United States does, about the destabilizing activities that Iran remains involved with, whether it's supporting terrorism or other things as well. So this does not just affect the United States and the United States interests, but it affects other countries as well.

QUESTION: And a willingness to go further, as the U.S. has laid out?

MS NAUERT: I'm not going to get into commenting on what other countries are going to do. But I know we have those conversations and those conversations are ongoing.

QUESTION: Thanks.

MS NAUERT: Hi, Michele.

QUESTION: Around about noon yesterday the President was seriously

considering not certifying this. Shortly after that, he met with the Secretary.

MS NAUERT: I wouldn't characterize it that way. There were meetings underway at the White House yesterday. And those meetings took place for a period of time, and the Secretary and the President and everyone else had conversations. And we ultimately ended up sending the letters up to the Hill and informing the Hill that Iran was in compliance.

QUESTION: Did Secretary Tillerson need to convince the President and spell this out and –

MS NAUERT: I wouldn't put it that way at all. I mean, they had a series of conversations, as they have about a lot of other issues.

QUESTION: Did he make that argument though? Was that part of what he wanted to do while he was there at the White House?

MS NAUERT: I think the Secretary and the President are in line with one another.

Okay. Anything else on Iran?

QUESTION: Syria?

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

MS NAUERT: Anything else on Iran? Okay. We're done with Iran. Okay. You want to go to –

QUESTION: Okay. Thank you. Thank you, Heather.

MS NAUERT: – Middle East peace. Let's see what we can do to solve it, huh?

QUESTION: Yeah, exactly. So this – is this your first time meeting with Mr. Greenblatt on this very issue?

MS NAUERT: Myself, personally.

QUESTION: No, I mean from the department.

MS NAUERT: No. No, I know other people from the State Department have had a series of conversations with him and discussions with him. He has been in meetings in Israel with our ambassador there and others as well. So there are a whole lots – lot of those conversations and dialogues taking place. It was just my first time having the opportunity to go over there and hear firsthand about some of the activities.

QUESTION: Okay. So are we likely to see a more active State Department in the Middle East peace process, as we have seen in the past?

MS NAUERT: Well, the State Department has been active. We've been accompanying Mr. Greenblatt and also Mr. Kushner on a lot of these

trips. We help facilitate that. We help provide some additional expertise and backup. And they're very generous. They like to work with us; we like to work with them. And he's extremely hospitable, so he invited our team over and we just went over to say hi and learn more about what he's going to be doing.

QUESTION: Okay. I have just a couple more.

MS NAUERT: Yes.

QUESTION: Yesterday, the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told the French president that he's skeptical about the Trump administration peace efforts and peace process. Do you have any comment on that? He does not – I mean, it is not like that kind of engagement from the administration.

MS NAUERT: I'm not aware of the prime minister's comments. This is the first I'm hearing of them. But I know that we have a very good relationship with Prime Minister Netanyahu, and we have – this administration has talked a lot about the importance of promoting peace between the Israelis and the Palestinians.

QUESTION: And finally, I want to ask you about al-Aqsa closure, if you have any comment on that, because this is a clash – a flash point. It's a very volatile situation and so on. Are you calling on the Israelis to sort of stand down with the measures that they have taken such as the metal detectors and the closing off the area for Palestinian prayers and Muslim prayers?

MS NAUERT: I think first what I would want to say about that is the White House had issued a statement on that very matter that you are addressing.

QUESTION: Yes.

MS NAUERT: And we continue to condemn terror attacks that take place on individuals.

QUESTION: Right.

MS NAUERT: That occurred on Friday. That occurred at the end of – let me finish here. That occurred at the end of Mr. Greenblatt's meetings. Always – I want to say this – when these types of events occur, we want to express our condolences to the families of those who have been affected. Hold on, Said. I'm not done yet.

Zero tolerance for terrorism. And that is something that we believe very strongly in. We would urge all sides to take steps to reduce tensions. We support the maintenance of the status quo and expect both sides to fulfill their commitments to that.

QUESTION: But I just want to remind you that the attackers are Israeli citizens. They come from a town up north. They came all the way down to

Jerusalem to assault the –

MS NAUERT: We are promoting – Said, we –

QUESTION: Why punish the Jerusalemites? Why are they being punished?

MS NAUERT: We are promoting peace. And that's something that is one of the top issues for this administration, and we'll continue to talk about that. And things like this, when they happen, it has the ability, it has the ability, to de-escalate – or excuse me, has the ability to put things on a bad path. So we would encourage that to certainly not happen. Okay?

QUESTION: Two –

QUESTION: Just a follow-up on that?

MS NAUERT: Go ahead.

QUESTION: Two brief things on this. One, you said you support the maintenance of the status quo. Do you believe that the status quo is being maintained? Or has – have the Israelis, in putting the metal detectors up, changed the status quo?

MS NAUERT: We have – we have been clear with the Israelis in our conversations about this, and I just don't want to get into any possible diplomatic conversations.

QUESTION: Right. But do you – but forget about a conversation. Does the administration think that the status quo is being maintained right now?

MS NAUERT: The Israeli Government has pledged that they will maintain the status quo, and we would hope and expect them to do that.

QUESTION: But are they?

MS NAUERT: Again –

QUESTION: Do you think – what's your – I mean, you look at the situation. Can you say that the status quo is being maintained? Because the Jordanians, who are in charge of the – that – for the area are very concerned that the status quo isn't being maintained.

MS NAUERT: Okay.

QUESTION: So what's – can we get an answer for that?

MS NAUERT: I am not aware of the Secretary having spoken with the Jordanians about this matter in particular. They were just in town last week, as you all know.

QUESTION: Right.

MS NAUERT: But if I have anything more for you, I can get back to you on

that.

QUESTION: Okay. And then the last thing is did you ever get an answer to the question I had the other week about whether this administration draws a difference between housing that's built in East Jerusalem for Israelis as opposed to West Bank? Do you consider East Jerusalem housing to be settlements?

MS NAUERT: I'm not sure that I do. You know what? I don't think I do, but let me look into that for you. Okay?

QUESTION: All right, thanks.

MS NAUERT: Okay. Any – pardon.

QUESTION: You might want to know that 600 more or 700 more housing units were declared today. I wonder if you have a statement on that.

MS NAUERT: I do not. Not on that today. Thank you. Hi.

QUESTION: Thank you.

MS NAUERT: Hi, Janne.

QUESTION: Hi, nice meeting you. (Laughter.) Okay, on South Korea, two questions for the South Korea.

MS NAUERT: Okay.

QUESTION: Recently, South Korean Government proposed military talks with North Korea. Can you confirm that the South Korean Government informed the U.S. in advance this issue?

MS NAUERT: So, I can't confirm any diplomatic conversations that took place on that matter. As you know, we had a terrific visit from President Moon not long ago who visited with our President, and also Secretary Tillerson was able to sit down with his counterpart here. We had a terrific meeting with them. They are an important partner with the United States, and that continues to be the case.

In terms of the proposal that you just mentioned, I would have to refer you back to the Government of the Republic of Korea. But overall, I would say we share the very same goal, and that is a denuclearized Korean Peninsula. We've both remained very concerned about the activities of the DPRK, the launching of the intercontinental ballistic missile, for example, and we want to see a complete and verifiable, irreversible denuclearization of the peninsula.

Okay, yes.

QUESTION: One more on the FTA issues. Regarding in the FTA renegotiations that the U.S. wants from South Korea, does it mean a revision negotiation or full renegotiations?

MS NAUERT: Does it mean food negotiations?

QUESTION: Yeah. Or revisit.

MS NAUERT: Let me look into that. I don't have anything for you that's recent on that, but let me check. Okay?

QUESTION: All right. Thank you.

MS NAUERT: Mike. Right? Mike?

QUESTION: I have one more on North Korea.

MS NAUERT: Right?

QUESTION: Yes.

MS NAUERT: Right. Hi.

QUESTION: Hi, nice to –

MS NAUERT: We haven't met before, but yes.

QUESTION: Michael Lavers from the *Washington Blade*.

MS NAUERT: Yes, yes. Good to see you.

QUESTION: I'm wondering if you have any comment on the most recent comments that the president of Chechnya made about the ongoing crackdown against gays and lesbians in Chechnya?

And then, second, as a follow-up to that, can you explain why the Secretary has not publicly commented on this situation as of yet? I know the State Department has, but not the Secretary specifically. Any reason why?

MS NAUERT: So first, let me say we are certainly aware of those comments that were made. Those comments on the part of the Chechen president were very concerning and also upsetting to us. The United States and we here at the State Department have spoken a lot about concerns about the treatment of LGBTI people in Chechnya. Some, as the person you had mentioned, went so far as to – well, I'm not even going to – I'm not going to repeat some of the things that he said because it was so horrific.

We have called on Russia to hold a federal investigation into that matter, and we have those conversations at the highest levels. Human rights is something that's very important to us. We continue to speak about that from this position here at the podium, and part of my job is speaking on behalf of Secretary Tillerson and speaking on behalf of this department, and let me just reassure you that that is something that's very important to us.

QUESTION: Thanks.

QUESTION: China?

QUESTION: Russia?

MS NAUERT: Thank you. Hi.

QUESTION: Okay, thanks. So the meeting yesterday, afterwards we're still hearing Russia making the threats about retaliation. Does the State Department feel that that's imminent now that there isn't a deal on these properties?

MS NAUERT: Well, these deals, so to speak, are going to take some time. The under secretary, Tom Shannon, had the meeting yesterday – it went on for quite some time – with Mr. Ryabkov. We were happy to have him come here to Washington to sit down with us to talk about those – some of those so-called irritants.

The conversation – we put out a readout this morning – was what – one that we considered – and this is what Mr. Shannon said himself – is that it was a forthright, tough, and deliberate conversation that reflected concerns on both of our parts, but also our commitment to a resolution.

So nothing is coming together anytime soon. I don't have a timeline for you or anything, but those conversations will be continuing.

QUESTION: Well, so are you calling their bluff, in essence? They've been threatening to do the same to the U.S. for months?

MS NAUERT: It's a hypothetical. I know that they have threatened a lot of things, and so I'm just not going to get into the various threats that people from around the world make.

QUESTION: So to wrap this up, how would you characterize the Secretary's feeling on these properties? Is he – he's open to giving them back with some conditions, or how would you describe it?

MS NAUERT: I wouldn't characterize it that way, and –

QUESTION: Okay.

MS NAUERT: And look, one of the priorities here is – or the priority here is to get the United States and Russia to a place where they can have a good, decent, solid relationship so we can work together on areas of mutual cooperation, areas that are mutually important to both of our countries. One of them is Syria, for example, in that particular area in the southwest where there has been the ceasefire. That's a smaller area of mutual cooperation. From that, we can build upon that and start to work toward other goals on other matters.

These conversations between Mr. Shannon and Mr. Ryabkov will continue. We've got a lot of stuff to talk about with that government, and so that'll continue.

QUESTION: So did the U.S. present conditions?

MS NAUERT: I can't get into the – all the details about what went on in that conversation, but I can say we're continuing those conversations.

QUESTION: But just to be clear, is the Secretary open to giving them back?

MS NAUERT: That I don't know. There are a lot of meetings that are taking place and those meetings will continue. We're just not sure.

QUESTION: Thanks.

QUESTION: So a growing number of lawmakers are saying that the administration should not return these properties, at least until the investigation into the meddling in the presidential election is completed. There are some members of Congress who are calling for even more punitive measures to be enacted. So I'm just wondering, is that something – is that advice that you guys are willing to take on, or do you see that there is a possibility of this specific issue of these two properties being returned before there is a conclusion to the investigation?

MS NAUERT: In terms of a timeline, I'm just not aware of any kind of specific timeline that we have. We don't, in fact, have any kind of timeline. I know that members of Congress have sent letters to the Secretary and other people here in this building, and so we just gather those letters, take a look at them, and that's then between the Secretary and those members of Congress.

QUESTION: But you don't know if he has a position that is the same as those members of Congress? In other words, you don't know if he is saying yes, a resolution ultimately will involve the Russians getting back the properties, but that's not going to happen until –

MS NAUERT: As you know, we have hundreds of members of Congress who all have very different opinions on subject matters.

QUESTION: I don't know of any member of Congress who's actually saying give them back right now. Are they?

MS NAUERT: Well, my point is a lot of members of Congress all have different opinions, and so I'm not going to say that the Secretary shares the opinion of any one over the other.

QUESTION: Well, forget about, then, opinion. How about – the question then would be: Does the Secretary think that it would be inappropriate to return these two properties before the investigation into the election interference is over?

MS NAUERT: Again, that's something that is in part taking place on Capitol Hill. I think the Secretary is stepping back and taking a look at this issue separately. One of the bigger overarching issues is we

need to be able to get our relationship on a better path. As the Secretary talked about, it's at a low point.

QUESTION: Last one: Do you know, have the Russians asked to go and visit or take a look at their properties to see –

MS NAUERT: Because it's nice out, they want to get outside, they want to get out of D.C. and New York?

QUESTION: Syria?

QUESTION: Well, I don't know. I was going to ask you to a briefing out there. I'm just wondering, have they asked to inspect these properties?

MS NAUERT: Not that I'm aware of. Not that I'm aware of.

QUESTION: But if we could –

QUESTION: Syria?

QUESTION: – if I could clarify this, please, the administration – the White House made an argument only days ago for why they're open to giving these properties back. They laid out this argument. So by not going back to that argument, are you saying that the Secretary isn't aligned –

MS NAUERT: I think our goal – and as you all can understand, diplomatic conversations can be sensitive matters, and sometimes I'm not able to give you and other people in the building aren't able to give you all the details and information that you want. We want to preserve the ability to go back and speak with the Russians and do what we need to do to get our relationship on a better track, and part of that means looking for additional areas of cooperation. Part of that means trying to smooth out the differences in terms of some of the so-called irritants that we have with other nations.

QUESTION: But does the – so is the Secretary in agreement with the White House on that argument or not?

MS NAUERT: Michele, I think I've covered it, so let me just leave it there, okay? Okay. Okay.

QUESTION: Can we go to Syria?

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

MS NAUERT: Hi. Hi.

QUESTION: On Ukraine.

MS NAUERT: Okay.

QUESTION: Russian-backed rebels in east Ukraine have proclaimed the creation of a new state, and I'm not going to attempt to say it, but

"Little Russia," translated. Could you comment?

MS NAUERT: So here's what we had heard: that the so-called separatists – and notice I call them "so-called separatists" – want to see a new state. That new state would be in place of Ukraine. That is something that's certainly an area of concern to us, but I just don't – beyond that, I don't want to dignify it with a response.

QUESTION: Syria? Can we go to Syria?

QUESTION: And so, but you're not dismissing it out of hand? You don't think that that's a good idea.

MS NAUERT: Pardon? I –

QUESTION: What if they wanted to call it, say, Centerville?

MS NAUERT: (Laughter.) I mean –

QUESTION: Can we go to China?

QUESTION: Syria?

QUESTION: Can we go back to (inaudible) just for a second?

MS NAUERT: Yes. Hi, Dmitri.

QUESTION: Just for a second longer. It's a slightly different subject.

MS NAUERT: Dmitri wants to know about Russia. Welcome back, Dmitri.

QUESTION: Thank you. I wanted to ask you something about your guidance, your readout of the meeting.

MS NAUERT: Okay.

QUESTION: Why was it necessary to mention the – their intent to convene a new bilateral consultative commission on the New START? Up until very recently, both sides were stressing that the implementation of the New START was going on perfectly or very well despite all the differences and whatnot. Has any new problems arisen? Why was it necessary – why is it necessary to convene a commission? That's part one.

And part two –

MS NAUERT: Okay, let me answer your first question first –

QUESTION: Okay.

MS NAUERT: – because I'm not so good with multiple five-part questions here. So in terms of that, I know that Mr. Under Secretary Shannon looks forward to speaking with his Russian counterparts on possible areas of interest in other meetings coming up. I don't have any specific meetings or dates or anything to announce at that time, but that's one area where

they could come up with additional talks to have.

Okay, second part.

QUESTION: Okay, and the other part was the strategic stability talks. That dialogue took place –

MS NAUERT: That would be – I would give you the same answer on that. I don't have any specific meetings or dates or anything to provide you at that time, but we're just going to keep an eye on that, and that's something that I know we're willing to have conversations about.

QUESTION: Is it like – is it on a regular basis or –

MS NAUERT: That I can't comment on. I don't want to get ahead of any possible conversations.

QUESTION: Can you take one on China/India?

MS NAUERT: Okay. Okay.

QUESTION: Syria?

MS NAUERT: Yes, sir. Hi, sir.

QUESTION: Syria?

QUESTION: Thank you so much.

MS NAUERT: Tell me your name again?

QUESTION: Ali.

MS NAUERT: Ali, right. Sorry, thanks.

QUESTION: Ali from ARY News TV. The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom expressed grave concern on the situation of religious freedom and human rights in India, and especially about the killing of minorities for eating beef and Indian forces' brutalities in held Kashmir. So they wanted to go to India, the U.S. commission – a panel of U.S. commission – but the Indian High Commission here denied their visa and said they wouldn't – they won't allow U.S. commission to go to India to monitor the actual situation there. So do you have anything to say on that?

MS NAUERT: I'm not aware of the specific subject that you are bringing out – up about people getting in trouble for eating beef, so let me look into that and get back to you.

QUESTION: I sent this question to your press team like day before yesterday.

MS NAUERT: Oh, perhaps you did. Okay.

QUESTION: Yeah.

MS NAUERT: That doesn't necessarily mean that I see everything that comes into our press team.

QUESTION: I have one more question about –

MS NAUERT: Okay, last question. Go right ahead.

QUESTION: I have one more question. Thank you so much. There are so – many media reports in Pakistan about Dr. Afridi, the release of Dr. Afridi. So what kind of efforts and what kind of discussion with the Pakistan –

MS NAUERT: I haven't had that conversation recently with the people who – our people here internally who have handled Pakistan. I'm certainly aware and familiar with Dr. Afridi's case, and if we have anything new to bring you, I will certainly bring that to you, okay?

QUESTION: Thank you very much.

MS NAUERT: Okay, okay.

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

QUESTION: Yemen?

MS NAUERT: Go ahead.

QUESTION: Israel?

QUESTION: Can we stay on India?

QUESTION: Yemen?

MS NAUERT: Hold on. I'm sorry.

QUESTION: Can we stay on India?

MS NAUERT: Yes, hi.

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

MS NAUERT: Yes.

QUESTION: Hi. Yulia Olhovskaya, Channel One Russia. Can I go back for one second to yesterday meeting of Ryabkov and Shannon? Do the U.S. have any conditions for return diplomatic property? (Inaudible.)

MS NAUERT: I think I've covered this. We've talked a lot about that and we have a lot of other people here with questions about the region, so let me just leave it at that. I know that Mr. Shannon looks forward to continuing those conversations.

QUESTION: Syria?

MS NAUERT: Okay. Sir, hi.

QUESTION: Yemen?

MS NAUERT: With the beard.

QUESTION: Thank you.

MS NAUERT: Hi, how are you? What's your name?

QUESTION: My name is Grigory Dubovitsky. I'm from Russian news agency RIA Novosti.

MS NAUERT: How – wait, let's just do a show of hands here. How many folks do we have from Russian media?

QUESTION: I guess three.

MS NAUERT: One, two, three. Okay, got it. All right.

QUESTION: So the a question about Syria.

MS NAUERT: See? Freedom of the press. (Laughter.) It's a good thing, isn't it?

QUESTION: Yes, it is.

QUESTION: Yes.

MS NAUERT: We love that. So welcome.

QUESTION: Okay. So my question is about Syria, that Mr. Ryabkov confirmed us that Russia and the United States may hold talks on a second ceasefires agreement for Syria.

MS NAUERT: I'm sorry, say that again.

QUESTION: Mr. Ryabkov said that Russia and the United States may hold talks on a second ceasefire agreement for Syria, so can you confirm it and provide more details if you have?

MS NAUERT: I can't – I cannot confirm that that is something that's a discussion that is underway. I know one of the priorities for the U.S. Government, in addition to coalition partners in Syria, is trying to obtain ceasefires and trying to get stability in the region, in certain parts of it where we think that that can take hold. Part of the reason we want to do that is to be able to get humanitarian assistance in that is so desperately needed by folks there. So we are working to do that. We are pleased so far with how the ceasefire has been working in southwestern Syria, and at some point hope, if and when the time is right, that that's something that could potentially expand elsewhere. Okay? Okay.

QUESTION: Follow-up on Syria.

MS NAUERT: Yeah. Hi, sir.

QUESTION: Yemen?

MS NAUERT: Yes?

QUESTION: Thank you.

MS NAUERT: Tell me your name, please?

QUESTION: Jafar Jafari with Al Mayadeen TV. I'm not with the Russian –

MS NAUERT: (Laughter.) You're from India, sir? You're from India? Yes, thank you.

QUESTION: A UN jet was carrying a team of journalists into Yemen, and they were prevented from entry by the Saudi coalition.

MS NAUERT: I'm sorry, who was bringing journalists into Yemen?

QUESTION: United Nations.

MS NAUERT: The UN was, okay.

QUESTION: Yes. The journalists were – they couldn't enter. Does the U.S. have a policy of denying journalists access to troubled areas?

MS NAUERT: Certainly – as a general matter, certainly not. We –

QUESTION: Well, in this particular case.

MS NAUERT: The United States is incredibly open –

QUESTION: Right.

MS NAUERT: – to the media. As you know, we've had media embed with our U.S. forces around the globe, in other places. I'm not familiar with the particular example that you brought up. I don't know if these were U.S. reporters going into Yemen. That would be the Government of Yemen's decision, I would think, whether or not to allow certain people in. But I'm just – I'm just not aware of that, so I don't want to comment on that particular question, because I just don't have all the details. Okay, thank you, sir.

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

MS NAUERT: Sir.

QUESTION: Syria? Syria?

QUESTION: Do you have any comment on the – just the general situation in Yemen right now, particularly as it relates to cholera and famine?

MS NAUERT: Yeah. Goodness, we announced quite a bit of money that went out from USAID to Yemen to help with cholera and also food scarcity of resources, and that's been another major concern of ours. I don't have the cholera numbers in front of me, but there have been far too many deaths as a result of cholera. One of the problems in a country like Yemen is not so much where they don't have food, but rather it's because so much of that food and aid is prevented from getting to the people there because of the fighting on the ground. So one of the things that we do is we try to push for greater access to be able to get the Yemeni people the food that they – the food and supplies and healthcare that they need. And that would also include clean water, and that's – kind of loops in cholera, but I can get – try to get you the latest numbers on those – on those unfortunate deaths if you'd like.

QUESTION: Thanks.

QUESTION: Can we go to Syria, please?

QUESTION: India?

QUESTION: Syria, please?

MS NAUERT: Okay, okay. I'm going to have to do last question.

QUESTION: (Inaudible.)

MS NAUERT: We got a lot of India questions today.

QUESTION: Thank you.

MS NAUERT: Okay.

QUESTION: I am the first person who met you and gave you my card when you came and sat there as an observer.

MS NAUERT: Thank you.

QUESTION: Okay. And the – China yesterday briefed a lot of diplomats about the condition – the border conditions with India, and including the U.S. diplomat. What did they share with you, if you can say, or what is the U.S. position now on the tense situation on the border between India and China? Thank you.

MS NAUERT: Yeah. I know that that – thank you for your question and thank you for your kind welcome when I first came on board here. I know that the United States is concerned about the ongoing situation there. I know we believe that both parties, both sides should work together to try to come up with some better sort of arrangement for peace. And I'll just leave it at that right now.

We got to go, guys. Thank you so much. Please take a moment to welcome our Iraqi friends. Ladies and gentlemen, thank you so much for coming to the United States. (Applause.) And my step mom is here in the audience,

so lots of friends here.

QUESTION: Thank you.

MS NAUERT: Thank you, everybody.

(The briefing was concluded at 3:05 p.m.)

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[\[1\]](#) agreement

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Press Releases: U.S.-Japan-Republic of Korea Trilateral Policy Planning Dialogue

Media Note
Office of the Spokesperson

Washington, DC
July 18, 2017

Senior Policy Advisor to the Secretary of State and Director of Policy Planning Brian Hook will hold a trilateral meeting with Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs Deputy Minister for Foreign Policy Satoshi Suzuki and Republic of Korea (ROK) Ministry of Foreign Affairs Director General of the Policy Planning Bureau Ma Sang-Yoon in Washington, D.C. on July 19.

The three plan to exchange views and coordinate policy on a wide range of issues, including the evolving situation in North Korea.

Mr. Hook will also hold bilateral meetings with his Japanese and ROK counterparts while they are in Washington.

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Press Releases: Anniversary of the Argentine Israelite Mutual Association Bombing

Press Statement
Heather Nauert

Department Spokesperson

Washington, DC
July 18, 2017

The United States shares the sorrow of the families of those who perished in the bombing of the Argentine Israelite Mutual Association (AMIA) building in 1994. For the past 23 years, we have joined the Argentine government and victims of this terrorist attack in seeking justice. We continue to believe that the Iranian government has a responsibility to cooperate fully with Argentine authorities in bringing the perpetrators to justice. On this occasion, we also reflect upon the significant contributions of prosecutor Alberto Nisman in investigating the AMIA bombing, and note the importance of clarifying the circumstances of his tragic death. On this day, as has been the case in the many years since the bombing, we remain united with the people of Argentina in the search for justice.

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