

Press Releases: Previewing Secretary Pompeo's Remarks on Iran at the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library

Special Briefing
Senior State Department Official
Via Teleconference
July 19, 2018

MODERATOR: Thank you, and good afternoon, everyone. Thank you for joining today's call. We're pleased to have a senior State Department official here today to preview Secretary Pompeo's remarks on Iran at the Reagan – Ronald Reagan Presidential Library this Sunday. For your reference purposes only and not for reporting, we are pleased to welcome [Senior State Department Official]. From this point on, he will be referred to as a senior State Department official. He will have some brief remarks at the top, and then we'll be happy to take some questions. Just as a reminder, this call is embargoed until the conclusion of the call.

So with that, let's get started. And I'll turn it over to our senior State Department official.

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: Hi. Thanks very much for joining the call. The Secretary will be giving a speech at the Reagan Library on July 22nd, titled – the remarks are titled "Supporting Iranian Voices." He will be joined at the event by some members of Congress, including the House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Ed Royce and Senator Tom Cotton. They'll be – plus there'll be some other members of Congress who will be joining.

The Secretary in his speech in May, on May 22nd, where he unveiled the administration's new Iran strategy, made a number of remarks addressed to the Iranian people. And he now is continuing that conversation by now addressing Iranian – the Iranian diaspora in the United States. Southern California is home to around 250,000 Iranian Americans.

And in his remarks – I'll just highlight a couple of things – he will be reflecting on that we are approaching the 40th anniversary of the Islamic Revolution. The Iranian regime is the last revolutionary regime on Earth, and it exports its revolution around the Middle East. And he will talk about – survey the last 40 years of stealing from the Iranian people, the terrorism they have committed around the region, the brutal repression at home. He will be exposing some of the corruption of the regime. He'll be highlighting religious persecution.

As you know, the State Department's hosting the first-ever ministerial on religious freedom, and he'll be talking about the persecution of religious groups in Iran. He'll be supporting the legitimate demands of the Iranian people, especially their economic demands for a better life. He will be talking about – giving an update on our campaign of maximum economic pressure and diplomatic isolation. In terms of the Iranian diaspora, the Secretary very much wants the Iranian people to enjoy the same quality of life that Iranians in America enjoy.

And so those are some of the highlights of his remarks, and I'm happy to take some questions.

MODERATOR: All right. Thank you very much. We'll now go to our first question.

OPERATOR: (Inaudible) the line of Barbara Usher of BBC. Your line is open.

QUESTION: Hi, [Senior State Department Official]. I have two questions. The first one's a bit brief. Is MEK invited to the speech?

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: I'm not – I don't know the answer to that. I don't believe that they are.

MODERATOR: Okay. We'll go to the next question.

OPERATOR: We have Robin Wright of *The New Yorker*. Your line is open.

QUESTION: Hi, [Senior State Department Official], thank you for doing this. Two things. First of all, when you talk about the United States supporting protest, does this mean that the U.S. is supporting regime change – a question that keeps coming up? The administration keeps saying no, it's just changing behavior, but the type of demands being made are so sweeping that it could be easily translated as regime change.

And secondly, can you talk a little bit about Helsinki and what happened on the issue of Iran when it comes to Syria, what kind of agreement or discussion President Trump had with President Putin about ensuring that Iran is not near Israel's border, that it's being contained? And did you get anything tangible out of it?

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: Thanks for the question – the two questions. On the first one, if you look at the list of 12 demands that Secretary Pompeo laid out in his speech in May, these list of 12 demands were the global consensus prior to the Iran nuclear deal, and nobody at the time thought that those 12 demands were a proxy for regime change. The length of the list of the 12 – these are very basic requirements that we would ask any normal country to follow, and the length of the list is simply a scope of the malign behavior of Iran.

This has not – this list of 12 is not a list that we created. It's a list that Iran created. We are responding to this. Just because we are sort of properly tallying the inventory, the broad inventory of Iran's threats – which is nuclear, it's terrorism, it's missiles, it's human rights abuses,

it's the detention of foreigners arbitrarily – the simple inventory of them and demanding that Iran behave like a normal regime is not a proxy for regime change. We think these are all – if you look at them one by one on the 12, and I encourage everybody to do that, these are all very basic requirements that should be expected of a nation. And so we are seeking a change in the regime's behavior.

In terms of Helsinki, the only thing there to say is that we – the United States is still committed to denying Iran influence in Syria, to deepening its penetration in Syria. We cannot see – we cannot allow the Lebanonization of Syria to take place. And so our policy is to push back on Iran and to deny them that kind of influence.

OPERATOR: Next we'll go to the line of Nick Wadhams of Bloomberg. Your line is open.

QUESTION: Hi, [Senior State Department Official]. Thanks very much.

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: Hey, Nick.

QUESTION: Why is the Secretary doing this specifically about Iran? I mean, there are many countries, for example, where – whose people don't enjoy economic freedom or religious freedom or where the U.S. disagrees with those governments, yet the Secretary is going out of his way in this particular case to focus on Iran. Why is that?

And can you say whether there's any indication that the administration would consider lifting the travel ban on Iran, an issue that's obviously been protested quite vehemently by many Iranian Americans? Thanks.

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: Well, I think on the first question we have just a very large and active Iranian diaspora in the United States. They've been here – many of them have been here since the time of the Islamic Revolution. There is an enormous disparity in the kind of life they live here and then, if you look at Iran, the kind of just brutal, brutal violence and repression that the citizens of Iran have been on the receiving end of for so many decades now.

And I've seen this across many administrations trying to reach out to the Iranian diaspora and to – many Iranian Americans very much want a better way of life for Iranians in Iran. And so this is something which I've seen across administrations, and it's important for us to stay connected not only to the diaspora here in the United States, but I think the Secretary will continue meeting with and giving speeches to the Iranian diaspora in different regions of the world.

On the second question, which I think was about the travel ban, our support for the Iranian people and their ability to exercise their rights to free speech and peaceful protest is a fundamentally separate issue from implementing 9645. As you know, it imposes visa restrictions on nationals from Iran and six other countries. Iran regularly fails to cooperate with the United States in identifying security risks. It's the source of significant

terror threats, a state sponsor of terrorism. They don't – they fail to receive its nationals subject to final orders of removal from the United States.

And so the visa restrictions that we put in place were a result of the Iranian Government's failure to comply with the kind of information-sharing criteria that we look for and also the national security and the public safety risk factors. I will point out that the travel restrictions don't apply to student visas.

The Iranian people – you've seen the protests. They are protesting against inflation, unemployment, the deep corruption of the state, the government's support for terrorism. We support their desire to have their voices heard, and we very much look forward to the day when the Iranian regime can comply with national security and public safety criteria. And at that time, we'll be able to reassess this restriction and look for ways to support legitimate travel to the United States.

And I think that was made clear in Secretary Pompeo's speech back in May, that this is not – this strategy is not all sticks. We have presented a very positive vision for the future of U.S.-Iranian relations, and this is something – it's a choice that the regime needs to make. But we have put on the table the possibility of a treaty relationship with the United States if Iran decides to change its behavior and to start behaving like a normal country.

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

OPERATOR: We have Carol Morello with *The Washington Post*. Your line is open.

QUESTION: Thank you. Hi, [Senior State Department Official].

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: Hi, Carol.

QUESTION: You mentioned that the Secretary would be exposing the corruption of the regime. That verb seems to suggest that you have some new material that has not been made public. I was hoping you could talk about that. And also, do you expect the Secretary to talk about all – at all about the documents that the Mossad got out of Iran and go into them in any detail? And at this point, how much credence do you put in them?

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: How much credence do we put into the documents from the atomic archive that the Israelis took out?

QUESTION: Yeah, mm-hmm.

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: Well, on the first question, we know ourselves and we know from what we hear from the people protesting in Iran is that the regime has prioritized its ideological agenda over the welfare of the Iranian people. That has put Iran into an economic tailspin. You look at how during the time of the JCPOA their increased oil revenues could have gone to improving the lives of the Iranian people, and instead they went to terrorists and dictators and proxy militias around the Middle East. And what

we see in Iran – this is a country that has enormous wealth and the Iranian regime lines its own pockets while its citizens are demanding better jobs and economic reforms and more opportunity. And so the Secretary will be highlighting specific examples of regime elites who – and to call out their corruption. And I don't want to say much more beyond that since he will be doing it himself.

On the second question, we believe that the documents that were obtained by the Israelis in their – when they were able to locate and secure and take out of the country this vast atomic archive, which I believe is about a half a ton of documents, are authentic, and those continue to be studied.

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

OPERATOR: Francesco Fontemaggi of AFP. Your line is open.

QUESTION: Hi, [Senior State Department Official]. Thanks for doing this. President Trump stated several times in recent days that Iran is a different place since he withdrew from the JCPOA, that it's no longer looking at the Mediterranean and the Middle East. Can you say on what grounds he says that? What explains what he's saying? And also, he said that Iran is in turmoil. Can you tell us what is the U.S. assessment of the internal domestic situation in Iran? Do you think that those protests can go further and maybe top the regime at some point?

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: Can you just give me that first question one more time? I got the second one. I didn't understand your first one.

QUESTION: Yeah. The President said that Iran is no longer – the regime is no longer looking as much as before at the Mediterranean and at the rest of the Middle East. Can you say on what ground the President says that, why he assessed that the regime changed its behavior in the Middle East?

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: I don't have in front of me exactly what the President said and I don't want to go beyond what he said. I'm happy to take another look at it and – but we can follow up with you directly.

On the second question about the economic indicators, as I said earlier, the Iranian regime has plundered the Iranian economy to fund its – to finance terrorism and to fund its foreign wars around the Middle East, and all of the economic trend lines for Iran are negative. We have seen a gradual, steady decline of foreign direct investment. The Iranian rial hit a record low of 90,000 to the dollar in the unofficial market in late June. We see the stock exchange, the Tehran Stock Exchange, slip from an all-time high and has been declining. When you look at the economic forecasts and the – in terms of the economic forecasts of foreign direct investment and capital flight through 2022, along with projections about decline in oil revenues, these are all in the wrong direction for Iran. But as I said, that's simply a function of Iran mismanaging its economy.

Their banking system – they're facing a liquidity crisis. They don't follow international banking standards, and there's a reason they don't follow them,

because the economy is designed to be opaque. It is designed to fool foreign direct investors so that they don't know whether they are funding commerce or funding terrorism, and Iran has – is very skilled at using front companies. And that revenue is then used to finance Iran's terrorism and its foreign wars.

So when you look at the exchange rate for the dollar, you look at consumer prices, the stock exchange, foreign direct investment, capital flight, all of these macroeconomic indicators are heading in the wrong direction, and it is simply a function of a kleptocratic regime.

MODERATOR: Okay. We'll take the next question now, please.

OPERATOR: Go to the line of Warren Strobel of Reuters. Your line is open.

QUESTION: Thank you. I wanted to go back to the question of the overall policy goal here. In the Secretary's – Pompeo's May speech, he said, quote, "after our sanctions come into force, Iran will be battling to keep its economy alive," close quote. Countries that are battling to keep their economy alive tend to be either unstable or in the process of collapsing. And the question is whether the administration has thought through potential unintended consequences of the economic squeeze on Iran.

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: We look at this simply through this sort of lens: We know that Iran uses its economic revenues to finance terrorism. They are – there is no country in the world that sponsors more terrorism, supports more terrorism than Iran, and so when – our maximum economic pressure campaign is designed simply to deny Iran the financial resources that it uses to facilitate terrorism. One of the other things, though, is that so much of the money that is not spent on terrorism and foreign wars goes to the regime elite and to increase individual wealth. And so it's – it isn't any broader than that in terms of a weak economy means a government that doesn't have the revenues that it needs to finance terrorism.

And if you look – I'll just throw out a few numbers here – Iran has spent over \$16 billion supporting Assad and its proxies in Iraq and in Yemen, and it has also – gives \$700 million a year to Lebanese Hizballah. It has given, I believe, \$4 billion in lines of credit to the Assad regime. And so these are – this is all – revenue is the sinews of war, and Iran spends billions and billions of dollars in these – in other countries and it destabilizes these important countries in the Middle East, as I said, whether it's Syria or Lebanon or Iraq or Yemen, and that has second and third-order consequences.

The money that it used to support the Assad regime obviously contributed to the refugee crisis, which is the worst since World War II. And so when you connect the dots around the Middle East to all of the violence and the bloodshed and the turmoil, so much of it is driven by Iran. And that's why we are trying to deny them the revenues to execute their – their sort of revolutionary and ideological ambitions.

MR GREENAN: All right. Thank you, everyone. I think that's all the time we're

going to have today to discuss the Secretary's speech on Sunday. I thank our speaker, [Senior State Department Official]. The – as a reminder, this call was on background and our speaker is referred to as a senior State Department official. The embargo for this portion of the call has now lifted, and as a reminder to others, if you'd like to remain on the line, in a few moments we'll begin a second background call to discuss the Secretary's participation in the 2018 Australia-U.S. Ministerial Consultations in Palo Alto.

So with that, I'll conclude. I thank our speaker today, and thank you all for joining us.

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: Thanks very much.

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[Press Releases: Interview With Hugh Hewitt of the Hugh Hewitt Show](#)

Interview
Michael R. Pompeo
Secretary of State

Via Telephone
July 19, 2018

QUESTION: Secretary Pompeo, in fact, joins me. Good morning, Mr. Secretary. Good to have you back.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Hugh, it's good to be with you. It's been too long.

QUESTION: Well, I want to talk about religious liberty with you, but a first question. You're just back from Korea, Vietnam, the United Arab Emirates, Brussels, and of course Russia. Last time we talked you stressed that we know

everything about everyone who attacks us. And I just want to make sure, for deterrence purposes, is that the case? Are we aware with certainty of the origin of cyber attacks, because it's so essential to deterrence that we do know that?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Hugh, it's not always the case every day that we do. But with great frequency, we can do attribution in a way that gives U.S. policymakers an enormous advantage in understanding the threat.

QUESTION: David Sanger has a new book out stressing why we need to be able to pinpoint people and speak about it, because otherwise the whole world will attack us with impunity. Did you take the message to friend and foe that we are watching and we have the tools?

SECRETARY POMPEO: They do know, Hugh. But David's comments are a little bit naive to be honest with you. It's the case that we can't always publicly do what David described. It would be foolish for America to consistently announce everything we know. It would betray how we came to know it; it would share with them information that we don't want them to have about our capabilities and our skillsets. And so, make no mistake about it, we are very clear with our adversaries, when it's in our best interest, to share with them what we're doing.

QUESTION: Now after a major week of events – and I mean, you went through a week that culminated in the Helsinki controversy – then Andrew Brunson does not get released. How hard is it to refocus a department that is convulsed by stories on the ministerial next week and on the individuals like Pastor Brunson? Can you get everyone to get back on the page of focusing on religious liberty next week?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Hugh, thanks for the question. We've got a religious freedom ministerial that is going to have 80-plus delegations. It's historic. It's the first time the State Department has taken on this mission. We believe religious freedom is central to the world and to, frankly, America's place in the world. We make it a real priority. Pastor Brunson in particular has been a priority of mine since even before I had this current role. The entire administration is focused on getting his return.

But one of the reasons we're conducting the ministerial, Hugh, is because not every country shares our same understanding of religious freedom, and our effort in holding this ministerial here, where we have 40-plus foreign minister level visitors coming to attend, is to move each country in the direction where increased religious freedom around the world can thrive.

QUESTION: Now, Secretary Pompeo, for the benefit of the Steelers fans and others, a ministerial is a term they may not be familiar with. You just alluded to what it means. It means people like the Secretary of State of the United States and your counterpart in the United Kingdom and across the world coming to Washington. So what's on that agenda?

SECRETARY POMPEO: It's a broad agenda. We're going to talk about how religious freedom fits into a democratic society, how it makes sense for each

country, how it can improve economies in the world by having this religious freedom, by allowing all persons of every faith – or those who have no faith – to have the freedom to worship or choose not to in the way that they prefer. We believe that improving respect for religious freedom requires more than just talk, and so we're bringing people together. We'll announce several new initiatives over the course of the two days of the summit. And we're very much looking forward to it. We're hosting a huge gathering here at the State Department that I think will advance the cause of religious freedom around the world in a way that America has not done for too long.

QUESTION: Every year, we put out a list of Countries of Particular Concern, CPCs. At the top of that list every year is Iran, which may be the most anti-Semitic and the most repressive of other religion countries in the world. I don't imagine Iran is sending anyone to this conference. But what can we do to encourage an extremist, fanatical regime like Iran to leave their indigenous other religions alone?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Iran is a huge challenge. They would be a perfect exemplar for the absence of religious freedom inside of a country. There are others too. With respect to Iran, a key component of this is exactly what we're doing at this gathering. We're talking about it; we're raising it. We're raising the awareness. You referenced the report that the State Department puts out. It's just a piece of paper; it's just words, for sure. But calling it out and trying to articulate the rationale for why it matters and those that are behaving badly, whether it's by anti-Semitism or persecuting Christians, these are incredibly important concerns to the United States and to President Trump. And our mission in holding this gathering is to get the world to unite behind this fundamental concept of religious freedom for every individual.

QUESTION: Now Secretary Pompeo, last week the forces of Daniel Ortega opened fire on a Catholic church. They actually kept up a gun battle aimed at a Catholic church all night long. What do we do in response to that?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Nicaragua has got enormous challenges today. The Ortega regime, including his wife, are behaving – it's not just about the attack on the church. Their activities – the violence level has been raised. We are working to bring all of the elements of U.S. power to bear there. The State Department is at the front of trying to convince Ortega that it's time for a democratic process to begin and a solution to be achieved there and that violence is not a mechanism that's going to result in success for either he, his family, or the elites around him.

QUESTION: Well, let me close, Mr. Secretary, by going back to the Helsinki summit. Just a factual question: Were you consulted by the Department of Justice before the indictments were filed?

SECRETARY POMPEO: I can't talk about that, Hugh.

QUESTION: And while – and theoretically, would it be useful for the Department of State to be consulted before such matters as important as that are conducted, on a theoretical basis?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yes, Hugh. It is common practice that when the Department of Justice is going to take action that has diplomatic implications or foreign policy implications that we would be notified of those actions.

QUESTION: And then back to Pastor Brunson. Do we have any reason to hope, in the week ahead, that he gets out, Secretary Pompeo?

SECRETARY POMPEO: I – as a man of faith, Hugh, I am always of the belief that good things will happen. And you should know that the United States Government is working diligently to ensure the release of Pastor Brunson. And then there are others being held in Turkey too that we're working hard on.

QUESTION: Secretary Pompeo, thank you for joining me. And good luck with the ministerial next week. It's vitally important that people pay attention to it. And I appreciate your taking the time this morning.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Thank you, Hugh. It's wonderful to be back with you. So long.

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[Press Releases: Vice President Pence Delivers Remarks at First-Ever Ministerial To Advance Religious Freedom](#)

Media Note
Office of the Spokesperson

Washington, DC
July 19, 2018

On July 26, Vice President Mike Pence will deliver remarks at the first-ever Ministerial to Advance Religious Freedom at the U.S. Department of State in Washington, DC. The Vice President will address government and international organization representatives about the importance of international religious freedom and its role in American foreign policy.

The Ministerial to Advance Religious Freedom will take place at the U.S. Department of State, July 24-26, and will convene religious leaders, rights advocates, and members of civil society organizations, government officials, and representatives of international organizations from around the world to discuss the challenges facing religious freedom, identify concrete means to address persecution of and discrimination against religious groups, and promote greater respect for religious freedom for all.

For press inquiries related to the Ministerial, please e-mail IRFMinisterialPress@state.gov and visit www.state.gov/religiousfreedom for information related to the Ministerial. On Twitter, follow along with content about the Ministerial with @IRF_Ambassador and using the hashtag #IRFMinisterial.

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Heather Nauert
Spokesperson

Department Press Briefing
Washington, DC
July 18, 2018

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TRANSCRIPT:

3:13 p.m. EDT

MS NAUERT: Hi, everybody. Good afternoon.

QUESTION: Hello.

MS NAUERT: Hope everyone's doing well. Let me start out with a couple of announcements this afternoon. By the way, it's a little chilly in here. I can see that.

QUESTION: Noticed.

MS NAUERT: I know. I see you all have your blankets on and everything. Okay.

First, I'd like to start off talking about Nicaragua, and yesterday the Ortega government sent police and government-aligned armed groups to the town of Masaya in a deadly attack on its own citizens. Reports suggest that at least three people have been killed and dozens have been wounded. The Ortega government's brutal campaign of violence against their own people must stop immediately. Yesterday's assault on Masaya is another glaring example of Ortega's efforts to cling to power no matter the cost to the people of Nicaragua. Since April, attacks on university students, journalists, clergy, have killed hundreds and the international community is uniting in its condemnation of the heinous act.

We welcome recent statements by the United Nations, the Organization of American States, and well over 100 – excuse me, well over a dozen countries condemning the government-sponsored violence. We urge others to join the international call for peace. We continue to support the Episcopal Conference of Nicaragua's efforts to advance negotiations to resolve the current conflict, restore respect for human rights, and achieve a better, more democratic future for all Nicaraguans. We appreciate the church's critical role as a mediator. However, we are concerned that those officials seeking to bring an end to the crisis are coming under physical and reputational attack by the Ortega government and its supporters. The path to peace for the Ortega government remains through early, free, fair, and transparent elections. We urge the Ortega government to take concrete actions now and to negotiate in good faith.

Next, I'd like to mention that today, USAID Administrator Mark Green is wrapping up his visit to Colombia, and that's where he met with President Santos and President-elect Duque, as well as members of the Colombian congress, to reaffirm our strong partnership with the people and the Government of Colombia. Administrator Green also visited the Colombia-Venezuela border during his trip to the region to meet with some of the more than two million Venezuelans who have fled the crisis in their home country, which was created by the Maduro regime. While there, Administrator Green announced an additional \$6 million in U.S. funding to provide food and health assistance to the thousands of Venezuelan migrants crossing the border every day, and for the Colombian communities that are hosting them.

Lastly, I'd like to announce that Secretary Pompeo will travel to New York on Friday, July the 20th, to meet with Ambassador Nikki Haley and members of the United Nations Security Council, the Republic of Korea Foreign Minister Kang, and Japanese Ambassador to the United Nations Koro Bessho, to discuss the latest on North Korea. The Secretary will also meet with UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres to discuss a range of issues, including preparations for the UN General Assembly high-level week in September and also UN reform.

The Secretary will then travel to Simi Valley, California, on Sunday,

July the 22nd, to deliver remarks on supporting Iranian voices at the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Center for Public Affairs as part of his visit with members of the Iranian-American community in the United States. Secretary Pompeo will travel to Simi – from Simi Valley to Palo Alto, California, where he and Secretary of Defense James Mattis will host the Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs Julie Bishop and also the Minister for Defense Marise Payne for this year's Australia-U.S. Ministerial Consultations, otherwise known as AUSMIN. That takes place at the Hoover Institution at Stanford on July 23rd and 24th. This AUSMIN celebrates 100 years of mateship. It marks the U.S. and Australian forces fighting side by side in a battle for the first time. It's been 100 years.

QUESTION: I think you have to say mateship with an Australian accent.

MS NAUERT: (Laughter.) I don't think I could pull that off very well. That dialogue will focus on deepening our strategic alliance and developing initiatives to promote our shared vision of peace, stability, and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific and beyond. The United States and Australia have held strategic talks annually since 1985.

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

QUESTION: Thanks, Heather. I want to start with some stuff that comes out of Helsinki.

MS NAUERT: Okay.