

Press Releases: Press Availability With Jamaican Prime Minister Andrew Holness

Remarks

Rex W. Tillerson

Secretary of State

Kingston, Jamaica

February 7, 2018

MODERATOR: (In progress) as well as the U.S. Secretary of State, the Honorable Rex Tillerson. You may be seated. Thank you so much for joining us, everyone, on this working visit of the U.S. Secretary of State to Jamaica. The Prime Minister will make some remarks, followed by Secretary Tillerson.

Prime Minister.

PRIME MINISTER HOLNESS: Members of the media, ladies and gentlemen, good afternoon. It was my great pleasure to welcome Secretary of State Tillerson to Jamaica and to host him and his delegation on this brief but historic working visit to Jamaica. Secretary Tillerson and I have engaged in critical discussions on issues of mutual interest to Jamaica and the United States, as well as the region, with a focus on promoting a peaceful, prosperous, energy-secure, and democratic hemisphere.

Among the specific matters discussed were strengthening security cooperation in order to more effectively combat transnational organized crime; boosting the U.S.-Jamaica economic partnership; exploring opportunities to broaden U.S.-CARICOM engagement; energy security; the economic vulnerability of middle-income countries, including climatic events; de-risking and correspondent banking issues; and of course, the situation in Venezuela.

Our talks reflected Jamaica's long and productive relationship with the United States and signaled the importance of the strong and vibrant partnership that exists between our two countries. I highlighted the common values we share based on our geographic proximity, our strong historical and cultural ties, our robust trade, tourism and investment relations, our large Jamaican diaspora in the USA, and our strong record of people-to-people contacts at all levels.

I expressed gratitude on behalf of the government and people of Jamaica for

the high levels of support provided by the United States to Jamaica over the years, especially in the areas which have assisted in meeting our national development goals. In particular, we have greatly valued America's efforts to disrupt transnational crime through continued support to effectively secure Jamaica's maritime space. We agreed to deepen our cooperation in this regard, acknowledging also that the sharing and exchange of intelligence is critical to safely – is critical to the safety and security of our two countries and the wider region.

With respect to our economic partnership, Secretary Tillerson and I both agreed that the transformation of Jamaica's energy sector is critical to the achievement of our development objectives, including resilience. I expressed the hope that the U.S. will continue to support our thrust towards energy independence in the region, including greater efficiency in energy use and greater in cooperation of renewable energy sources. I expressed the hope that the United States will strengthen its economic partnerships and participation in the region in the interests of our respective countries and peoples.

Additionally, we used the opportunity to discuss diaspora matters and the invaluable contribution of Jamaicans resident in the United States, including those engaged in service sectors of critical importance to the United States economy.

Secretary Tillerson reiterated the concern of the U.S. Government on the political and economic crisis in Venezuela and the impact on the most vulnerable. We both agreed that positive engagement between the government and the opposition in Venezuela is essential, and expressed regret that the attempts of the OAS to promote dialogue have not been met with success. At the conclusion of our meeting, we agreed that the Government of Venezuela must act in the best interest of its people and that it should ensure that the presidential elections are free, fair, and credible in the eyes of the Venezuelan people and the international community.

Secretary Tillerson, I thank you for visiting Jamaica today, as we work towards a shared vision of peaceful, prosperous, energy-secure, and a democratic hemisphere. I thank you for the frank and candid dialogue and the spirit of cooperation which have made our talks constructive and fruitful. I look forward to continuing the vibrant partnership enjoyed between Jamaica and the United States in the years ahead. I thank you. (Applause.)

SECRETARY TILLERSON: Well, first, let me begin by thanking the prime minister for a very warm welcome to Jamaica and for the hospitality shown to myself and my delegation. This is indeed my first visit to Jamaica, although I shared with him some of my family members have been here. I think they have more vacation days than I do. (Laughter.)

But indeed, it really is a pleasure to be here and, as the prime minister indicated, have a very, very far-reaching, comprehensive discussion and exchange on important issues to both of our countries, but also to take note of the strong record of cooperation that exists between the United States and Jamaica. And as most of you know, this is the concluding stop on a trip that I've taken throughout Latin America and the Caribbean, and this stop I think

is important because Jamaica is our closest partner in this region.

The United States understands the importance of – that our security and prosperity are very closely tied to that of our Caribbean neighbors, and we're glad to have the partner we have in Jamaica. And I noted that the prime minister is assuming the chairmanship of CARICOM, and so I think it made our discussions even that much more timely and useful. Because we did speak about the region more broadly, as well, beyond just Jamaica and the U.S. relations.

We did talk about several aspects of the U.S.-Jamaica bilateral relationship, and our view is of the outsized role that Jamaica does play in the region as a leader to other countries here in the Caribbean Basin. Through the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative, the United States and the Caribbean have really taken great strides in unifying our approach to regional security, but we discussed ways in which we could take that further and do more.

We appreciate the Jamaican Government's commitment to countering narcotics trafficking and transnational criminal organizations and the cooperation that we already enjoy, but we also see many, many opportunities to enhance that cooperation to be even more effective in disrupting these illegal organizations.

We appreciate the Government of Jamaica has made important progress combatting the lotto scams, cooperating closely with U.S. authorities to extradite suspected lotto scammers to the United States and establishing a bilateral lotto scam task force, and we welcome that. The U.S. Government will continue to support Jamaica's security forces and criminal justice system. It is in both of our countries' interests to work together to investigate crimes, share intelligence, conduct asset seizures where legally and appropriate to do so, and bolster existing anti-corruption and anti-gang programs.

In addition to our focus on regional security, as the prime minister indicated, we had a very comprehensive discussion on ways to promote increased energy independence not just for Jamaica, but throughout the Caribbean. And we stand ready to assist with Jamaica and other partners in the Caribbean to explore and develop the resources they have, but also to share the abundance of resources that North America enjoys and the continent enjoys. Jamaica is developing new wind, solar, and gas – natural gas capabilities, all of which are going to serve the Jamaican people better.

And finally, as mentioned to the prime minister and Minister Johnson Smith, the United States appreciates Jamaica adding its voice to the major issues affecting our region, and the prime minister just spoke very eloquently about the concern we all share regarding the situation in Venezuela. Jamaica's votes in the OAS to achieve stability, prosperity, and support democracy in Venezuela have demonstrated exceptional support to the human rights issues that confront us in the Western Hemisphere. We will continue to ask our partners to support the people of Venezuela during this very trying time for them, and we will continue – the United States will – to put pressure on the Maduro regime to return its country to free, open, and democratic elections. The people of Venezuela deserve this.

So today, we'll continue to work hand in hand to advance regional security cooperation, build economic partnerships. We have so much more to do together, and thank you again, Prime Minister, for the very warm welcome. (Applause.)

MODERATOR: Thank you so much, Secretary Tillerson, and Prime Minister. Now, ladies and gentlemen, we'll open the floor for some questions. Prime Minister, Secretary Tillerson, we have members of the overseas traveling media as well as our local media entities here with us.

I have – again, the rules, you raise your hand, I'll identify you, and then when you – the microphone is brought to you, could you please identify yourself, your media entity, and ask succinctly your question to the leaders? I see a hand over there, if we could get the microphone that side, please. Ms. Chisholm, in the back.

QUESTION: Thank you very much, good afternoon. Andrea Chisholm from Television Jamaica. Secretary Tillerson, at the United Nations prior to the vote on Jerusalem, the U.S. ambassador to the UN said that we are watching, and many saw that as a threat to small and developing countries. Then there are some who classify Haiti, one of our CARICOM partners, as “blank-hole” countries. How should we perceive your visit today and how can Caribbean countries think that you respect us and it's not more of the United States just throwing their power around?

SECRETARY TILLERSON: Well, I'm here to reinforce the partnership and how we view the partnerships with Jamaica, but also with the entire Caribbean region, as I just indicated in my remarks. This is an important region to us. As we discussed today, this is the United States' third border, and Jamaica has the largest stretch of that third border with the United States – very important to our national security but also important to future economic opportunity as well. So the U.S. sees many, many opportunities for furthering our cooperation on trade, for strengthening our security cooperation, and most particularly, for combating these transnational criminal organizations that bring nothing but problems and violence and devastation to Jamaica and the region, but also certainly to the homeland for the United States.

So we seek to strengthen this – our partnerships in the region, and we see many, many opportunities to do so, and that's why we're really excited about the prime minister assuming chairmanship of CARICOM and it's why – one of the reasons why I really wanted to meet with him today.

MODERATOR: Thank you, Secretary Tillerson. I recognize CBS. I believe you had a hand up. Could you identify yourself formally, please?

QUESTION: Yeah, hi, Kylie Atwood with CBS News. Thank you very much. Mr. Prime Minister, I have a question for you first. The U.S. is continuing to look for ways to build up opposition and to economically isolate the Maduro regime in Venezuela. You've stated that you support the U.S. in those efforts today, but is Jamaica willing and able to stop importing Venezuelan oil?

And Secretary Tillerson, a question for you: How would the U.S. be able to

support the Caribbean and Jamaica specifically if you're asking them to cut down on the amount of oil that they're importing from Jamaica? Could the U.S. provide any subsidized oil to Jamaica and these other countries? What are you thinking about as possibilities? Thank you.

PRIME MINISTER HOLNESS: Jamaica supports human rights, Jamaica supports peace in this region, and Jamaica wants to see the people of Venezuela being able to enjoy their democracy. This is a principle that has nothing to do with any other country. This has always been Jamaica's position. We wish the best for the people of Venezuela. We now don't hardly import oil from Venezuela. With the new dynamics in the global trade and energy and with the United States now becoming a net exporter of energy resources, Jamaica can, in this new paradigm, benefit from that.

MODERATOR: Secretary?

SECRETARY TILLERSON: Well, as the prime minister, I think, made the point in his remarks, this is one of the things that binds Jamaica and the U.S. so closely, is strong commitment to democratic values. And it's why we're just both heartbroken to see what's happening in Venezuela, as we're seeing what was once a thriving democracy dismantled before our very eyes. It's the reason we intend to take all actions possible to persuade the regime to return to its full constitutional authorities, return it to the hands of the Venezuelan people.

As to any future steps that the U.S. might take regarding sanctioning oil or products to put more pressure on the Maduro regime, we are going to take into full consideration the impacts on regional countries as well. And we had a good exchange today regarding that issue not just for Jamaica, but also getting the prime minister's perspective on other countries, how they might be affected. And we will be looking at what are actions the U.S. might take to mitigate the negative impacts of that.

So I don't want to get into specifics because we're going to – we're going to undertake a very quick study to see: Are there some things that the U.S. could easily do with our rich energy endowment, with the infrastructure that we already have available – what could we do to perhaps soften any impact of that?

Having said that, I think there is – there's great unanimity in the region and certainly in the hemisphere that we all want to see some progress on this situation in Venezuela, which only gets worse day by day.

MODERATOR: Thank you, Secretary Tillerson and Prime Minister. I recognize at the back Mr. Campbell.

QUESTION: Thank you. Edmond Campbell, Gleaner Company. Good afternoon, Secretary of State and Prime Minister Holness. The UN General Assembly passed a resolution in December of last year rejecting the American recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital. But prior to that vote, U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley, she warned countries not – well, to vote with the U.S., or not to vote against the U.S., or the U.S. might be withdrawing aid

from such countries.

Secretary Tillerson, is that a policy position of the U.S.?

And Prime Minister Holness, could you just explain to us specifically why it is that Jamaica sat on the fence in that particular vote? Thank you.

SECRETARY TILLERSON: Well, I think President Trump actually addressed this in his State of the Union speech the other night when he said we need to undertake a re-examination of how the United States provides aid around the world globally, and not just for this particular issue, but more broadly in terms of: As we provide significant assistance to countries, are these countries that align with our values? Are they countries that align with what we believe are ways to make the world a safer and more prosperous place?

And so I think it's in that context that I would answer your question, as it's not been examined in quite some time, if ever, in terms of: How does the United States want to think about the generosity of the American people, because this is the American people's money that's being provided to others, and what should the expectation be around – what are we supporting?

And so as the President stated in his State of the Union address, he's asked that we consider that question. There has been no new policy adopted at this point, but he's asked us to think about all of our elements of our aid programs, and are they really advancing and promoting the values that the American people want to see advanced.

PRIME MINISTER HOLNESS: Edmond, Jamaica was one of several countries in the Caribbean region that abstained. From our perspective, from a diplomatic perspective, Jamaica did not need to take a position on another country's position on where they would want to see as a capital in the world. So from our perspective, this was not an issue that Jamaica should take a position on.

And generally speaking, Jamaica conducts its foreign policy on principle. We are not conducting foreign policy for aid or for special benefits. So I want to make that position very clear to the Jamaican people.

MODERATOR: Thank you, Prime Minister, Secretary Tillerson. And given our time issue, let's take a final question. The gentleman with the beard.

SECRETARY TILLERSON: Oh, another question. I thought we were done.
(Laughter.)

QUESTION: Hello, Mr. Secretary, the gentleman with the beard. (Laughter.) I am Dave Clark from Agence France-Presse. The question's actually for Mr. Prime Minister. Mr. Prime Minister, when we were with the Secretary in Mexico last week, Foreign Minister Videgaray said that if America went ahead and expelled more than a million so-called Dreamers, that this would be a win for Mexico, a massive injection of human capital, and a loss for the United States, because they'd be losing a lot of valuable workers. You yourself have just spoken about the large Jamaican diaspora in the United States. From your perspective, if the United States were to halt or reverse immigration from

Jamaica and the Caribbean, would that be a loss for the United States or would that be a loss for Jamaica? And how do you feel when the President of the United States is reported as saying he would prefer immigrants from Norway? Thank you.

PRIME MINISTER HOLNESS: Well, you raise a very interesting question. We, in Jamaica, have struggled with the reverse of immigration, which is the loss of tremendous talent and human resource, much of which we pay for. We call it the brain drain. At the same time, the Government of Jamaica would not want to see people deprived of their dreams and aspirations and ambitions. But from a government perspective, we are a practical government. And as we look on as to what another independent country would do with their internal foreign policy, we stand ready to welcome all our Jamaicans, and we want our diaspora to continue to support and participate in Jamaica.

You mentioned an important thing, Secretary Tillerson. You say, America the homeland. Jamaica is the homeland for Jamaicans, and we would want to have their skills and their resources here. And we support them as well in their dreams to settle and work in other countries, and we encourage them to abide by the laws and institutions of that country.

MODERATOR: Thank you so much. Thank you so much, Mr. Prime Minister and Secretary Tillerson.

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[Press Releases: Under Secretary Shannon Participates in G-7 Political Directors Meeting](#)

Media Note
Office of the Spokesperson

Washington, DC
February 7, 2018

Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Thomas A. Shannon, Jr. will travel to Vancouver, Canada on February 8-9 to participate in the G-7 Political Directors meeting. Canada holds the G-7 presidency for 2018.

The G-7 annually brings together representatives of the world's leading industrialized democracies to seek common ground on major global issues, including counterterrorism, non-proliferation, North Korea, and Syria. Under Secretary Shannon's engagement in Vancouver with his G-7 counterparts will set the stage for a Foreign Ministers' meeting and Leaders' Summit later in the year.

To learn more about the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, please visit [here](#).

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[Press Releases: Inaugural Meeting of the Cuba Internet Task Force](#)

Media Note
Office of the Spokesperson

Washington, DC
February 7, 2018

As directed in President Trump's June 16, 2017, National Security Presidential Memorandum "Strengthening the Policy of the United States Toward Cuba," the Department of State convened a Cuba Internet Task Force composed of U.S. government and non-governmental representatives on Wednesday, February 7. Over the next year, the task force will examine technological

challenges and opportunities for expanding Internet access in Cuba with the goal of helping the Cuban people enjoy the free and unregulated flow of information.

During the inaugural meeting, the task force agreed to form two subcommittees, one to explore the role of media and freedom of information in Cuba, and one to explore Internet access in Cuba. The subcommittees will provide the task force a preliminary report of recommendations within six months based on input from relevant experts and stakeholders. The task force agreed to reconvene in October to review the preliminary reports, after which it will prepare a final report with recommendations for the Secretary of State and the President.

The Cuba Internet Task Force is chaired by Deputy Assistant Secretary for Western Hemisphere Affairs John S. Creamer. In addition to the Department of State, other entities represented on the task force are: the Office of Cuba Broadcasting, the Federal Communications Commission, the Department of Commerce's National Telecommunications and Information Administration, the U.S. Agency for International Development, Freedom House, and the Information Technology Industry Council.

The Cuba Internet Task Force is a Presidential Advisory Committee under the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA). Consistent with the objectives of FACA we will work to ensure that advice by advisory committees is objective and accessible to the public. All public documents related to the task force will be made available on the Department of State's Cuba Internet Task Force [webpage](#). Those interested in being considered for participation on a subcommittee should email CubaITF@state.gov with an explanation of their relevant experience and interest.

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[Press Releases: Interview With Rich Edson of Fox News](#)

Interview
Rex W. Tillerson

Secretary of State

W Hotel
Bogota, Colombia
February 6, 2018

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, thank you so much for joining us on Fox.

SECRETARY TILLERSON: It's my pleasure, Rich.

QUESTION: I'd like to begin with this trip. Minus your Mexico trip early last year, this is your first trip to the region. You've been Secretary of State for a year. There are concerns about the U.S. leaving the Trans-Pacific Partnership that maybe the United States isn't as connected with this region, or ceding any type of engagement with this region. Have you encountered that sentiment while you've been on this trip?

SECRETARY TILLERSON: None whatsoever. I've just – I've had a very warm welcome in every country we've visited. I think it's important to remember that out of the 20 trade agreements that the U.S. has in place, 12 of them are with countries in this hemisphere. So these are already very important trading partners with us, and we have very robust trade throughout the hemisphere.

So each country is – it's been a very good visit with each country. We've talked about the things that are important to them, the things that are important to us. But I don't sense any weakening of the bonds between the United States and these very important countries in our hemisphere at all.

QUESTION: And the world doesn't stop when you're in one region, of course. Since you've been here, there was another chlorine gas attack in Syria. There are reports now that Russian and Syrian jets have bombed civilians in northwestern Syria in the biggest attacks since Aleppo. Is partnering with Russia advancing U.S. interests there, and are you now re-evaluating that partnership?

SECRETARY TILLERSON: Well, we're going to continue to work with Russia on the really difficult and complex situation in Syria, where we can. We maintain very, very open lines of communication with them both through military channels, but also through the diplomatic channels.

We are very concerned about the reports of, yet again, use of chemical weapons, chlorine gas, reports in some instances of potential use of Sarin gas. And the bombing that is going on, obviously, it is very difficult not to kill civilians in those bombing attacks. Our objective from the beginning has been to defeat ISIS, and then to de-conflict the country and stop the violence and create the conditions for a reconciliation, peace talks, chart the way forward using the UN Security Council process and –

QUESTION: Does that seem anywhere close, though, now that you still have

Sarin gas, you still have Iran's influence, Russia bombing civilians? How does this end, and any time soon?

SECRETARY TILLERSON: Well, in the areas that we have our presence and work with our coalition forces, we've been able to stabilize areas once we've liberated them from ISIS control. And that is what we've worked with the Russians as well; we have an area to the south that we actually worked jointly with Jordan to stabilize.

QUESTION: And you want to build on that?

SECRETARY TILLERSON: And we'd like to build on that. As you know, Russia, Iran, and Turkey have worked on stabilizing some areas to the west and the northwest. But these are some of the more complicated areas. And we will hope that ceasefires can be put in place, the violence can stop, and we can get the parties to the negotiating table in Geneva. We believe we have rejuvenated the Geneva talks and we're hopeful that the two sides will begin a serious negotiation to write a new constitution in preparations for elections for all Syrians to vote.

But the first step is we have got to stop the use of these chemical weapons. We believe Russia can play a very important role. They need to play an important role. They are supporting –

QUESTION: And they're not right now, right?

SECRETARY TILLERSON: They don't appear to be – they're supporting the Assad regime, they're providing the air cover for the regime. Russia is responsible. They agreed that they would take care of the chemical weapons in Syria. Clearly, they failed to do that. And they're blocking the UN Security Council's ability to give the Joint Investigative Mechanism of the OPCW the mandate that it needs to go ahead and investigate these things.

So Russia really needs to move to a different place on this. And they can deny it all they want to, but facts are facts. And they need to go to another spot and support the new mandate, the JIM, support the elimination of these chemical weapons. They can put the pressure on the Assad regime and say, "Stop this."

QUESTION: More on Russia. You've warned Mexico about potential meddling. The United States has warned European countries. CIA director Mike Pompeo warned about the U.S. midterms. Is this just an assumption, or does the U.S. have intelligence leading us to believe that they're going to try to meddle in the 2018 elections?

SECRETARY TILLERSON: Well, there's a lot of ways that the Russians can meddle in the elections, a lot of different tools than can use. I think what we see – and some of this is through some of our own sharing with countries that are allies of ours and partners of ours – and we are seeing certain behaviors. As I said the other day, we see some of Russia's fingerprints around elections that have occurred in Europe, and the Europeans have shared that with us. We are seeing similar activity in this hemisphere. There are a number of

important elections in this hemisphere this year.

QUESTION: And leading up to the U.S., too?

SECRETARY TILLERSON: Leading up as well to the U.S. –

QUESTION: In the U.S. we're already seeing this?

SECRETARY TILLERSON: In the U.S. in 2018. So we really – I think it's important we just continue to say to Russia, look, if you think we don't see what you're doing, we do see it. You need to stop. If you don't, you're going to just continue to invite consequences for yourself.

QUESTION: Is the U.S. better prepared this time around than 2016?

SECRETARY TILLERSON: Well, I don't know that I would say we're better prepared, because the Russians will adapt as well. If it is – if the point is if it's their intention to interfere, they're going to find ways to do that. And we can take steps we can take, but this is something that once they decide they're going to do it, it's very difficult to preempt it.

QUESTION: There have been demonstrations in Russia. The administration has loudly supported those demonstrators in Iran who were searching for democracy. Does the U.S. equally support, the administration equally support, those calling for democracy in Russia?

SECRETARY TILLERSON: Well, yes, we think it's important that Russia ensure that they are conducting free and fair elections, allowing opposition voices to be heard, allowing opposition parties to organize, and at least give the Russian people that choice. The Russian people are the ones that need to have the opportunity to consider other candidates and other points of view and what they might do differently in terms of running Russia's affairs. So yes, we –

QUESTION: That's not happening now though there, is it?

SECRETARY TILLERSON: Well, it certainly – as you know, one of the most popular opposition candidates has been prohibited from running in the election. And I don't – and the truth is I really don't think this serves Russia's purposes particularly well either. I think it would be important for them to allow greater participation in their elections.

QUESTION: On Korea, you and the Vice President are at least signaling to North Korea a willingness to talk – not negotiate – as you've made clear. But is the United States actively seeking a conversation with the North Koreans at the Olympics?

SECRETARY TILLERSON: Well, look, the Vice President – the President asked the Vice President to lead the U.S. official delegation to the Opening Ceremony of the Olympics in Seoul. We're there to first support the successful Olympics by the South Korean Government. We're also there to support all the United States athletes that'll be competing, and we expect to bring home a lot of medals. And whatever happens while the Vice President is there, we'll

just have to see. We'll wait and see and –

QUESTION: But the U.S. isn't going to initiate this, or does the U.S. want – someone has to make the first move.

SECRETARY TILLERSON: Well, look, the Vice President's there, and we'll just have to see what happens.

QUESTION: The Olympics opened this week, and South Korea has agreed to essentially bring the North Korean team – the joint ice hockey team. Seems like they're paying full freight for this. The U.S. has also agreed at the request of the South Koreans to suspend joint defensive military exercises during the Olympics. The North Koreans continue, assumingly, advancing their program. They're having a military exercise later this week. Has the U.S. gotten anything out of all of this rapprochement, or has South Korea gotten anything out of this? Seems like North Korea's gotten a lot and given nothing up.

SECRETARY TILLERSON: Well, I'm not sure that the South or the U.S. expected to get anything out of this. In terms of the South Koreans allowing the North Koreans to participate, and with the approval of the IOC as well, our understanding is that what North Korea is receiving from the South Koreans is no more than what all the participants who are attending the Olympics are receiving. Also, the North – the South Koreans have been using some training facilities in the North, so our understanding is this is on a reciprocal basis and there is no gain, there is no cash or anything being paid to the North Koreans for their participation in the Olympics. So it's very much just on an equal basis.

And I think in terms of the military demonstrations that the North Koreans may have, this is a military parade, is what we understand. We see a lot of these great parades they have in the square there in Pyongyang. And as to our military exercises, we agreed very early on that we did not want to detract from South Korea's needs to ensure they could provide full security during the conduct of the Olympics, and so we –

QUESTION: So this doesn't run pressure to the counter –

SECRETARY TILLERSON: No, this was really to allow all South Korea's security and military assets to be focused on – just like any nation that would host an Olympics. It's a big security challenge, and we didn't need to be running military exercises that require them to divert resources. That's the reason we said we would postpone these till the Olympics are over.

QUESTION: So I think we'll end on you're here, you're Secretary of State. There was lots of reporting that perhaps you wouldn't be. A State Department official says that the narrative you're leaving has been allowed to fester for some time and that's something that you would like to address in your second year as Secretary of State. Do you have a message for whoever is pushing the "Mr. Secretary Tillerson is leaving" narrative from the White House?

SECRETARY TILLERSON: I'm still here. Nothing has changed. My work I was doing last year – State Department did a lot of really important work in 2017 formulating the foreign policies that are necessary to carry out President Trump's agenda. I've said 2018 is a year of execution. The President has put some great policies in place; now we need to go execute against those and start winning for the American people.

QUESTION: And finally, do you believe there are still people in the White House who don't want you to be Secretary of State?

SECRETARY TILLERSON: I have no idea.

UNDER SECRETARY GOLDSTEIN: Okay, thank you so much.

QUESTION: All right. Mr. Secretary, thank you for your time, sir.

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[Press Releases: Conviction of Peaceful Activists](#)

Press Statement
Heather Nauert

Department Spokesperson

Washington, DC
February 6, 2018

The United States is deeply troubled that a Vietnamese court has convicted and sentenced peaceful labor and environmental activist Hoang Duc Binh and Nguyen Nam Phong to fourteen years and two years in prison, respectively, under vague articles of the Penal code.

All people have the right to the fundamental freedoms of expression, association, and peaceful assembly.

Mr. Binh and Mr. Phong's convictions are the sixth such verdicts over the past week alone of individuals peacefully expressing their views. They are among many individuals convicted this past year for exercising basic rights, including Nguyen Ngoc Nhu Quynh (aka "Mother Mushroom") and Tran Thi Nga. The trend of increased arrests, convictions, and harsh sentences of peaceful activists since early 2016 is very concerning.

The United States calls on Vietnam to release all prisoners of conscience immediately, and to allow all individuals in Vietnam to express their views freely and assemble peacefully without fear of retribution.

We also urge the Vietnamese government to ensure its actions and laws, including the Penal Code, are consistent with the human rights provisions of Vietnam's constitution and its international obligations and commitments.

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