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Readout
Office of the Spokesperson

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The below is attributable to Spokesperson Heather Nauert:

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo spoke by phone today with Swedish Foreign Minister Margot Wallström. The Secretary thanked the Government of Sweden for its tireless advocacy in support of U.S. citizens as the United States' protecting power in North Korea. The two also discussed areas of mutual concern, including the danger that Nord Stream II poses to European energy security, and the fight to defeat ISIS.

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Heather Nauert
Spokesperson

Department Press Briefing
Washington, DC
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TRANSCRIPT:

3:24 p.m. EDT

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

QUESTION: Freezing.

MS NAUERT: It is cold. It'll keep you awake. (Laughter.)

QUESTION: Yeah.

MS NAUERT: Put on a sweater, as Jimmy Carter would say. (Laughter.) Good afternoon, everyone. Hope you're well. I do actually remember the warmer days in here when people – I won't name any names – would fall asleep because it was so warm in here, so we try to keep you awake.

All right. Good afternoon. A couple of announcements I'd first like to make.

QUESTION: Are you talking about Matt?

QUESTION: It was not me.

MS NAUERT: It was definitely not Matt. It was not Matt. (Laughter.)

I'd like to start with this, and that is the Secretary welcomed the president of Uzbekistan earlier today here at the State Department. This is President Mirziyoyev's first trip to Washington and will raise the strategic partnership between the United States and Uzbekistan to a new level. We applaud the president's ambitious reform program to improve the human rights situation in his country. These efforts have created the conditions for increased economic, political, and security cooperation between our nations. We recognize that Uzbekistan has an important role in making Central Asia a stable and prosperous region through initiatives like the C5+1 framework and in supporting international efforts to stabilize Afghanistan.

As part of the visit, Ambassador Alice Wells, the senior bureau official for South and Central Asian Affairs, signed agreements to promote U.S.-Uzbekistan cooperation in the field of education. Agreements were also signed with other U.S. Government agencies to intensify cooperation on energy, agriculture, law enforcement, two-way trade, and also investment.

Next, I'd like to address a very concerning situation following a riot that took place at a prison in Venezuela just yesterday. It is called the *Helicoide* prison – it's in Venezuela – and that is where U.S. citizens, including U.S. citizen Joshua Holt from Utah, are being held right now. You may have seen Joshua Holt's Facebook videos and the tweets issued last night by our U.S. Embassy in Caracas. We continue to have serious concerns about the safety and welfare of U.S. citizens who are being held there. The Venezuelan Government is responsible for the safety of all detainees in its prison system, including U.S. citizens in detention. We hold the government responsible for their safety and well-being.

We observed Mr. Holt through his video and he has confirmed that he is still safe. Last night, our chief of mission in Caracas, Todd Robinson, went in person to the ministry of foreign affairs and made repeated requests to the highest levels of the Venezuelan Government for

information about the situation at that prison. Venezuelan authorities refused to meet with our chief of mission at that time. Prior to yesterday's events, our Acting Assistant Secretary Palmieri called in the Venezuelan charge once again to ask for the release of Mr. Holt on humanitarian grounds.

The U.S. embassy and the Department of State continue to press the Venezuelan authorities for their assurances of the safety of U.S. citizens who are detained in Venezuela.

Lastly – pardon me – I would like to mention our deputy secretary will travel to Buenos Aires, Argentina for the G20 foreign ministers meeting. I believe he leaves on Saturday. At the G20 meeting, Deputy Secretary Sullivan will address global economic, political, and security issues, including sustainable development. The conversations will set the stage for the G20 Leaders Summit that will take place in Argentina this November.

On the margins of the G20 ministerial, Deputy Secretary Sullivan will meet with foreign ministers for bilateral discussions including the Argentine Foreign Minister Jorge Faurie. Following the G20, Deputy Secretary Sullivan will travel to Brasilia, Brazil, and that's where he'll meet with the Deputy Foreign Minister Galvao and launch the U.S.-Brazil security forum. That's a bilateral law enforcement initiative that will address transnational crime.

While in Brasilia, the deputy secretary will discuss our joint economic growth agenda and global and regional issue, including the crisis in Venezuela. The deputy secretary will also meet with Embassy Brazil staff and members of Brazilian civil society.

With that, I'd be happy to take your questions, but not before recognizing some of our colleagues in the back. We have some information officers, some press officers, who are just getting ready to head out to their posts. I have a list of where you all are going. It's an impressive array, so congratulations to all of you. And they've ranged from going to places from Afghanistan to – let's see, where else? I remember that one. Afghanistan – come on, somebody say something. Don't be shy. Where else are you going?

QUESTION: Guatemala.

MS NAUERT: Guatemala, okay. Where else?

QUESTION: The Vatican.

MS NAUERT: Vatican. Oh, that's a tough one. (Laughter.) Okay, nice. Rome. Sir, where are you going?

QUESTION: Beijing.

MS NAUERT: Beijing, all right. Well, thank you so much for your service. Godspeed and good luck to you out there. Let us know if you need

anything.

Matt, go right ahead.

QUESTION: (Laughter.) Thanks, Heather. Before moving on to North Korea, and I'm sure the Middle East, I just want to ask you one brief one about the statement that the Secretary – was released in the Secretary's name this morning –

MS NAUERT: Yes.

QUESTION: – about the LGBTI discrimination, anti-discrimination day, basically. It says in there, "The United States firmly opposes criminalization, violence, and serious acts of discrimination such as in housing, employment, and government services, directed against LGBTI persons." And I'm just wondering how it is that you guys can say this – or say it and expect to be taken seriously – when this administration's stated policy is to discriminate against transgender people by not allowing them to serve in the military.

MS NAUERT: Matt, let me first start out by saying the Secretary released a statement earlier today. This is a matter that's important to the State Department. Promoting, protecting, and advancing human rights, including the rights of LGBTI persons, has long been and continues to remain the policy of the United States Government. As the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states, "all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and in rights."

In terms of what you're addressing with regard to the Department of Defense and its policies, it's a matter that's being handled in multiple courts right now. I'm not going to get ahead of the court process, but DOD will continue to comply with the court rules.

QUESTION: But I –

MS NAUERT: And I don't speak for the department of Defense –

QUESTION: I know.

MS NAUERT: – but that's all I have for you there.

QUESTION: I get that. But I mean, it's – but that's what the policy is. Whether or not the courts rule on it or not, the President has tweeted that that is his policy. And on the International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia, Biphobia for the United States – I don't understand how it's consistent for the U.S. to stand with LGBTI people when the stated policy is to discriminate against it, at least one section of it.

MS NAUERT: Matt, again, that's before the courts. I'm not going to address that. That is a Department of Defense issue. One of the things that we stand for here at the State Department proudly – and we continue to do so – is the respect for human rights. And that includes the right

to love anyone you want, to spend time with anyone that you choose, and we stand firmly behind that and that hasn't changed.

QUESTION: Okay. Very briefly on North Korea.

MS NAUERT: Yes.

QUESTION: The President, in remarks made just a few minutes ago with the NATO secretary general, seemed to confuse or conflate the quote-unquote "Libya model," which, as the national security advisor referred to and as has been generally understood I think everywhere in this town except for one person maybe, that model is the '03 – the Bush administration's '03, '04 pact with the Libyans that saw them get rid of all of their weapons of mass destruction, and not the next administration, the Obama administration's, military intervention in 2011 that – so I just want to make sure. The State Department understands the difference between these two things, correct?

MS NAUERT: In terms of what the President said in his remarks, I would just have to refer you to the White House. I have not had a chance to speak with the White House since the President spoke. We've been really busy here today. In terms of using any sort of so-called Libyan model, our model is to denuclearize the Korean Peninsula and we stand firmly behind that, and that hasn't changed.

QUESTION: Okay. But there is still enough institutional knowledge left in this building, right, that understands what the '03, '04 Libya deal was?

MS NAUERT: I can tell you that we have Libya desk experts and we have people here staffed up in the building who are experts –

QUESTION: Okay. All right. Okay. So if there is –

MS NAUERT: – on the entire history, but I don't want to get into a history lesson here with all of you.

QUESTION: Fair enough. I'm not going to ask you for the details of the history. But I just want to make sure, even if people up the street on Pennsylvania Avenue don't understand the difference, the people who work for the department does.

MS NAUERT: Matt, I'm not going to go there. I'd refer you to the White House if you have any specific questions about his comments. Okay?

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

QUESTION: On North Korea?

MS NAUERT: Hi, Lesley.

QUESTION: Hello. Given that the Secretary has been the contact with Pyongyang, has he personally reached out to anyone in North Korea

regarding the summit?

MS NAUERT: I will go back to what the President said, and what the President said earlier today is that we're making arrangements for the meeting. The Secretary has said to me – and I spent time with him this morning having this conversation about this very issue. Chairman Kim had asked for a meeting with the President of the United States. He addressed this with our Secretary. We are continuing to push ahead and plan in our preparations. Those continue at this time for a meeting between the President and Kim Jong-un in June.

QUESTION: But he has not been in touch with him?

MS NAUERT: I'm not going to get into all of the details. I can tell you we've been closely coordinating with our allies. We provided – or at least confirmed our call with the Republic of Korea, just yesterday I believe it was. And we continue with our – excuse me – we continue with our preparations for that.

QUESTION: Thank you.

MS NAUERT: Uh-huh. Yeah. Hey, Rich.

QUESTION: On North Korea, Acting Assistant Secretary Susan Thornton discussed the idea of a big down payment at a *Wall Street Journal* conference in Tokyo. To that, Senator Marco Rubio said that this is the reason he would prevent her confirmation, because that position undermines the President and is essentially a gradual back-and-forth – North Korea does something, the United States rewards it. Is the State Department seriously considering that or what is –

MS NAUERT: I think, first, what I would encourage everyone to do – and our Acting Assistant Secretary Susan Thornton was speaking through a *Wall Street Journal* panel in Tokyo. I would encourage all of you to go back and read our comments. If you have not seen them yourselves, we can certainly provide them to you. The headline in that *Wall Street Journal* article – and we've reached out to the *Wall Street Journal* about this – is, frankly, inaccurate and overblown. What Susan Thornton was talking about is very similar and the same thing to what Secretary Pompeo spoke about, and that is that we would like to see a bigger, bolder, different, faster deal than the kind of deals that have been proposed before.

Susan said – and I'll read part of her quote for you, because it was a lengthy panel in which she provided information on – she said, "There is an expectation that he's already committed to complete denuclearization." She's referring to Kim Jong-un there. "And in his conversations with the South Koreans that there will be a big down payment, a big, upfront demonstration of his intention to do that, not just words and statements but also actions." Our policy remains the same. It's complete, verifiable, irreversible denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. What she said is completely in line with what

Secretary Pompeo has said.

QUESTION: Are you going to have this gradual back-and-forth that the Secretary is (inaudible) about?

MS NAUERT: No. And you all can appreciate this. Headline writers sometimes take your pieces and they kind of change those pieces and they go their own direction with things. So we'll be in contact with them to have some conversations about that.

QUESTION: Just to follow up on that –

MS NAUERT: Hi.

QUESTION: – two questions. One is the tweet from Marco Rubio suggested that Susan Thornton was somehow undermining the President with her statements there.

MS NAUERT: Not at all. Not at all. Look, Susan Thornton has – and continues to be a very valued, hardworking member of our diplomatic community. Susan Thornton has had the opportunity to meet with the President. They spent time together. I think it was in Beijing, quite a few months ago, when they were traveling. Susan Thornton had been nominated for her position by the White House. Susan Thornton has a great deal of respect among people here in the building. She has professionally – just as our other Foreign Service officers in the building – pushed forward the agenda of this administration.

One of the things that has impressed me the most about our Foreign Service officers here is whether or not they like the policy – and I'm not speaking to Susan; I'm speaking in general terms – whether or not they like the policy, they push it out. They're professional. They do their jobs, and they're patriots. So Susan has continued to work hard on behalf of this administration, the American people, and the State Department.

QUESTION: And just one follow-up on this.

MS NAUERT: Yeah.

QUESTION: Or slightly different, but also North Korea. The Secretary's comments over the weekend about U.S. offering the full weight of trade and investment in North Korea were met in the North Korean statements – essentially they said they don't want U.S. investment. Was he surprised by that? Has that changed his thinking or tactics or –

MS NAUERT: I think one of the things that the Secretary had addressed with Chairman Kim is the idea that North Koreans could have a brighter future, and by a brighter future that means economic investment. That does not mean – some news organizations misreported this – that does mean U.S. tax dollars going to support the regime of Kim Jong-un, not at all. That means if they denuclearize we could see – we could envision a future for North Korea where there's private investment, where private

money goes into North Korea, whether it's building hotels or cinemas or whatever. That could be a future that North Korea could have, if they choose to denuclearize. And I think that's an exciting opportunity. I think it's something that – I can't speak for the North Korean Government, but I think that's something that was certainly at least somewhat appealing to them. Who doesn't want a brighter future for their own people?

Hi, Barbara. Yeah.

QUESTION: Just to follow up on the Libya model, which the essence of it is to remove the nuclear program from top to bottom and then there's compensation, which I believe is what Mr. Bolton was talking about – that falls along the lines of what Secretary Pompeo has been saying as well, right?

MS NAUERT: Look, I'm not going to get ahead of what the President and what Secretary Pompeo and all of our colleagues throughout the interagency are planning to discuss with the North Korean Government. Those meetings will all take place. We're having meetings in the meantime where we talk and discuss how meetings in June will be structured and how those conversations will go, but as far as those plans are, we are not ready to reveal those at – right at this point.

QUESTION: Hello.

MS NAUERT: Hi.

QUESTION: The President also said that if there's a deal, Kim Jong-un can have very strong protections. Can you give more details –

MS NAUERT: Yeah, I'm not going to get into the –

QUESTION: – or is part of a peace treaty or –

MS NAUERT: I'm not going to get into the security situation there. But as you would imagine – I think we talked about this just two days ago, that governments have concerns, especially countries like that, that something could happen to their leader. That is it. I will leave it at that, that of course countries are certainly going to be concerned about such things. But I'm not going to get into details of that.

Hi, Janne.

QUESTION: Hi. Thank you, Heather. But it seems North Korea does not want to open Western styles, so why they going offer the United States – offer economically, provide all kind of investment or make a (inaudible)?

MS NAUERT: You're asking what the motivation would be –

QUESTION: Yes.

MS NAUERT: – for the private sector to invest in North Korea someday?

QUESTION: Yes.

MS NAUERT: Well, I think it's like any country, right? Any country wants to have or perhaps would want to have that kind of private investment so they can grow their economy. There's a lot of work that needs to be done in North Korea. Electricity is not readily available throughout large parts of that country. That's one potential opportunity. I'm sure there are very many U.S. corporations that would certainly welcome being involved in helping to bolster its infrastructure, whether it's electricity, roads, or whatever. So that's the incentive for the private sector.

Again, U.S. taxpayers would not be financing this. We're a long way off from that point, of course, because the country hasn't denuclearized, but the point is we're just talking about what could be a brighter future for that country and for its people.

QUESTION: But Kim Jong-un concerned about if –

QUESTION: There's a big market for Gap and McDonald's, I think.

QUESTION: Yeah, McDonald's go there.

QUESTION: You sure the North Koreans want that?

QUESTION: But if Kim Jong-un is concerned about even open their country, their people is the freedom to saying or freedom to watch WIFIs or whatever they use in electricity. He's concern about human right issues in North Korea, so the best (inaudible).

MS NAUERT: Certainly, and human rights issues is something that we bring up very often with governments all around the world. We talked here just a few weeks ago about our Human Rights Report, in which we were very clear about our concerns, our very real concerns, about human rights issues in North Korea. Not that long ago, the President hosted a group of North Korean defectors who spoke about their experiences and why they chose to leave the country. They've spent time here at the State Department as well. I don't have much more for you on it, other than to say that that is an issue that we continue to raise with many countries around the world.

QUESTION: Can I change the topic very quick?

QUESTION: Hold on, hold on. Something on the Susan Thornton – your explanation. You said that she talked about how this deal – the administration wants this deal to be bigger, bolder – did I hear this right? – bigger, bolder, faster, stronger? Is that like the motto here? Because I don't – because that sounds like the intro –

MS NAUERT: No, she did not. She did not use those words, no.

QUESTION: That sounds like the intro to The Six Million Dollar Man, but
—

MS NAUERT: You're dating yourself, Matt.

QUESTION: Yeah.

MS NAUERT: No, Susan —

QUESTION: But what did she say?

MS NAUERT: Susan did not use those words.

QUESTION: What did she say? Bigger, bolder —

MS NAUERT: No.

QUESTION: You —

MS NAUERT: Let me find it, hold on.

QUESTION: Well, maybe it wasn't — maybe it wasn't her.

MS NAUERT: She said, "There is an expectation, as he's already committed to complete denuclearization, and in his conversations with the South Koreans, that there will be a big down payment, a big up-front demonstration of his intention to do that — not just words and statements, but also actions." That's what she said. I said that that is in line with the Secretary and what he had said over the weekend when he talked about how this program — we're hoping that this deal would be bigger and different and faster.

QUESTION: Different and faster, okay. Sorry.

MS NAUERT: I can find the exact quote for you.

QUESTION: Could I move on?

QUESTION: Heather.

QUESTION: Heather, could I move on to Human Rights Watch, please?

MS NAUERT: Okay, certainly. Okay, yes.

QUESTION: Heather.

MS NAUERT: Hold on, hold on. One more on this before — I'll come over to you next, I promise.

Hi.

QUESTION: Thank you. The President also said that the model of "decimating," quote, Libya would be the model if we don't make a deal with North Korea. Is that the choice that the U.S. is giving North

Korea, either come to the summit or be so-called decimated?

MS NAUERT: I'm not going to get into the details of that. I'd just refer you back to the White House for anything more on that.

Okay, hi.

QUESTION: And then also on that, the President suggested that Kim Jong-un perhaps no longer wants to have a summit because he spoke with China. Previously you have said that China has been helpful. What is your assessment now? Has China been helpful, or would you like for them to do something differently?

MS NAUERT: We have always said – and we've been consistent about this – that China can always do more. China, as the key trading partner with North Korea, has an incredible amount of leverage with the North Korean Government. And so we continue to say to China that you can certainly do more, and I'll leave it at that. Okay.

QUESTION: Can I ask one more on –

MS NAUERT: Hi, Said. No, we've got to – let's move on.

QUESTION: Yeah. I have a quick question on the Israelis last week expelled or ordered – issued an order to expelling the head of the Human Rights Watch in Jerusalem and the West Bank, Omar Shakir. He's an American citizen. They gave him 14 days to leave. I wonder if you are raising this with the Israeli Government and how would you view this. This guy is doing his job.

MS NAUERT: Said, I can just tell you we're certainly aware of the report. I'd have to refer you to the Government of Israel for any questions about that. I'm not aware if we're having any conversations with the Government of Israel about his case.

QUESTION: Yeah, but would you call on the Israelis to allow him to do his work?

MS NAUERT: Look, I don't have the specifics of that case or the situation, so I'm not in the position to call on any government to do anything on that.

QUESTION: Okay. Because this comes in after – the week before the Israelis disallowed the two – a Columbia law professor and a constitutional center official from entering the country. They were there held for 14 hours and then they were deported. So this – there is a pattern right there. Are you concerned that American citizens who might be speaking about Israeli abuses of human rights are being sort of intimidated or not allowed in because of their views?

MS NAUERT: Said, I don't have any information on that, and I'm not going to accept that premise. I don't have any information on that. Countries certainly have a right to allow in individuals that they choose to allow

in. The United States does. Every country around the world as sovereign nations have the ability to make some of those decisions, and I'm saying that in general terms. I don't have any specific information on his particular case.

QUESTION: Thank you.

MS NAUERT: Yeah.

QUESTION: (Inaudible) at least on –

QUESTION: (Inaudible) criticize all kinds of human rights situations around the world.

MS NAUERT: What, Matt? What, Matt?

QUESTION: I'm just wondering, are you looking in at least to the – asking the Israelis about the case of the Human Rights Watch guy?

MS NAUERT: I think I just answered that. I'm not aware if we are or not.

QUESTION: Well, can you find out? Because I mean, when –

MS NAUERT: I will – I will certainly look into it.

QUESTION: As you are – you are correct that every country has the right to allow in who it wants to, but if an American citizen is unjustly deported or prevented from going into a country, it is certainly within the remit of this building to inquire and – as to the details and to complain, sometimes even loudly, if they see –

MS NAUERT: I will certainly see if I can find something for you on it.

Hi, Laurie.

QUESTION: Hi. There have been major complaints about fraud in the Iraqi voting, and the UN Mission there has called on Iraq's Electoral Commission to investigate them, quote, "immediately and fully." What is your position on this?

MS NAUERT: Yeah. So we spoke about this a little bit the other day. The vote tally is still underway at this time. We're certainly aware that there have been some challenges with that. We agree with the UN special representative who – the individual has called on the Independent High Electoral Commission to immediately and fully investigate those complaints, the complaints that you're referring to, concerning the overall electoral process in Iraq. We call for the release of final election results just as quickly as possible and just as quickly as they're ready. We understand the concerns that some people have had about that, and that's why we call on them to quickly do this and resolve it.

QUESTION: Okay, and a question on Turkey. The foreign minister has said

that there was a preliminary agreement about Manbij that was reached under Secretary Tillerson. At that time, you said that there was no such agreement. Is it still your position that there's no agreement between the U.S. and Turkey on Manbij?

MS NAUERT: That's correct. The talks about Manbij are ongoing, and nothing has been concluded. This is something that we addressed at NATO when the Secretary had met with his counterpart in Brussels as well, and so we just don't have any new updates for you on that.

QUESTION: On Iraq –

MS NAUERT: And I will also point out that we do have a new Secretary, and so he has the ability to have conversations with the Government of Turkey, and then they can decide a new way forward if they should want to.

QUESTION: Sorry, Heather, a quick question on the election in Iraq because –

MS NAUERT: Yes.

QUESTION: Are you disappointed in the level of turnout because it was very low? I mean, I worked back during the civil war and the turnout was much, much bigger. Are you disappointed? Do you think that people have lost faith in the democratic process in Iraq?

MS NAUERT: I don't see it as that at all. We have seen from time to time when we've had higher or lower election turnouts in the United States, and many other countries have experienced that as well. But what is significant here is that the Iraqis held this successful election. The election went off with very, very limited violence. That is a tremendous success. And if we just wind back the clock to where Iraq was just a few years ago, when ISIS had controlled large swaths of that country, and now here people are turning out to vote and the biggest complaint we can find is a low turnout? Well, I'd say congratulations to the Iraqi people for pulling off a successful election.

Hi.

QUESTION: Thank you. Back to Turkey, please?

MS NAUERT: Yeah.

QUESTION: As you know, Turkey has recalled its ambassadors to – from the U.S. and Israel. Can you give us an update? Is this straining U.S.-Turkish relations? And also on Pastor Andrew Brunson, please.

MS NAUERT: Sure. So first, in terms of Pastor Brunson, his case is one that we watch very carefully, very closely, not just here at the State Department. I know the Vice President has been keeping a close eye on it. Our colleagues at the State Department have been able to spend time in the courtroom with Pastor Brunson and having conversations with his

family. This is also something that the President has watched very closely and carefully. It's something that this administration continues to bring up in its bilateral meetings with the Government of Turkey, and at the next opportunity, I would not be surprised that this comes up yet once again. Congress is also following this very carefully and very closely. I don't have an update for you on his case. I can check with some of our experts who are following this on a day-to-day basis and see if I can find anything more out for you on that.

QUESTION: Thank you.

QUESTION: India?

MS NAUERT: And then you had a second question? Sorry.

QUESTION: Yeah, about the reaction to the embassy move and Turkey recalling its ambassador.

MS NAUERT: Look, we're aware that Turkey has recalled its ambassador. That is within Turkey's right to do so. And I don't see that as diminishing our relationship with the Government of Turkey. We – they continue to be an important NATO ally. That is being maintained and we look forward to our next conversations with the government.

Okay.

QUESTION: On India?

QUESTION: On Iran?

MS NAUERT: Yeah. Yeah.

QUESTION: Yes. So we are now just seeing those big companies in Europe who are just pulling their business out of Iran, and the European countries, they are just about to protest their companies. So I'm just wondering, how is your negotiation with the European countries, or do you just consider some exemptions for the European companies for their business in Iran?

MS NAUERT: Well, first, I can tell you that companies have time to wind down their activities, and that in part gives them the ability to decide what business decisions that they want to make. This administration has been very clear since day one its concerns about Iran's destabilizing activities, whether it is ballistic missile tests, terrorism around the globe, supporting the Houthi rebels in Yemen, firing off rockets and missiles into our strategic partner's territory in Saudi Arabia, to all that they're doing in Syria to bolster and prop up the regime of Bashar al-Assad, also doing things in Israel as well.

So Iran has a very well-documented litany of bad behaviors that it's continued to be involved with. This administration has been clear about that. We've explained that to our European partners and others around the world.

Earlier this week, we hosted about 200 ambassadors here at the State Department, where many of our assistant secretaries or at least several of our assistant secretaries had a chance to talk with them about our real and serious and grave concerns about Iran's destabilizing activity. That's one thing that we've been doing. The Secretary has been having phone calls with his counterparts from the E3 expressing our concerns. These concerns are not a surprise to those countries, but the Secretary continues to talk with them about those concerns, but also the way forward. And that's why we are happy and thrilled that the Secretary's first foreign policy address will be about that very thing, about Iran and the way forward.

The United States will be working hard to put together a coalition not unlike the D-ISIS coalition, where we bring together a lot of countries from around the world with the specific goal of looking at the Iranian regime through a more realistic lens – not just through the lens of the nuclear deal, but rather through all of its destabilizing activities that aren't just a threat to the region, but are a threat to the broader world.

QUESTION: So it means that there won't be any exemptions for the European companies –

MS NAUERT: I'm not –

QUESTION: – or their businesses, with Iran?

MS NAUERT: I'm not going to get into all of the details of that. The Secretary will provide his speech. Also I can tell you Treasury and other agencies are involved as well, and they may have some decision making in all of that. Okay?

QUESTION: India?

MS NAUERT: Okay. Sir, why don't – what do you have on India today?

QUESTION: Two quick questions, please.

MS NAUERT: Okay. I'll see if I can answer them.

QUESTION: One will be on India. Two-plus-two was postponed because we didn't have the Secretary of State. Now we have the new Secretary of State, congratulations, so when are we going to have this now two-plus-two because Secretary of Defense is ready?

MS NAUERT: Ah, yes, okay. You're – the Indian secretary of defense is ready, you're saying?

QUESTION: No –

MS NAUERT: Our secretary, okay.

QUESTION: – yeah – two-plus-two, right, yeah.

MS NAUERT: Okay. I don't have any information for you on that. Obviously, we have a very strong relationship with Prime Minister Modi's government. We have strong, strong people-to-people ties with the Indian population, and so I know when we get a chance to schedule something on that – I know we're looking at the Secretary's schedule right now to see what he has on his plate and what we're going to schedule in the near future – I'll let you know. Okay?

QUESTION: And second, madam, one strange thing is going on on Pakistani television is that former prime minister of Pakistan, Mr. Nawaz Sharif, he told the Pakistani television and – that Pakistan was behind the Mumbai attacks in India. Now, this also asserted that last year, General Musharraf said that Pakistan is favoring terrorism against India.

MS NAUERT: Say the last part again.

QUESTION: General Musharraf also said last year that Pakistan is supporting terrorism against India as far as Kashmir is concerned, and we are making it public that we will be supporting terrorism against India.

MS NAUERT: So –

QUESTION: And now it's the prime minister of Pakistan who just stepped down.

MS NAUERT: Look, the only thing I can – I have to share with you about that in terms of the Mumbai attacks, and we've been – we've addressed this on numerous occasions from this podium here, and those would be our concerns about the mastermind behind the 2008 Mumbai attacks. And he's a Lashkar-e-Tayyiba guy who was being held in Pakistan, and he was eventually let out on house arrest, and we have a reward out for – I believe it's for his arrest – not information leading to his arrest, but his arrest. I don't recall off the top of my head the award amount, but that person out in the open is a tremendous concern to the United States. In terms of your other question, I'd just have to look into that for you. Okay.

QUESTION: Thank you, madam.

MS NAUERT: Okay.

QUESTION: Just back to – just back to the Secretary's speech on Monday –

MS NAUERT: Yes.

QUESTION: – and this new anti-Iran coalition that you're –

MS NAUERT: No, I – let me correct you on that. It's not an anti-Iran coalition.

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

MS NAUERT: We stand firmly behind the people of Iran and make a very significant distinction between the Iranian population – a very proud, historic population; a rich, incredible society – to what the Iranian regime is doing to its country. And when Iran pledged that it would bring some of its money back home – because they’ve done quite well for themselves as a result of the JCPOA and businesses, as she mentioned earlier, coming into the Iranian marketplace – they’ve done very little to share that money with their people and the overall economy, and people are frustrated with that, and they have a right to be angry with that. So this isn’t an anti-Iran thing, this is the Iranian regime and the bad actions that it’s doing, nothing with the Iranian people.

QUESTION: Okay. I wasn’t intending to mean that it was about the Iranian –

MS NAUERT: Okay.

QUESTION: Whatever you’re going to – what are you going to call the coalition, then?

MS NAUERT: I don’t know, Matt. Do you have any suggestions?

QUESTION: The anti-Iranian regime – I don’t know, whatever it’s being called, whatever it’s going to be called.

MS NAUERT: Okay. Okay, I get your point.

QUESTION: Even if it – I don’t know if it’s even going to have a name. Well, whatever. Do you – has –

MS NAUERT: Maybe a government acronym.

QUESTION: Has – yeah, (inaudible) –

MS NAUERT: I’m sure it will be fabulous.

QUESTION: Maybe it could be called IRAN, I-R-A-N. You can figure out when it comes up – anyway, is there – been any interest in countries other than Israel and Saudi Arabia, the other gulf Arab states, in joining your coalition?

MS NAUERT: I can just tell you that in the Secretary’s calls that he’s had with his counterparts, they are fully understanding and appreciative of our concerns about Iran’s malign activity. These are countries that understand that. They’re not turning a blind eye to these things, and we continue to coordinate very closely with them.

QUESTION: Are you talking about the Europeans here?

MS NAUERT: Many countries, many countries, as we –

QUESTION: Has he spoken to Foreign Minister Lavrov at all since –

MS NAUERT: Not to my awareness, but I can look into that and see if we have anything for you on that.

QUESTION: Okay.

QUESTION: (Inaudible) coalition –

MS NAUERT: But the point is – the point is, these countries around the world understand – no one is ignorant to all the bad stuff that the Iranian regime has been involved with. And countries have an interest in joining us because we have a lot more work that we can do together, and recognizing that Iran needs to be addressed in a more comprehensive fashion.

QUESTION: They do, but I'm just wondering if you get this – if there is a high level of enthusiasm given the fact – for joining the U.S. given the fact that this administration has thus far not exactly been a joiner, but rather a withdrawer of international coalitions and – from international agreements and – so I'm trying – just trying –

MS NAUERT: Well, that – that's kind of funny that you say that as the President was just hosting the NATO secretary general. That is an example of something that we stand firmly behind and continue to do so.

QUESTION: Yeah, I get that, but the TPP, the climate accord, the Iran deal –

MS NAUERT: Look, I know that's a narrative that people would like to believe, but there were previous agreements –

QUESTION: By – yes, okay.

MS NAUERT: – that the United States has made the decision, and this administration has made the decision that it's not in the best interests of the American people to do that.

QUESTION: I –

MS NAUERT: When you talk about –

QUESTION: I get it.

MS NAUERT: – certain trade agreements – let me finish – when you talk about certain trade agreements, the President believes, and he firmly believes, that we can sometimes get a better deal when we conduct, when we develop bilateral trade agreements rather than these multilateral trade agreements.

QUESTION: Understood, but other countries –

MS NAUERT: That is a not a bad thing when we're looking out for the American people.

QUESTION: I'm not saying it is. I'm just saying, when other countries have – they have not been silent about their disappointment, anger, upset, whatever that the administration has removed the U.S. from these kinds of agreements. So I'm just curious if you can gauge their – the level of interest in joining the U.S. in a new coalition that is aimed at –

MS NAUERT: I can just tell you we've had conversations with them about it, they understand the threat that the Iranian regime poses, and we look forward to having more meetings and conversations with them along the way. Okay.

QUESTION: Would it include –

MS NAUERT: I've got to go.

QUESTION: Would it include the Iranian groups like Mujahedin-e Khalq?

MS NAUERT: Said, I have no information on that for you on that. Okay, thanks.

(The briefing was concluded at 3:59 p.m.)

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Press Releases: Secretary Pompeo's Call With Nigerian President Buhari

Readout
Office of the Spokesperson

Washington, DC
May 17, 2018

The below is attributable to Spokesperson Heather Nauert:

On May 17, Secretary Pompeo called Nigerian President Buhari. The Secretary noted the longstanding relationship between the Nigerian and American people and underscored the themes of the April 30 official working visit of President Buhari to the White House. He recognized Nigerian leadership across the African continent on priorities we share: countering terrorism and other threats to peace and security, creating economic opportunity, fighting corruption, and advancing democracy and stability. The Secretary welcomed continued cooperation in advancing our nations' mutual prosperity.

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Press Releases: 2018 U.S.-Vietnam Human Rights Dialogue

Media Note
Office of the Spokesperson

Washington, DC
May 17, 2018

Today, the Department of State hosted the 22nd session of the U.S.-Vietnam Human Rights Dialogue. Ambassador Michael Kozak of the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, and Director General Pham Hai Anh of the Department of International Organizations in the Vietnamese Ministry of Foreign Affairs led their respective delegations in the Dialogue.

The Dialogue covered a wide range of human rights issues, including the importance of continued progress on legal reform efforts, rule of law,

freedom of expression and assembly, religious freedom, labor rights, rights of vulnerable populations, multilateral cooperation, as well as individual cases of concern.

The promotion of human rights is a crucial part of U.S. foreign policy and key to our ongoing dialogue with Vietnam under the U.S.-Vietnam Comprehensive Partnership.

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Press Releases: Assistant Secretary of State for Consular Affairs Carl Risch Travels to the Republic of Korea and China

Media Note
Office of the Spokesperson

Washington, DC
May 17, 2018

Assistant Secretary of State for Consular Affairs Carl Risch will travel to the Republic of Korea (ROK) and China from May 20-24, 2018 to engage in bilateral discussions with counterparts on issues relevant to visa processing, consular protection, and International Parental Child Abduction (IPCA). Assistant Secretary Risch also plans to review consular operations at our U.S. Embassies in Seoul and Beijing and our Consulates General in Shenyang and Chengdu.

The United States is committed to long-term engagement with the ROK and China on a range of consular issues.

For press inquiries please contact CAPRESSREQUESTS@state.gov or (202) 485-6150.

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