

Press Releases: Previewing Secretary Pompeo's Upcoming Trip to Budapest, Bratislava, Warsaw, Brussels, and Reykjavik

Special Briefing
Senior Administration Officials
Via Teleconference
February 8, 2019

MODERATOR: Good morning. Thank you. And thank you, everyone, for joining us this morning for this background call on Secretary Pompeo's upcoming trip to Budapest, Bratislava, Warsaw, Brussels, and Reykjavik. Joining us today are [Senior Administration Official One]. And we also have [Senior Administration Official Two]. They'll give a brief overview of the trip and the activities of the trip, and then we'll turn it over – we'll open it up for some questions. And as a reminder, this call is on background. So now I will turn it over to Senior Administration Official Number One.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL ONE: So thank you, everyone, for taking the call. And I'll just start from the top and give a description of the trip, and then happy to discuss additional questions.

Secretary Pompeo will have five stops on this trip to Europe. He'll start in Budapest, go to Bratislava, Warsaw, Brussels, and then stop off on Reykjavik on the way back. So this is from February 11th to February 15th.

On the 11th he'll start in Budapest, where he will meet with Prime Minister Orban, Foreign Minister Szijjarto, Defense Minister Benko. Some of the themes that will be addressed in Budapest: first of all, our ongoing efforts to bolster the security relationship, to counter Russian aggression, strengthen NATO deterrence. A couple things that will be discussed in particular: one is the defense cooperation agreement. I think as most of you know, we have had talks underway for a few months now with both Hungary and Slovakia on defense cooperation agreements. We've made some progress in negotiations this week; we'll see where we stand next week. Also some discussions on air and missile defense, and I would expect to see the Secretary acknowledge Hungary's role in Afghanistan and the D-ISIS coalition.

Also in Hungary, we will continue to push for energy diversification in Central Europe. The Secretary will urge Hungary to engage more robustly on completion of Krk Island for LNG import as well as the BRUA pipeline and

discourage Hungary from support for TurkStream. We will also discuss regional cooperation and stability. The U.S. will make clear our support for Visegrad Four and the Three Seas Initiative as platforms to push back on Chinese and Russian influence in the region and press Hungarian leaders to drop their block of NATO engagement with Ukraine.

The Secretary will also express support for civil society. His first meeting in Budapest will be with a group of leaders from NGOs. He wants to hear their views on the full spectrum of issues in Hungary. In Budapest, and also in Bratislava, the Secretary will be announcing several new initiatives that the U.S. will be unveiling in 2019 to strengthen U.S. engagement across Central Europe and the Visegrad region that includes initiatives in anti-corruption, journalism, youth exchanges, and people-to-people contacts. And as many of you know, this is part of a larger effort that we have been planning for some time for 2019 to coincide with the 30th anniversary of the end of communism.

Finally, in Hungary, the Secretary will give particular focus to the role of China in Central Europe and express our concerns about the growing presence of Huawei in Hungary and urge regional leaders to heed the warnings of countries from Asia Pacific who have found themselves in difficult straits as a result of working too closely with the Chinese.

In Slovakia, the Secretary will meet with President Kiska, Prime Minister Pellegrini, and Foreign Minister Lajcak to discuss U.S. – the U.S.-Slovak security relationships. As I mentioned, we have a defense cooperation agreement negotiation underway with Slovakia. The Secretary will welcome Slovakia's decision to purchase F-16. We will also talk to the Slovaks about their priorities under the OSCE chairmanship, which Slovakia currently holds. We will continue to stress the central importance of strengthening the OSCE role in Ukraine and particularly focus on the role of the special monitoring mission and the need to heighten U.S. and EU responses to Hungarian – sorry, to Russian aggression in the November Kerch Strait attack.

The Secretary will visit with civil society and a group of youth in Slovakia and pay his respects at the Gate of Freedom Memorial. As some of you know, this is a site where more than 400 people died attempting to escape from communist Czechoslovakia to freedom in Austria. And we'll mark the 30th anniversary of the end of communism.

This will be a theme in all three of the Central Europe stops – Hungary, Slovakia, and Poland – that this is the 30th anniversary of 1989 and the events that resulted in the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of communism. The Secretary will call attention to what we are – were fighting for in 1989: freedom, individual liberty, free markets. The Secretary will underscore the role in all three of these stops that the U.S. played in supporting that transition and encourage U.S. allies to strengthen their resistance to Russia and China across the board in commerce, energy, security, and rule of law. He will emphasize that the United States intends to compete for positive influence in Central Europe, as outlined by the National Security Strategy. And I think you can expect to see his message in all three of these stops be that we expect those whom the U.S. helps to not abet our rivals, and that it's up to our allies to keep Europe free.

In Poland, the Secretary will meet with Foreign Minister Czaputowicz, discuss security and energy issues, build on the strong relationship with the – that the United States has with Poland. He will also, as most of you know, cohost with Poland the Ministerial to Promote a Future of Peace and Security in the Middle East, and I will defer to my colleague from the NEA Bureau to elaborate on that.

The Secretary will then make his way to Brussels where he will meet with EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Frederica Mogherini to discuss U.S.-EU cooperation on a wide range of issues, but in particular, to keep the focus on our efforts to restore democracy in Venezuela and support Venezuelan Interim President Juan Guaido and the National Assembly, as well as the importance of strengthening European security and addressing the threats posed by Iran and Russia.

And finally, the Secretary will travel to Reykjavik, Iceland on February 15th. In Reykjavik, the Secretary will meet with Prime Minister Jakobsdottir and Foreign Minister Thordarson and discuss security issues in the high north – North Atlantic and, in particular, engage with our friends in Iceland on their upcoming chairmanship of the Arctic Council. That's a brief *tour de table*.

MODERATOR: Thank you very much. Senior Administration Official Number Two, would you like to make any opening remarks?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL TWO: Good morning. We've talked quite extensively about the forum in Warsaw, so I'm not sure how much more I could add to that. My colleague Robert Palladino addressed it yesterday. But for those who haven't been tracking it 100 percent, you know it's an opportunity for the countries who have been invited to share their perspectives both within and outside the region. We've received a very positive responses from our partners and allies about the conference. No particular country or issue will dominate the agenda of the conference. We'll be able to talk about regional crises and their effects on civilians. We'll talk about missile development and proliferation, cybersecurity, emerging threats, the energy sector, and of course, countering extremism and illicit finance.

So we're very much looking forward to robust exchanges on all of these issues and very grateful for the Polish Government for cohosting this event with us.

MODERATOR: Thank you. Now we'll go to questions.

OPERATOR: Thank you. Ladies and gentlemen, if you wish to ask a question, please press * then 1 on your touchtone phone. You will hear a tone indicating that you are in queue. You may remove yourself from queue at any time by depressing the # key. Once again, please press * then 1 for questions.

MODERATOR: All right. We'll go to our first question.

OPERATOR: And that is from Nick Wadhams, Bloomberg News. Please, go ahead.

QUESTION: Hi. Thanks very much. I just had a quick question for each of you.

[Senior Administration Official One], I'm wondering whether given the U.S. effort to bring Hungary closer into the fold and discourage it from cooperation with China –

MODERATOR: Nick, you're kind of hard to hear. I'm sorry to interrupt. Could you speak into your mouthpiece?

QUESTION: Can you hear me now?

MODERATOR: Yes, better. Thank you.

QUESTION: Okay. [Senior Administration Official One], I'm wondering whether the U.S. is disappointed in Hungary given the degree to which it's now cooperated with Huawei. You mentioned this a little bit, but could you expand on that given how much the U.S. has sort of tried to pull Hungary closer into the fold? It seems like Huawei has made Hungary a pretty major hub for its operations.

And then also, [Senior Administration Official Two], on the Warsaw Conference, is the U.S. disappointed with the responses it's gotten so far? As far as I understand, several European countries will not be sending foreign minister to that conference because they're concerned about the message or the fact that the U.S. may be trying to use this essentially as a means to bash Iran. Thank you.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL ONE: Nick, thanks for that question. As you know, what we're trying to do in Central Europe is increase U.S. diplomatic, commercial, military, and cultural engagement across the board. Our view is that that is overdue and needed, that it has been in part the lack of robust U.S. engagement over the last decade or so in Central Europe that has created the vacuums that China and Russia have very readily filled. I think Huawei's strong presence in China – which, if I'm not mistaken, is the largest telecom presence outside of China – is indicative of that pattern.

So our efforts at diplomatic engagement are aimed at competing for positive influence and giving allies in the region a indication of U.S. support and interest in order to have alternatives to China and Russia. And that's been our emphasis across the board, by the way, in our efforts to increase defense cooperation, what we're doing in energy diversification, our restructuring of OPIC, and effort to provide alternatives to Chinese financing in the region, and of course, also some of the initiatives the Secretary will be talking about with NGOs.

But I think what I would underscore is that it's been the lack of U.S. engagement that has helped to create some of those vacuums. That's part of what we want to address. And to just give you a data point that underscores that, the last time a U.S. secretary of state was in Bratislava, for example, was 20 years ago. If you look at, say, France, we've had Secretary of State visits something like 65, 66 times in that 20-year period. Vladimir Putin showed up in Hungary twice last year alone, and the last time a U.S. president was in Budapest was 2006. So our message is we have to show up or expect to lose. We've been at this approach now for about a year. We know the

results of lack of U.S. engagement in the region, so we want to step up that diplomatic engagement.

The Secretary's visit is, by my count, the 14th senior U.S. official in the last 12 months to go to Central Europe, so we are trying to send a very strong message to our allies as well as our adversaries, and we don't agree with the Central European countries or with Hungary on everything, but we believe that we need to treat allies like allies and expect them to behave accordingly.

MODERATOR: Senior Administration Official Number Two, would you like to –

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL TWO: Sure, yes. Nick, thank you. No, we're not disappointed with the turnout. In fact, the RSVP roster has grown since our initial press call on January 28th. We think that we have critical mass here to engage on the topics that I mentioned and address the overall topic of peace and security.

There are side discussions, even a plenary on Yemen for example. Why would it not be in the interests of the other invited countries not to participate in a meeting that is getting at the Yemen conflict, whose resolution is in the interests of all of our European allies? So we think anybody who doesn't participate is going to be missing out, but we've got a good roster. I think we have an excellent agenda set forward, so I think we're looking – very much looking forward to making as much progress with those who are there on these tough regional issues.

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

OPERATOR: And next we have Carol Morello, *Washington Post*. Please, go ahead.

QUESTION: Thank you for doing this. I have a quick question for each of you.

Official Number Two, this is a question I asked in another call a couple days ago and it was ignored, so I'm hoping I can get an answer this time. Do you expect to have any discussion with the Saudis or anyone on the Khashoggi murder, perhaps urging the Saudis to tell them to stop impeding the UN investigation, as the special rapporteur said, and showing concern about the intercept showing MBS talked about using a bullet on Khashoggi a year earlier?

And Official Number One, in addition to Huawei, will you be talking to Mr. Orban at all about your – his seemingly coziness with Vladimir Putin and attempt to cultivate better relations?

MODERATOR: We can start with Senior Administration Official Number Two.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL TWO: Carol, thank you. I mean, the resolution of the Khashoggi investigation is a priority for the administration. The Secretary had an opportunity to meet with the minister of state for Saudi Arabia yesterday. You'll see from that readout that he, as he has in practically every engagement that he's had with the Saudis, he's raised the Khashoggi matter and pushing for those same benchmarks that we have been

pushing for – credibility, accountability, timely response to the investigation. So that’s an ongoing issue that we continue to work with the Saudis.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL ONE: Hey, Carol. Good to hear your voice. Thanks for the question. The short answer is yes, I do expect us to see the Secretary raise with Prime Minister Orban the problem that we have with his interactions with Vladimir Putin. This is part of a broader pattern across Central Europe.

I would expect to see the Secretary discuss with his senior Hungarian interlocutors the full range of issues in our bilateral relationship, but I would say part of our concern is very much the scale of corruption in Central Europe, and that includes Hungary. The corruption problem creates pathways for Russian and Chinese influence, so you really can’t separate the two. And this is one of the initiatives that we will be unveiling is U.S. support for efforts to look more closely at the intersections between corruption and Russian and Chinese influence.

I would also expect to see the Secretary raise the Russian presence in Central European energy grid and energy sector. I’m thinking in particular of the Paks nuclear plant but also Hungary’s support for TurkStream and our efforts to encourage alternatives to that like Krk Island LNG terminal, which will only succeed if the Hungarians show a degree of support for that project that is greater than they have shown to date.

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

OPERATOR: The next question is from Christina Ruffini, CBS News. Please, go ahead.

QUESTION: Good morning, guys. Thanks for doing this. I wanted to talk about Bratislava and Budapest. I’m wondering if you can give us any guidance. Were those stops planned before or after the U.S. made the final decision to withdraw from INF, and is that something you’ll be discussing possible future plans to place short or intermediate-range missiles in those countries? Is that something that will come up in discussions while we’re there? Thank you.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL ONE: Yeah, thanks, Christina. I appreciate the question. The effort to engage Central Europe and these stops in particular, Bratislava and Budapest, as I mentioned a moment ago, are part of a larger U.S. engagement strategy to coincide with the 30th anniversary of 1989. The initiatives that the Secretary will be unveiling in cultural ties and people-to-people links, all of this has been in the works now for many months to get ready for this anniversary year. As I mentioned, our strategy has emphasized the need for increased U.S. diplomatic, commercial, and people-to-people engagement with that region. So from where I sit, I don’t see anything about our efforts in Central Europe that have anything to do with where the U.S. has been at on INF.

MODERATOR: Thank you. We’ll take the next question.

OPERATOR: The next question is from Shaun Tandon, AFP. Please, go ahead.

QUESTION: Yeah, thanks for doing this call. I wanted to follow up with Senior Official Number One on Hungary. You mentioned the concerns with the Orban government. As you know, the previous administration gave a bit more of a cold shoulder to the Hungarian Government. I wanted to see – you say you'll mention human rights and other concerns. Is there any concern that perhaps the Secretary's presence could embolden the Orban government? Was that a factor, particularly as the Secretary has spoken in Davos and elsewhere of change throughout the world – Brexit, the Trump election, Bolsonaro? Is there any concern that this would be seen as more of a – as more of something to boost Orban in his role domestically?

And for Senior Official Number Two, just one quick question. I see that Poland has announced that the Palestinians have been invited to the Warsaw conference. I wanted to see if you could explain that a little bit to see whether you expect any talks on the Israeli-Palestinian issue, if you think the Palestinians would accept this offer. Thanks.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL ONE: Shaun, thank you for that question. What I would say is the current state of affairs in Hungary and in Central Europe, which includes many of the problems that we have in these relationships, came after about a decade of U.S. disengagement, and that disengagement was not only political in nature but I think strategically a deprioritization of Central Europe. And we know what resulted from that disengagement. So the vacuums that were created by the U.S. not being more strongly present in these places – those vacuums, they do get filled, they have gotten filled. So it's in that period of time that we have seen China come forward with the 16+1 Initiative, that we've seen Vladimir Putin become much more aggressive with a full-court press in this region, and yes, we do have concerns in rule of law and corruption and energy security.

But the purpose of diplomacy is to talk and is to engage. We're using diplomacy to look for areas of shared interest that have been neglected in the recent past. We're also using that diplomacy as we have in recent months as a messaging opportunity to talk about where our disagreements are with some of these governments. That's the purpose of diplomacy. And I would just underscore that these are NATO allies. We have diplomatic interactions with countries that are not NATO allies on a very regular basis. Secretary Pompeo has been traveling to North Korea and to other places with egregious human rights records because our diplomacy can lead to greater security. So we're using diplomacy for that purpose.

What I would say is that our approach on Hungary and Central Europe is consistent with the U.S. approach as outlined by the National Security Strategy and National Defense Strategy to compete for influence in vulnerable regions of the world, not just Europe, where Chinese influence in particular is growing. And in that regard, our effort with Hungary and with Slovakia is complementary to our actions in Asia Pacific, it's consistent with what we're doing in Serbia, Belarus, Cyprus, Azerbaijan. The goal is to wrong-foot the West's rivals in places where they have gained bridgeheads, and we cannot do that without diplomacy.

So I think that's going to be the main focus. I think you can expect to see the U.S. delegation talk to our friends in Central Europe about areas where we have interests that need to be rediscovered and developed, and also see us talk to our allies about areas in democracy and corruption where we have a problem and that problem is creating an inroad for authoritarian rivals.

MODERATOR: Thank you. Senior Administration Official Number Two.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL TWO: Yes, indeed. As noted, we have asked the Palestinian Authority to send representatives to this event. Senior Advisor to the President Jared Kushner is also confirmed to participate. He will discuss the administration's efforts to advance peace between Israel and the Palestinians and also take questions from the audience. So we would very much welcome the Palestinian Authority's perspectives during the discussion, but I do want to emphasize that this is not a negotiation but a discussion, and we look forward to fostering a constructive conversation in Warsaw.

MODERATOR: Thank you. We'll take the next question.

OPERATOR: The next question is from the line of Nadia Charters, Al Arabiya. Please, go ahead.

QUESTION: Thank you very much. It's Al Arabiya. Actually, I was asking the same question about the Palestinian issues that – since you mentioned that Mr. Kushner is addressing this conference. I'm just wondering why now, why he feels that this is the right platform since there have been, I will say, a little bit of silence on the peace deal. So what he hopes to achieve from this conference, and is this any bilateral meeting that he will have with the Israelis, with Netanyahu, with the Arab delegation? Thank you.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL TWO: Thank you. I don't think we have all the answers to the bilateral engagements. I'd refer you to Mr. Kushner and the White House for those schedules. But obviously, many Arab leaders are going to be here, there will be numerous bilateral engagements, Prime Minister Netanyahu's also scheduled to be there, et cetera. So – but I think the primary point here is this is a conference on peace and security in the Middle East, so it's a ripe opportunity, I think, to have a conversation about the Arab – sorry, the Israeli and Palestinian issue as well as some of the other issues like Yemen and Syria that I highlighted at the outset.

MODERATOR: Thank you. We'll take the next question.

OPERATOR: One moment, please. Next moment is from Shesgreen of *USA Today*. Please go ahead.

QUESTION: Hi, this is Deirdre Shesgreen. Thanks for taking my question. It's also about Mr. Kushner's agenda. Can you tell – can you say if he will be providing details about the peace plan, or just a broad overview? And will he be looking to bring other countries on board or what's the goal? And then how much will Secretary Pompeo be involved in that effort?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL TWO: I think I would refer you to the White House specifically for his schedule and for the kinds of interventions that

he is planning to have, but all I can stress, I think, is that this whole event is structured for sort of free-flowing and dynamic conversation. We've also said all along the way that we're not expecting everybody to agree on all of the issues. How could that be? So I think the whole idea here is to bring together a good cross-section of global leadership who are interested in making progress on some of the core issues in the Middle East.

MODERATOR: Next question, please.

OPERATOR: And next we have Joel Gehrke, *Washington Examiner*. Please, go ahead.

QUESTION: Hi, thank you for doing this. This is for Official Number One on the Arctic. Do you think that China wants to project military power in the Arctic? And can you elaborate, just for explaining to readers, on some of the ramifications for Americans of a security competition in the Arctic with China or Russia?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL ONE: Yes, Joel, thank you for the question. That's a great question. It's an area of enormous concern for us. I think it's something that hasn't been closely studied enough in the recent past.

The short answer to your question would be yes, I do see the Chinese as creating – they're certainly creating the potential, should they wish to do so in the future, to use military capabilities in the Arctic. I think the Chinese and Russians are a couple of steps ahead of the United States and European Union in realizing the strategic importance of the Arctic as a resource zone, and part of the issue here, and part of the reason for the stop in Iceland, is I think the – I mentioned a minute ago the problem of the rivals of the West developing bridgeheads in various parts of the world. We see Iceland as a place where the Chinese would like to develop a bridgehead, including through port capabilities, and doing so would position Iceland to be a natural hub for China vis-a-vis the Arctic, and it's a classic example of a place where the United States needs to show up more often diplomatically in order to make it clear to our allies that they have our support and to give them alternatives to Chinese courtship.

MODERATOR: Thank you. We'll take the next question. We'll take the next question now.

OPERATOR: (Inaudible) question's Aime Williams, *Financial Times*. Please, go ahead.

QUESTION: Oh, hi, thanks for doing this. On Huawei, I was wondering if you were more concerned about their presence in Eastern Europe than you are about their presence in Western Europe, and if you could expand a little on why, if that is the case.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL ONE: Aime, thank you. Thank you, Aime. That's a terrific question. The short answer is yes, we are more concerned about the Chinese presence, the Huawei presence in Central and Eastern Europe than in Western Europe.

I should be clear that, of course, we see this as being problematic across the board, but I think what sets Central and Eastern Europe apart is you have a large number of mostly small and midsize states that – many of whom have a higher propensity to corruption. And if you look, for example, at the 16+1 initiative, it underscores the importance of Central and Eastern Europe in Chinese global strategic plans. 16+1 was actually founded a year before the Belt Road Initiative.

And so I think from a Chinese perspective, they see in Central and Eastern Europe EU member-states – I think 12 out of the 16 members of 16+1 are EU memberships or EU member-states. So they see relatively small countries with a recent history of communism with significant pathways of corruption that lend themselves more readily to state penetration in key sectors, and then they have a springboard to operate within EU fora. And all you need to do is look at the success that the Chinese have had importing individual Eastern European member-states of the EU to block the EU on things like recognition of the human rights problem in China or a support for the U.S. position in the South China Sea.

So yes, I do see Central and Eastern Europe as being a prime target for China and being perhaps more vulnerable than some other parts of Europe to the success of that agenda.

MODERATOR: Thank you. We have time for one more question.

OPERATOR: And that question is from Jessica Donati, *Wall Street Journal*. Please, go ahead.

QUESTION: Hi. Thank you so much for doing this. I wanted to ask, is Brian Hook still going to the conference? And if there are going to be sessions on Iran, what is the aim? What kind of progress are you looking to get there on the (inaudible) of Iran?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL TWO: Yes. Brian will be going to the conference, and when we talk about the issues of Middle East peace and security, obviously Iran is a key topic. So there will be discussions about Iran's influence in the Middle East, what we can do to help get Iran on a more helpful footing than it has been, to collectively push back on some of its malign behavior in the region. So I think those topics will certainly surface at the event.

MODERATOR: All right. Thank you, everyone. Thanks to our speakers for joining us and thank you all for dialing in. We wish you a (inaudible) rest of the afternoon. The transcript will be available in a couple hours on our website. Thank you so much.

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Press Releases: Attempted Space Launch by the Iranian Regime

Press Statement
Robert Palladino

Deputy Spokesperson

Washington, DC
February 7, 2019

In defiance of the international community, the Iranian regime continues to develop and test ballistic missiles, including a reported second failed space launch in less than a month. Space launch vehicles use technologies that are virtually identical and interchangeable with those used in ballistic missiles, including in Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles (ICBMs). This attempted launch furthers Iran's ability to eventually build such a weapon that threatens our allies.

The Iranian regime has continued to exploit the goodwill of nations and defied multiple Security Council resolutions in its quest for a robust ballistic missile force. The Iranian regime continues to increase its investment in missile testing and missile proliferation even as its economy crumbles and its people suffer. Today Iran has the largest ballistic missile force in the Middle East. Iran has also exported ballistic missile systems to malign actors in the region, threatening innocent civilians.

Iran continues to defy UNSCR 2231 brazenly, working to enhance missile capabilities that threaten our allies. Iran's blatant disregard for international norms must be addressed. We must bring back tougher international restrictions to deter Iran's missile program. The United States will continue to be relentless in building support around the world to confront the Iranian regime's reckless ballistic missile activity, and we will continue to impose sufficient pressure on the regime so that it changes its malign behavior – including by fully implementing all of our sanctions.

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Press Releases: Women's Global Development and Prosperity Initiative

Press Statement
Michael R. Pompeo

Secretary of State

Washington, DC
February 7, 2019

In order to achieve peace and economic prosperity for all members of society, the United States promotes women's global development and prosperity today with the signing of a National Security Presidential Memorandum by President Trump. The initiative will advance women's economic empowerment through a whole-of-government approach to reach 50 million women globally by 2025. It will focus on efficiently and effectively directing our policy and programmatic efforts to support workforce development and women entrepreneurs, while breaking down barriers to create environments for women to participate fully in the economy.

The initiative will provide innovative educational programs, financial and technical assistance, capacity building, and mentorship to support women's economic participation. The initiative will engage the private sector, public sector, and civil society to ensure that women have the opportunity to reach their full economic potential in the United States and around the world, thereby promoting prosperity and peace for all.

Advancing the rights of women and girls worldwide is integral to our national security and a priority for the United States. We are proud to help launch the new Women's Global Development and Prosperity Initiative today, and look forward to continuing our work across the United States government, with partner governments and the private sector, to build upon these efforts.

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Press Releases: Department Press Briefing – February 7, 2019

Robert Palladino
Deputy Spokesperson

Department Press Briefing
Washington, DC
February 7, 2019

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TRANSCRIPT:

2:47 p.m. EST

MR PALLADINO: It's great to see you all again.

QUESTION: The feeling is mutual.

MR PALLADINO: Excellent. Thank you, Laurie. Thank you.

QUESTION: For Laurie?

MR PALLADINO: Yes, you remember me. Thank you. You care. You care.

We have a special guest today, Special Representative for Venezuela, Elliott Abrams. Elliott, please. Thank you.

MR ABRAMS: Thanks. A few comments to start. Two weeks ago, Juan Guaido and the democratically elected National Assembly took the courageous and constitutional step of declaring Guaido interim president, and forming a transitional government while working toward free and fair elections. We, the United States, recognized Guaido as the interim president on January 23rd.

As of today, 23 European countries have recognized Guaido as the interim president of Venezuela. I believe we're up to 48 countries around the world that have recognized him. As many of you know, there are meetings, yesterday and today in Uruguay, about the crisis in Venezuela. One, an Uruguay and Mexico-led meeting; another, the International Contact Group on Venezuela.

Instead of trying to accommodate Maduro through contact groups or dialogue, we urge countries to recognize Juan Guaido as interim president and join us in responding to his call for immediate international humanitarian assistance to meet the needs of the

Venezuelan people. Maduro has proven he will manipulate any call for negotiations to his advantage, and he has often used so-called dialogues as a way to play for time. We urge all involved to deal solely with the legitimate Guaido government. The time for dialogue with Maduro has long passed. Every day that Maduro remains in power is a day where political prisoners remain in jail, detainees are abused, and Venezuelans go without food and medicine.

The contrast between Interim President Guaido and Maduro is striking. While Mr. Guaido calls for humanitarian assistance for the people of Venezuela – excuse me – while Guaido calls for humanitarian assistance for the people of Venezuela, Maduro continues to block unhindered access to international humanitarian assistance, and denies Venezuelans the basic necessities they direly need, unless they declare loyalty to him. The U.S. Government is coordinating with Guaido and his team of experts, other governments in the region, our humanitarian partners, on the logistics of deploying aid to mobilize a response efficiently and safely. We are prepositioning items – relief items, food, nutritional supplements, hygiene kits, medical kits in Colombia so that they're available to reach Venezuelans in need in their own country as soon as that is safe and logistically possible.

Yesterday, Ambassador Carlos Vecchio announced an international conference on humanitarian assistance to take place at the OAS on February 14th to address the urgent humanitarian needs of the Venezuelan people. We encourage everyone – governments, organizations, private entities – to answer his call and support the long-suffering Venezuelan people. As Secretary Pompeo said, U.S. will mobilize and transport humanitarian aid – medicine, medical supplies, surgical supplies, nutritional supplements – for the people of Venezuela.

I would like to state that we are imposing visa restrictions and revoking the visas of members of the illegitimate constituent assembly. This body has usurped many of the constitutional powers of the National Assembly, the legitimate National Assembly, and embodies Maduro's destruction of democratic institutions. While I cannot name names because visa information is protected, I can state that we will continue to take action against those destroying Venezuela's democratic institutions. Thank you.

MR PALLADINO: We have time for a few questions. Matt.

QUESTION: Thanks, Robert. Just on the contact group, you mentioned at the beginning that 23 European countries now recognize Guaido. And yet the EU was the primary organizer of the contact group. So I'm wondering, one, if you guys were invited to join and said no for the reasons that you outlined, that the time for dialogue is past. And secondly, if 23 European countries have already derecognized Maduro, how do you think that the contact group was – try to get to dialogue?

MR ABRAMS: Well, I hope they're going to follow the position of the United States, which is that the only worthwhile message to the Maduro

regime is it's time to end the dictatorship in Venezuela. The question is really what is the purpose of the contact group, and we'll find out when they issue a final statement. But our messages to the members of the contact group have been don't fall into a trap that Maduro has set many times before, where there's a phony dialogue rather than a strong message to him: it's time to go.

QUESTION: Right. But did you decline an opportunity to be part of the contact group?

MR ABRAMS: I don't believe we were ever interested in joining the contact group, because we don't think that's the way to go.

QUESTION: Thanks.

MR PALLADINO: Let's go to Bloomberg. Nick Wadhams.

QUESTION: Mr. Abrams, can you talk about what the U.S. has in mind for Nicolas Maduro himself? John Bolton tweeted that he'd be happy to see him on a beach somewhere. Would you care where he goes? Would the U.S. seek to have him face justice of some sort? Do you have anything in mind for what the endgame for him ought to be?

MR ABRAMS: The endgame for him should be to leave power, and the sooner the better. Because his own situation is only going to decline the longer he clings to power and the more misery there is in Venezuela.

QUESTION: But where would you like to see him go? Should he remain in Venezuela or leave the country?

MR ABRAMS: I think it is better for the transition to democracy in Venezuela that he be outside the country. And there are a number of countries that I think would be willing to accept him.

QUESTION: Which ones?

MR ABRAMS: Well, he's got friends in places like Cuba and Russia, and there are some other countries actually that have come to us privately and said they'd be willing to take members of the current illegitimate regime if it would help the transition.

QUESTION: Can you name any?

MR ABRAMS: No.

MR PALLADINO: Let's go to Reuters.

QUESTION: Mr. Abrams, isn't it rather rich given your background –

MR PALLADINO: Excuse me, sir, no. No. Give order. No, no, no, no.

QUESTION: Do we have a free press here or not?

QUESTION: Mr. Abrams.

MR PALLADINO: Reuters. Hang on. It's Reuters.

QUESTION: Hello. How are you?

QUESTION: Freedom and democracy. That what's going on here?

QUESTION: So two questions, quickly. Is – you say time has long passed to negotiate with Maduro, but this is a different situation in which he – you have an opposition leader that has come forward and that is willing and has united the opposition, as you've claimed. Number two: How are you going to get the aid into Venezuela when Maduro still has the military behind him and he controls all of the territory?

MR ABRAMS: It is probably correct that the Venezuelan army, if mobilized, could prevent international aid from reaching Venezuela. That would be a really tragic situation. And we are hopeful that that won't happen. We saw the blocking of the bridge in Cucuta. But members of the army are Venezuelan citizens. They have parents and children and brothers and sisters who are suffering badly. So our hope is that they will be able to persuade Maduro, or they will simply disobey orders to continue the starvation of the people of Venezuela.

As to discussions with Maduro, negotiating with him on his departure is fine, if we ever get to that negotiation. Obviously, he may flee someday or he may seek to negotiate conditions. But that's not what he's done in the past. What he's done in the past is to use these negotiations to prolong his stay in power and to try to demonstrate his legitimacy. And that, we're against.

MR PALLADINO: Let's go to Fox, Rich Edson.

QUESTION: Mr. Abrams, you've been accused of –

MR PALLADINO: Excuse me, sir. Fox (inaudible).

QUESTION: How long can you say that –

QUESTION: (Inaudible.)

MR PALLADINO: Fox.

QUESTION: When did the –

QUESTION: (Inaudible) rich for you to be talking about political riots and starving people (inaudible) –

QUESTION: When did the administration become aware of Mr. Guaido, and how long has he been – has the administration been working with Mr. Guaido?

MR ABRAMS: I can't actually answer that question, because I've been here for too short a time. His – he was an elected member of the National Assembly in one of the major parties in the group of four

leading democratic parties. So I think it depends also who – if you ask me, for example, when did Ambassador Todd or when did now Charge Story know of him, I'm sure they've known him a long time. Obviously, he's gotten a lot more famous recently.

QUESTION: And are you confident that he's been sufficiently vetted, especially as this has gone on now for the last weeks?

MR ABRAMS: Yes, and I think – you know the pressure that he's under. You saw the incident that happened just a few days ago, where police entered his own home, his apartment where his 20-month-old daughter was. Think of the pressures that he's under. I think that the leadership that he is giving to the Venezuelan people is really quite extraordinary.

MR PALLADINO: Let's go to ABC.

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

QUESTION: Mr. Abrams, just in follow-up to something that you said to Lesley, you talked about you're hopeful that the Maduro regime wouldn't block aid coming across the border.

MR ABRAMS: Yeah.

QUESTION: Does that mean that you intend, with your partner countries, perhaps with NGOs, to begin moving that aid without explicit permission to do so?

MR ABRAMS: We will be moving aid to the border of Venezuela in the hope that – and there is some aid there now – in the hope that we will be able to get it in. I don't think that we or the Colombians or the Brazilians or anyone else is planning to try to force it in. It's an extraordinary situation, if you think about it. You've seen the statistics about hunger, about closure of hospitals, about the spread of communicable diseases that had been eradicated, because now there cannot be vaccinations. There are dire needs, and I think many people, again, in the Venezuelan army feel those needs for themselves and their families. So we're hopeful that that at least initial decision on the part of Maduro can be turned around, if he sees a real demand on the part of the people of Venezuela. Let it in. That's all we're asking. Let it in.

MR PALLADINO: Let's go to Voice of America. Nike, please.

QUESTION: How about the sanctions (inaudible) that the U.S. special rapporteur says that sanctions (inaudible) –

QUESTION: Thank you. Sir, you just mentioned the visa restriction. And do you – is there any discussion on any sanction regarding the regimes or governments that continue to support and help Maduro regime and sabotaging the democratic transition? Separately, there is a perception in China and in other countries that U.S. is interfering in

domestic politics. What's your response to those criticism? Thank you.

MR ABRAMS: Well, there has been interference in the domestic politics of Venezuela for a long time, primarily by Cuba, which has a very large presence in Venezuela. If you look around at the now nearly 50 democracies that are supporting Interim-President Guaido and the National Assembly, it's hard really to say that all of those countries are engaged in some kind of joint effort to interfere. What we're trying to do is help Venezuelans create a system where, if you will, they can interfere in their own internal affairs, where their politics is in the hands of the Venezuelan people, where the future of their country can be determined by – in a free election by the people of Venezuela.

QUESTION: How about sanction against governments like support –

MR ABRAMS: Well, the sanctions that exist now, that have been enacted, are not secondary sanctions; they're primary sanctions. We will continue to speak to governments around the world, urging them to get on the right side of this issue, which is the side of supporting the people of Venezuela and leading toward a transition and a free election there. We will keep pushing.

QUESTION: (Inaudible) the U.S. (inaudible) interfering in any way?

MR PALLADINO: Let's go to CBS, Christina Ruffini.

QUESTION: Thank you. Mr. Abrams, I spoke with Ambassadors Story and Vecchio this morning, and I asked them about this 30-day deadline. In the constitution he was able to take power, but it says only for 30 days. And they're confident with the situation on the ground as it is that the public and the constitution gives them time to fix this. But I'm wondering if there's any kind of concern as we pass that 30-day mark and the clock starts to tick down if the Guaido government can't take control, if they start to lose momentum, that we could see this fall apart.

MR ABRAMS: Well, I don't think so. First, I don't think they're going to lose momentum; they seem to be gaining momentum, as more and more countries join this struggle to support the people of Venezuela. If it is true that at the end of 30 days it has not been possible to have – to begin a transition to a free election and an elected, democratic government, the fall will be that of the regime, so I doubt that it will have any repercussions on the National Assembly and Mr. Guaido.

QUESTION: But don't you think that if there are two presidents of Venezuela, neither of whom –

MR ABRAMS: There is only one president of Venezuela, and there is a former president of Venezuela.

MR PALLADINO: All right. Last question, Michel, please.

QUESTION: An update on the U.S. diplomats in Venezuela, their security, their protection, and the U.S. presence in general?

MR ABRAMS: As you've heard the Secretary say many times there's no greater priority for him, for the department, than the safety of our officials on the ground around the world. That remains a concern. It gets a lot of attention here. And we are – I would just say we are working on that, and I would not like to say much more about it because it's important to us.

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

MR PALLADINO: Thank you. (Inaudible.) I appreciate it. Thanks for coming today. Here we go.

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

QUESTION: Hey, Robert?

MR PALLADINO: Yeah.

QUESTION: Before you start, can I – this was a – I wanted to – the visa restrictions that he announced on the visa – on the constituent assembly – is that new today?

MR PALLADINO: Yes.

QUESTION: It is?

MR PALLADINO: Yes.

QUESTION: And do – I know you can't give names, but roughly a number – a handful, dozens?

MR PALLADINO: We'll take it, all right? We'll take it.

QUESTION: While we're on the same subject, can we continue on that?

MR PALLADINO: No, we're going to – I've got a couple toppers and – that I'd like to start with.

And I'm pleased to announce that Lea Gabrielle will be our new special envoy and coordinator of the Global Engagement Center. Lea will provide the permanent leadership we have needed to bolster the Global Engagement Center's operations, and she will begin her duties on Monday. Lea is a former CIA-trained human intelligence operations officer, defense foreign liaison officer, United States Navy program director, Navy F/A-18C fighter pilot, and national television news correspondent and anchor at two different networks.

While serving in the United States Intelligence Community, Lea was a CIA-trained human intelligence operations officer assigned to Defense Intelligence Agency. She directed and conducted global clandestine

strategic intelligence collection operations. Lea later served as director of the United States Navy Sensitive Intelligence Program. Before that Lea was a defense foreign liaison officer for the Office of International Engagements at the Defense Intelligence Agency. She began her public service in the Navy as a fighter pilot flying combat missions in Afghanistan and Iraq, Operations Enduring Freedom and Southern Watch. She was on active duty military service for 12 years.

Lea also knows the media. After serving in the Navy, she became a television news journalist at NBC News and most recently served as a correspondent and frequent anchor for the Fox News Channel and Fox Business Network. Lea is a graduate of the Naval Academy, and we're thrilled to welcome her to the department.

Pleased to announce as well that the Secretary of State will travel to Budapest, Bratislava, Warsaw, Brussels, and Reykjavik from February 11th through 15th. On February 11th, Secretary Pompeo will arrive in Budapest, Hungary, where he will meet with the prime minister, foreign minister, defense minister, and civil society leaders; discuss a range of issues in the United States-Hungary bilateral relationship, including defense cooperation, energy, regional security, support for Ukraine, and ways to counter Russian and Chinese influence and to strengthen the Western alliance.

On February 12th he will arrive in Bratislava, Slovakia, where he will meet with the president, prime minister, and foreign minister; discuss United States-Slovak – the United States-Slovak security relationship, Slovakia's role as the chair-in-office of the OSCE, and regional and global issues. He will visit the Gate of Freedom Memorial, where more than 400 people died trying to escape from communist Czechoslovakia to freedom in Austria between 1948 and 1989. He'll also speak with students about the legacy of Western democratic freedom and its triumph over communism 30 years ago.

Later on February 12th, Secretary Pompeo will travel to Warsaw, Poland, where he will meet with the foreign minister to discuss security and energy issues, building on the strong relations between the United States and Poland. There the Secretary will participate in the Ministerial to Promote a Future of Peace and Security in the Middle East, jointly hosted by the United States and Poland, from February 13 through 14 in Warsaw. Countries from across the globe have been invited to participate, and more than 40 will, in fact, be there.

The ministerial will be a forum for countries concerned about instability in the region to share their assessments and other ideas on a better way forward. Countries will also address a range of critical issues including terrorism and extremism, countering illicit finance, missile development and proliferation, regional crises and their effects on civilians, cyber security, energy threats to the energy sector, maritime trade and security, and threats posed by proxy groups across the region.

On February 15, Secretary Pompeo will travel to Brussels, Belgium, where he'll meet with the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Mogherini. The Secretary and high representative will discuss our shared efforts to restore democracy to Venezuela and support Venezuelan Interim President Guaido and the National Assembly, as well as the importance of strengthening European security and addressing the threats posed by Iran and Russia.

Finally, the Secretary will travel to Reykjavik, Iceland, on February 15th. In Reykjavik he will meet with the prime minister and foreign minister and discuss security issues in the North Atlantic, Iceland's upcoming chairmanship of the Arctic Council, and growing economic relations.

One other trip announcement: Secretary Pompeo will deliver the March 18th keynote address for the State Department's Road to the Global Entrepreneurship Summit Heartland Event in Overland Park, Kansas, which will take place on March 18th and 19th. The Road to GES Heartland Event will bring together hundreds of entrepreneurs, investors, and public and private sector leaders who are building innovated solutions to agriculture, health, and connectivity. Will also preview the Secretary's participation in the Global Entrepreneurship Summit in The Hague, the Netherlands, which will take place on June 4th and 5th, and both events promote growth and prosperity in the United States and the world, and the Heartland Event will show how American economic strength can shape world affairs to our nation's benefit. Road to GES Heartland will also include a delegation of entrepreneurs from the Netherlands, a strong and longstanding partner of the United States.

Finally, I want to start off with a brief update on our efforts towards the final, fully verified denuclearization of North Korea and the second summit between President Trump and Chairman Kim. As the President said during the State of the Union Address, the second summit will occur on February 27th and 28th in Vietnam. Vietnam is a close friend and partner of the United States, and we thank the Government of Vietnam for its generosity in hosting the second summit. The history of our two nations reflects the possibilities for peace and prosperity. We move past conflict and division towards the thriving partnership that we enjoy today.

As you know, negotiations are ongoing. Currently we have a team on the ground led by the United States Special Representative for North Korea Stephen Biegun, who is in Pyongyang for – with meetings with his counterpart, Kim Hyok-chol. These meetings are to prepare for the President's second summit with Chairman Kim and to make further progress on the commitments that the President and Chairman Kim made at their first summit in Singapore, including complete denuclearization, transformation of the United States-North Korea relations, and building a lasting peace mechanism on the Korean Peninsula.

With that, I'd be happy to take a couple questions.

QUESTION: So Kansas in March, eh? Any particular reason you decided to announce this more than a month ahead of when it's actually happening?

MR PALLADINO: Because it's time to start sending invitations, actually, and this has been in the works for about –

QUESTION: Okay. No other reason for the Secretary to make another trip to Kansas –

MR PALLADINO: Hey, hey, the Secretary likes Kansas, you may have noticed as well. Yeah, absolutely. Always a good reason to visit Kansas.

QUESTION: On North Korea, has anyone heard from Special Representative Biegun? When's he coming back from Pyongyang? He's been there for, what, two days now, or –

MR PALLADINO: I have – we have nothing further to announce on his schedule at this point. When we have some updates on that, we'll – we will provide them.

Anything further on that? North Korea?

QUESTION: Locations in Vietnam – why not announce where this is going to be and more details on it?

MR PALLADINO: That will come when it's ready for announcement, but I have nothing at this time.

QUESTION: But we're only days away from this summit, so why are those details not nailed down just yet?

MR PALLADINO: We're working on details as we speak, and we're looking forward to a very good summit.

Please.

QUESTION: (Inaudible) second summit. Will the issue of the declaration of the end of the war coming up at this summit?

MR PALLADINO: I'm not going to get ahead of the summit and the agenda for the summit, but we're very much focused on setting it up, yeah.

QUESTION: Okay. What is the United States preparing to – for the concession to North Korea? You have any concession to North Korea?

MR PALLADINO: We are focused on the commitments – achieving – first of all, achieving final, fully verified denuclearization as committed to by Chairman Kim in Singapore. And at that first summit, President Trump and Chairman Kim made that very first leader-to-leader, leader-level United States-North Korea commitment, and that's the first time that that's happened, and we are following up on those commitments that have been made and we remain confident.

QUESTION: It is reported that United States willing to provide incentive, an economic package to North Korea. Can you confirm this? Any reason why you –

MR PALLADINO: We've always been clear that one of our goals here is a brighter future for the North Korean people. Part of that, of course, though – we remain united in enforcing and in implementing the United Nations sanctions until we achieve that final, fully verified denuclearization. We've been very clear that sanctions relief will follow denuclearization. I have nothing – don't have too much more on the summit, but one more – go right here.

QUESTION: No, no, on summit, I have a quick follow-up. So before the first summit, the U.S. rhetoric was the goal is to reach a final, verifiable, and irreversible denuclearization. So has your goal changed? Because you are not using the same words as before.

MR PALLADINO: Stephen Biegun, our special representative, gave very full remarks only a week ago at Stanford. I refer you to those. I really have nothing further to add beyond the special representative's –

QUESTION: Can I – just a quick follow-up?

MR PALLADINO: Sure, Lesley. Please.

QUESTION: I'm going to give it to my colleague who covers the UN for Reuters.

QUESTION: Hi, Michelle Nichols from Reuters at the UN. The UN sanctions monitors reported to the Security Council on Friday that North Korea continues to defy UN sanctions, and in particular they found evidence of a consistent trend that the DPRK is dispersing its assembly, storage, and testing locations of missiles to avoid any decapitation strikes. Does the United States have a response to this?

MR PALLADINO: Yeah, our goal hasn't changed. Our goal is the same, as announced at the first Singapore summit, and that is the final, fully verified denuclearization of North Korea, and we are very much focused on that. We've seen a lot of positives that have occurred since that first summit, but we've been – we've been candid along the way as well, and that much, much work remains.

QUESTION: But did North Korea have to demonstrate anything in particular before you agreed to this next summit? Did they have to demonstrate any particular ask by the U.S.?

MR PALLADINO: Yeah, I'm not going to go into private diplomatic conversations, but we have had a lot of engagement with North Korea during the interim. That's all I have today on North Korea. Let's go, Rich, right here, please.

QUESTION: Quickly on Iran, or – do you have anything on these satellite images and reporting that shows Iran has attempted to launch another

satellite into space, and what the U.S.'s comment on that would be?

MR PALLADINO: I've seen the reports, and – failed, correct? We're aware of those reports of that launch. We continue to call upon the Iranian regime to cease immediately all activities that are inconsistent with the United Nations Security Council Resolution 2231, including space vehicle launches.

QUESTION: Is there anything that the United States is coordinating with European allies who have been open to further sanctions on Iran and further penalties for Iran on its ballistic missile program?

MR PALLADINO: Nothing to announce today, but we continue to take the actions that we believe are necessary to impose sufficient pressure on the Iranian regime so that it ceases pursuing these capabilities that could further destabilize the region.

QUESTION: On the peace and security conference next –

MR PALLADINO: Please.

QUESTION: Thank you. Thank you, Robert. Good to see you at the podium.

MR PALLADINO: Said, hello.

QUESTION: Next week, it is said that Mr. Kushner is going to brief the leaders that are attending, or the countries that are attending, on where they are – where you are with the peace plan. Could you share with us what is he going to say to – is he going to sort of reveal the peace plan, the so-called deal of the century? Is it going to be oral? Is he going to submit something in writing? That's one.

And second, the Israeli prime minister will be attending. Why have you not sent an invitation to the Palestinian authorities since you're going to be talking about peace and security? Or maybe you have, I don't know. But could you shed light on these two issues?

MR PALLADINO: Mr. Kushner will be in attendance, and he will be discussing Middle East peace as part of this overall conference. And anything further than that, I would – I have to refer you to the White House. I don't want to get ahead of what they plan to do.

QUESTION: But this conference is organized by the State Department and Secretary Pompeo, so the invitations, I assume, went out from this building, correct? I mean, you invited –

MR PALLADINO: That's correct.

QUESTION: Okay.

MR PALLADINO: We sent the invitations.

QUESTION: So have you sent out an invitation to the Palestinian Authority or any Palestinians to attend?

MR PALLADINO: I don't have anything on that specifically today.

QUESTION: Very, very quickly, today the United States blocked a statement at the United Nations Security Council that wanted to express regret for Israel throwing out international observers from the city of Hebron and calling that – for all people to sort of tone down and so on. Why would you block such a statement? I mean, the observer mission – you were instrumental in creating that international observer mission in Hebron back in the '90s when it was so volatile.

MR PALLADINO: The 1997 agreement on the temporary international presence in the city of Hebron clearly states that the consent of both the Israelis and the Palestinians is required in order to extend the mandate and presence of the TIPH. Furthermore, Oslo II and Hebron Protocol of 1997 also stated that the agreement from both sides was necessary for that to continue.

QUESTION: Yeah, but don't you like to see some international presence in Hebron because it is a point of conflict and flash point?

MR PALLADINO: Regardless of whether one agrees or disagrees with the Israeli decision not to renew, it would be inaccurate to accuse Israel of not having the right to make this decision under the 1997 agreement. This is a sovereign decision and it's the right of either party to make that agreement.

Please.

QUESTION: Robert, but are you disappointed, though? I mean, it's their right to do it, but you guys take stance – positions and stances on sovereign decisions by foreign governments every day, kind of like the way you did yesterday with Germany and its extradition. So do you – it seems as though your blocking of the statement at the Security Council would suggest that you're not disappointed and that, in fact, you're in favor of it. You said whether you agree or disagree with the Israelis' decision. Well, do you agree or do you disagree with it?

MR PALLADINO: I have nothing further on that other than to say it is – this is in accordance with the agreement itself. This was something that is the right of either party to do, and that was a sovereign decision that was made. Nothing further on that subject.

Any – please, Michel, go ahead.

QUESTION: I have two questions. One on the Turkish – the Turkish foreign minister has said today that the U.S. and Turkey have agreed on forming a joint task force to coordinate the withdrawal from Syria. Can you confirm that?

MR PALLADINO: I haven't seen that report, Michel. I'm sorry. I

haven't – I haven't – I don't have anything on that.

QUESTION: And on the security zone in Turkey, news reports – or in Syria. News reports said that the administration asked France, Britain, and Australia to form a force to create this – this force for – to employ their forces in northeastern Syria. Is it accurate?

MR PALLADINO: I don't have anything on that. Talks are ongoing on many different levels right now, as you know, but I don't have anything specific to add to that.

QUESTION: Last one. Secretary Pompeo has met today with the Kuwaiti prime – deputy prime minister. Any readout?

MR PALLADINO: I don't have a readout on that for you yet, no, but hope to. We'll put something out, hopefully soon.

Yes, Laurie, go ahead.

QUESTION: Yeah. Could you respond in general terms to President – Turkish President Erdogan's complaint that the U.S. has been too slow on the security zone and his threats to implement the security zone unilaterally by force by Turkey? What's your response to that?

MR PALLADINO: The United States takes Turkey's security concerns seriously, and we are actively engaging with Turkey on this matter. And as President Trump just said, we're working through the course of various discussions, including senior-level meetings that took place here at the State Department on Tuesday, as recently as that, and we're trying to promote a stable and secure security relationship for northeast Syria as soon as possible.

QUESTION: And you remain committed to ensuring the security of the people that live in northeast Syria?

MR PALLADINO: We have been clear on that. From the President on down, we have spoken at length to counterparts at various levels on how to proceed with the safe withdrawal of our troops from northeast Syria while stabilizing liberated areas, and we're fully engaged on this, and we've been clear that the Syrian Democratic Forces should not be engaged militarily, and that would include the Kurdish component of the SDF. And we also want to make sure that – and I'll stop there.

QUESTION: Thank you.

MR PALLADINO: All right. All right.

QUESTION: Saudi –

QUESTION: On a different topic, Robert?

MR PALLADINO: Sure. Let's go to Michelle.

QUESTION: Thanks. This is –

QUESTION: There's three Michelles in here.

QUESTION: I know.

QUESTION: Yeah.

QUESTION: It's very confusing.

QUESTION: This Michelle, and –

MR PALLADINO: And we got – how many Roberts do we have? That's my next question. (Laughter.) All right.

QUESTION: We're wasting precious seconds here. So we haven't seen you in a while, Robert. This is the first briefing this year.

MR PALLADINO: Thank you for noticing.

QUESTION: Last year there were 61 briefings. By comparison, 2016, there were 219 briefings for the year. Why are there so few briefings, and is this ever going to be a daily briefing again?

MR PALLADINO: This is the department press briefing, I would say first. And since Secretary Pompeo assumed leadership last April, he really has taken a lot of steps to increase media engagement here at the State Department – across the United States, frankly, and around the world. There's been an expansion. We remain committed to doing all that we can to provide transparency for the American people and to explain our foreign policy around the world.

Now, the Secretary has been in this press briefing room now nine times for nine televised briefings. We hope to continue.

QUESTION: But what's the problem with having a daily briefing though, when past administrations had them virtually every day?

MR PALLADINO: We have had a government shutdown that has slowed us down, regrettably.

QUESTION: No, no, no, aside from the shutdown.

MR PALLADINO: No, a shutdown is a major consideration.

QUESTION: There was no shutdown –

MR PALLADINO: Absolutely.

QUESTION: – for most of last year. The shutdown has a few weeks.

MR PALLADINO: And we have – we've had significant travel as well. And we have more travel upcoming, and if you looked at the last bit of travel, there was a lot of media engagement on that travel, both from

joint press conferences and media interviews. And a little while ago I announced additional travel next week, and we're actively at work to ensure fulsome press engagement on the next trip as well.

So I reject the premise. The Secretary has conducted 72 press engagements since he's arrived. That includes remarks, press availabilities, interviews. And we always want more. I understand that. More to come, and let's look forward.

QUESTION: Wait, wait.

QUESTION: Hang on a second.

MR PALLADINO: Please.

QUESTION: You can't reject the premise. You can't reject the premise. The premise is factual. You can just count up the number of briefing – not the Secretary – I'm talking about this daily briefing, where you are expected or should be able to cover the world and tell us what U.S. policy towards Cameroon or whatever.

MR PALLADINO: We've got a lot of different ways to communicate, and we are – we're going to be providing more information in many different ways. When we're here in Washington, you have my commitment that I intend to brief as often as we are able to brief.

QUESTION: Well, there was a time when there was both a deputy spokesman and a spokesperson.

MR PALLADINO: Yes.

QUESTION: Right? And when the spokesperson was away on travel with the Secretary, the deputy spokesperson would brief. Remember those times?

MR PALLADINO: You may have noticed that the President has made an announcement in December and that the spokesperson is very much focused –

QUESTION: So you –

MR PALLADINO: Okay.

QUESTION: So she goes and does that, but in the meantime there's just one of you. And as wonderful as you are, Robert –

MR PALLADINO: Thank you, Matt. Thank you.

QUESTION: – you can't be in two places at the same time.

MR PALLADINO: This is correct.

QUESTION: So why don't we get someone who can either be a deputy deputy, who can brief while you're on the road with the Secretary, or get another spokesman, get a new spokesperson.

MR PALLADINO: We will hire you for personnel soon, Matt, okay. These are good suggestions.

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

MR PALLADINO: Let's move on. Lesley, please, move on.

QUESTION: As head of the Correspondents Association –

MR PALLADINO: Yes.

QUESTION: – given that we are now discussing this openly, it is true exactly what my colleagues are saying, that there have not been daily briefings. And it is true that you are the lone person on this, and maybe you should look for somebody else to brief when you're not around, number one.

MR PALLADINO: I think that was what Matt just said, Lesley. Okay.

QUESTION: I know. But number two is also: There is value in these briefings not just for us, but everybody on the outside. And then number three is: Can I please put in a request for a Reuters interview, given that we've never ever had an interview? But it seems that there are other outlets that continually have interviews almost daily.

MR PALLADINO: Oh, Lesley, we agree that there is value in this briefing not only for those that are in this room but for audiences around the world. That's why it's important to do a press briefing.

QUESTION: Thank you.

MR PALLADINO: And we'll continue. Please. Michele Kelemen, NPR. Please.

QUESTION: Thank you. Does this administration intend to meet the deadline tomorrow to Congress to say whether Mohammed bin Salman had anything to do with the Khashoggi murder and whether there will be any sanctions.

MR PALLADINO: The Department of State shares the deep concern and outrage over the killings of Jamal Khashoggi expressed by members of Congress and we have consulted and corresponded with the Congress regularly since Jamal Khashoggi's October 2nd killing, including briefings by the Secretary of State.

On November 15th, the Department of Treasury, in consultation with the Department of State and the Department of Justice, imposed Global Magnitsky sanctions on 17 individuals under Executive Order 13818, which builds upon and implements the Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act to target perpetrators of serious human rights abuse and corruption. These sanctions blocked and designated individuals' assets in the United States jurisdiction and generally prohibited all transactions by U.S. persons with them.

We will continue to consult with the Congress and work to hold accountable those that are responsible for Jamal Khashoggi's killing.

Please.

QUESTION: What was that? Are you going to meet the deadline, tomorrow's deadline, to –

MR PALLADINO: I would say we continuously engage with members of Congress to provide them with information as appropriate and to hear their concerns and to have dialogue. I'll stop there.

QUESTION: Right. But isn't it appropriate to follow the – to comply with the law?

MR PALLADINO: I have nothing further to announce today.

QUESTION: Well, wait, wait.

MR PALLADINO: And of course we will comply with the law.

QUESTION: Okay. All right.

QUESTION: I have a question on Iran.

MR PALLADINO: Okay. Let's go to Iran.

QUESTION: So in Japan, Special Representative Brian Hook said that the oil waivers on those eight countries, such as Japan, Taiwan, will not be extended. Can you confirm that or is such a decision still being under consideration?

MR PALLADINO: I don't have anything on that today. Sorry.

Let's go to Shaun. Please.

QUESTION: Can I ask you – the case of – getting back to Turkey – of Adem Yilmaz that was raised apparently with the German foreign minister yesterday? Could you say a little bit about what the United States wants in terms of prosecution of him and whether concerns were raised with the Germans?

MR PALLADINO: We did make – Deputy Secretary Sullivan made very clear yesterday our concerns with Germany's refusal to extradite Yilmaz. Yilmaz is a convicted terrorist; he's charged with serious crimes by the United States. Two American service members were killed and 11 wounded as a result of a suicide bomb attack in Afghanistan in 2008. And this bombing was facilitated by actions that Yilmaz took in support of terrorism. So the United States will never relent in its efforts to bring Yilmaz to justice.

QUESTION: Does it intend to also take that up with Turkey, if and when he is taken there?

MR PALLADINO: Yeah. We have been in touch with the Turkish authorities to coordinate further on Yilmaz's case. I can confirm that. Yeah.

QUESTION: Just briefly following up, you mentioned disappointment with Germany. They argue that it's a judicial process domestically for them. Do you believe that the Germans have done all that they could to take him to the United States, to extradite him?

MR PALLADINO: Can you redo the question one more time? I lost the train there. Go for it.

QUESTION: Sure. Sure.

MR PALLADINO: Yeah.

QUESTION: Just the Germans argue, in response to this, that it's a domestic judicial process, rather than a process – a political decision for the German Government to make. Does the United States buy that? Does the United States think that Berlin could have done more to extradite him to the United States?

MR PALLADINO: We're disappointed by Germany's decision not to deport – decision to deport him to Turkey rather than to extradite him to the United States. He's been indicted by the Southern District of New York on terrorism charges, and the refusal to extradite him is inconsistent with Germany's obligations under the Bilateral Extradition Treaty between the United States and Germany.

Yeah.

QUESTION: Can I do Hungary briefly?

MR PALLADINO: Do – any more on Germany here? Yeah, fine. But let me just add though, at the same time, because I think it's important to add, that Germany remains one of our closest allies and trading partners with whom we cooperate on a huge range of issues. And I would even include extradition in that category as evidenced by our successful collaboration on the Jakiw Palij case. But friends must be frank with one another at times when they have concerns, and to be clear, in this case, the United States has some concerns.

QUESTION: So this one case is not going to trash the entire U.S-German relationship? Is that what you're trying to say?

MR PALLADINO: The premise of the question –

QUESTION: At the very end?

MR PALLADINO: This is our ally, Germany.

QUESTION: Gotcha.

MR PALLADINO: Please, Nick.

QUESTION: Let me – can I just ask about one where you mentioned that the Secretary will meet with civil society groups when he's in Hungary? Does that include critics of the Orban government and people who – concerned about his undermining the judicial system in Hungary and his increased demonstration of authoritarian impulses?

MR PALLADINO: I don't have full details on each leg of the trip, but we will be putting out a media note this evening just as a heads-up, and there will be a curtain-raiser background briefing announced soon, during which we'll provide a lot of detail on each leg of the trip. That will be tomorrow at 10 o'clock.

QUESTION: Does the Secretary –

MR PALLADINO: So that's coming. Yeah.

QUESTION: Does the Secretary have any concerns that his visit in – legitimizes Victor Orban's actions?

MR PALLADINO: These are NATO allies. We have longstanding historical, cultural, and economic ties to Central Europe, and we very much look forward to honoring our shared history with central Europe and to building on a shared future as we go forward. This year marks 30 years since Central Europeans tore down the Iron Curtain in 1989 and reclaimed their sovereignty and freedom, choosing for themselves a Western path joining NATO, joining the European Union, moving towards democracy and freedom that had been denied for them for so long. So we are committed to NATO, we're committed to the Western Alliance, and we're going to work with our European partners and allies, and we certainly can't expect American views on a variety of subjects to be heard by our allies if we refuse to engage with them. And so –

QUESTION: So will you – will he raise those concerns with the government directly?

MR PALLADINO: I have nothing to announce at this time on future discussions. There'll be much more detail provided tomorrow. I would encourage you to please tune in. We will have senior State Department officials to speak on these matters at length, and in conclusion, it is great to see you all again. Thank you very much.

QUESTION: So Robert, does that mean that it's like with the case of Germany, where you're friends but you need to be frank when you have concerns with them? If you have concerns with Hungary and its policies, you'll raise them? Is that a fair –

MR PALLADINO: Matt, we talk to our friends frankly all across the globe. That is what the State Department does.

QUESTION: Okay.

MR PALLADINO: And you can – thank you, guys.

QUESTION: Thank you.

(The briefing was concluded at 3:38 p.m.)

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[Press Releases: Interview With Trish Regan of Trish Regan Primetime on Fox Business Network](#)

Interview
Michael R. Pompeo

Secretary of State

Treaty Room
Washington, DC
February 6, 2019

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, welcome. Good to have you here.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Trish, it's great to be with you. Thank you for having me on.

QUESTION: So you have effectively destroyed the caliphate. That is a big, big accomplishment. But have you destroyed ISIS?

SECRETARY POMPEO: The threat obviously continues, but the work that's been done – today, we held here at the State Department a big coalition group, over 75 countries, mostly my counterparts. The President came over to both thank them and remind them that this great work over two years, where our military and our diplomats have done such great work, has taken down nearly

all of the real estate. You remember when they were putting people in cages and cutting off heads. This was horrific stuff. We've taken down almost all of that territory, both in Iraq and Syria. So that's the good news. The challenge, of course, is that the threat from radical Islamic terrorism remains, and the President told the assembled groups here today, "We're with you." We're with you in this fight. We understand this threat continues, and we're going to fight them wherever we find them.

QUESTION: How will we make sure that they don't reassemble in some way in Syria?

SECRETARY POMPEO: That's the challenge I think for our time. In Syria, we will simply do the same mission we've had for my two years in this administration. It's to identify, make sure we understand where they are, and go after them, whether that's us directly or through our partners and coalition partners, to achieve the outcome, which is to make sure that we do the thing that the President talked about in his speech last night: protect Americans, protect American security, and make sure that the threats to the homeland are diminished.

QUESTION: Do you run the risk that they just change locations, so if it's not Syria, it's somewhere else tomorrow?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yeah, they'll try. They've been trying for a long time. They'll try and move. They'll certainly try and set up, whether that's in Africa or in Libya in the north. We find this threat from radical Islamist terrorism on most continents today. Our task is to deny them real estate, keep pressure on them, diminish their financial capacity, all the things that reduce risk for Americans.

QUESTION: Let me switch to North Korea. We've got a lot, by the way; that's why it's going around the world. We can certainly take our pick here. But when you look at North Korea and – do you see that as a success? I mean, the President is saying he avoided war with North Korea. Was it that close?

SECRETARY POMPEO: You remember what President Obama told him when they had their conversation. He said it was the biggest threat that President Trump and America would face during President Trump's time in office. I've seen this threat; you have too. For decades now, administrations allowed North Korea to continue to pose a threat to the United States. We've taken a very straightforward approach. We know the challenge of negotiating these nuclear weapons from Chairman Kim will be difficult, but it's the mission set. So we, in the finest tradition of diplomacy, built out a global coalition that has put on UN Security Council sanctions that are unequalled. We've put real pressure on them, and now have this opportunity. We've had one back in June in Singapore. We'll have another here at the end of this month in Vietnam to work with Chairman Kim Jong-un so that he can deliver on the promise he made in Singapore to denuclearize, and in turn that we made commitments that we'd create a brighter future for the North Korean people. We're completely prepared to do that as well.

QUESTION: Well, the critics would say, well, he's just biding his time. This

gives him more of an opportunity. What do you say to that, sir?

SECRETARY POMPEO: So the time he has is with an economy that is not serving his people, and Chairman Kim Jong-un himself has said it. He wants to change the focus for North Korea. He said this in his New Year's Day speech, he said it in other places as well. He understands that we need to create collectively a better future for the people of North Korea. We stand ready to help. We simply need the nuclear weapons gone from the peninsula. We'll have peace, we'll have security, and then North Korean people can get a chance for the brighter future they so richly deserve.

QUESTION: Speaking of people that need a brighter future, what is your plan in Venezuela?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Plan's very straightforward. We're supporting the Venezuelan people, who have for far too long now suffered under the hands of Mr. Maduro. The people know better. The humanitarian crisis is real. He conducted a sham election, then declared himself president, and we simply have said we're not going to recognize that. There are now almost four dozen countries that have taken this same view, that have recognized the interim president, Mr. Guaido, as the president of Venezuela, rightly, duly empowered under the Venezuelan constitution, under the people of Venezuela's own power to deliver good outcomes for them.

Trish, today we tried to deliver humanitarian assistance from Colombia, from the United States and Colombia, into Venezuela, and the Venezuelan military, under the direction of Mr. Maduro, stopped that. Not only is he not allowing the economy to flourish, he is actively denying medicine, foodstuffs, and hygiene kits for his own people. This is horrific stuff, and I think the Venezuelan people have had enough of it, and I'm confident that in the days and weeks ahead, they will continue to protest, continue to rise up, and their wishes will be seen for. We're doing everything we can to make sure countries in the region help us do that.

QUESTION: He controls the military. I mean, to me – he's controlling the military, and I know you've seen some success. For example, there was an Air Force general that said okay, I'm going to switch sides. How do you get more of those military members to switch sides, because ultimately, doesn't it come down to that?

SECRETARY POMPEO: So there's two interesting things I think about that. First, there's been some notion that there'd be an invasion of Venezuela. Well, that happened. The Cubans invaded Venezuela. But the Cubans have been controlling the security apparatus, protecting Maduro, and destroying the way of life for the Venezuelan people for an awfully long time. The second thing: I'm convinced that many of the individuals that are inside the Venezuelan military don't want to do harm to their brothers and sisters, to their children and their grandparents. I think they care about the Venezuelan people too. I think over time they will come to see that Maduro's time is up and change should be at hand.

QUESTION: There are five Americans that are in prison right now being held

hostage by Nicolas Maduro. Six people actually left from the U.S. to go down to what they thought was a business meeting. They worked for Citgo, which was owned by PDVSA. They thought it was a normal business meeting in Caracas, and the next thing they know they wind up in prison. Again, five U.S. citizens and then another person who was working here with a green card. What are we doing to help them, to get them out? Because America can't stand for that. We can't allow a dictator to lock up our people.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Trish, I can't talk much about any individual case. I can tell the American people this: First, anywhere there is an American who is wrongfully detained, in this case by the thug Maduro – the United States Government is incredibly focused on obtaining their release. We've been pretty successful in President Trump's first two years in doing that. President Trump and my team are rightfully proud of the work that we've done.

In the case of Venezuela, I can assure the American people that we are working diligently to make sure that no American is wrongfully detained by Mr. Maduro.

QUESTION: And the families in Texas and Louisiana, you can assure them that you're working hard?

SECRETARY POMPEO: There is – there is no effort that is being spared in returning Americans who are wrongfully detained, in – frankly, in Venezuela and elsewhere in the world as well.

QUESTION: Let me ask you about sort of the process for this, because again, how do you get rid of a dictator, right? I mean, this is a guy who's clinging to power. He's clinging to his military. There's certainly been precedent. We've done it before. John Bolton has said to me on this show: Well, he should take the deal. He should take the amnesty deal and live happily ever after on the beach in a villa somewhere far, far away from Venezuela. But how do you get from point A to point B in order for him to take that deal?

SECRETARY POMPEO: We've seen this before. A dictator is clinging to power until the moment they no longer can, and we hope that that moment, that moment when Maduro realizes he no longer has the support of the Venezuelan people in material ways and the military begins to recognize that to see Venezuela move forward, to see the good things that most Venezuelans wants for themselves and for their families – when they recognize that the time is up and that there's no more negotiating, there's no more talking, there's no more fraudulent elections to be held, you can't cling to power – we hope that that day comes sooner. It will matter to the Venezuelan people. They'll be out of fuel before too terribly long. The shelves in the stores are already bare. The humanitarian crisis there is very real, and I think that's why you see the globe rise up. I mean, it's seldom been the case in South America. You know the history, Trish. Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, Colombia – I'll forget names here, sitting here (inaudible) – are all rallying to the aid of the Venezuelan people. I am convinced that the – their fellow South Americans will be a powerful influence in Maduro realizing that his days are over.

QUESTION: It's heartening to see. It's heartening to see the people taking to

the streets in the name of freedom and in the name of democracy, and it's heartening to see the United States standing with them in that endeavor.

Let me ask you about some of the sanctions we've put in place. Do you feel that those are working? There are people, investors that have invested in Venezuelan sovereign debt or PDVSA debt that feel some concern because they – they worry you're shutting down the market, and in doing so you're shutting down the market to Americans, thereby allowing the likes of the Russians or the Chinese or any of the other bad guys that want to come in and buy this stuff up on the cheap the opportunity to do so. Are the sanctions working, and what can you say to ease some of their fears?

SECRETARY POMPEO: So Trish, it's the case when America makes a decision to impose sanctions, it sometimes has adverse impacts on Americans. There's no doubt about that. They're not free. But this time they're really worth it. Sanctions matter over time. They don't matter on – so much on day one or day two, but over time deny the Maduro regime the resources to conduct business, which includes paying salaries to the military, and to try and transfer those resources to the duly elected interim president, Mr. Guaido. If we can accomplish that, then that money – those resources will go for the good of the Venezuelan people and not for the evil of Mr. Maduro. That's the objective of our sanctions. We are still, in spite of the sanctions, providing humanitarian assistance. It's not –

QUESTION: And you'll keep doing so?

SECRETARY POMPEO: We will. These aren't aimed at the Venezuelan people; indeed, just the opposite. They're aimed at achieving a really good outcome for the people of Venezuela.

QUESTION: Why is this so important for our hemisphere?

SECRETARY POMPEO: We should not permit a country in our hemisphere to treat its own people this way. American values – America is – not only our interests, but our values are at stake here. We had someone hijack an election in the Western Hemisphere, and the people of that country revolted against it. We ought to do all that we can to rally the global community to reject that as a way of doing business in the Western Hemisphere.

QUESTION: And do we run the risk that if we're not there, Russia is?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Russia is there today. The Cubans are there today. We are very hopeful that when this peaceful transition takes place, which is our ultimate objective, that the Venezuelan people will want to be sovereign and independent, not rely on Cubans and Russians for their security or their wellbeing.

QUESTION: That would be great. I think they would like that. Before I let you go, I want to ask you: Ivanka Trump and you and everyone here at the State Department and some other agencies as well are teaming up in an initiative to help women all across the globe. Tell me a little bit about it and why it's so critical to reach the women of the world if you really want to see peace.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Trish, this is almost a truism in this administration that we believe, which is that if you empower women and you create opportunities for women, countries and families will be far more successful. So this initiative, which will be government-wide, run out of the White House, called the Women's Development and Prosperity Initiative, will have multiple pieces to it. But each of them are aimed at a singular objective, which is to make sure that every country maximizes the value of every human being, and in this case, making sure women are empowered in the most fundamental ways to take care of themselves, their families; if they want to be entrepreneurs, to do that, to go to school – all the things that we in this administration hope for every human being. We're going to work diligently to make sure that women in countries across the globe have those very opportunities.

QUESTION: I think it's very admirable. I really do think that women are so critical; they are the lynchpin, if you would, to a society. So it's a – it's a great way of interacting with the world.

And finally, I hear you're going to be in Warsaw next week.

SECRETARY POMPEO: I am.

QUESTION: Yes?

SECRETARY POMPEO: We're traveling to Warsaw to conduct a meeting of dozens of countries to talk about Middle East stability and how we achieve that. We thank the Poles for hosting it. We'll have countries from all across the globe talking about how it is we can take down the risk in the Middle East, whether that risk is from radical Islamic terrorism, or from the challenges that we find in Yemen or in Lebanon, or the threat that is posed by the Islamic Republic of Iran. Each of those topics will be discussed with a broad range of views, and we hope to come out of there with a strategic plan forward which reduces risk for the people here in the United States of America.

QUESTION: It's so important over there, but just to tie it back to Venezuela: Do you have concerns that Venezuela runs the risk of turning into a no man's land where you have these bad actors, including some with links to Hizballah, that could be more of a threat because they're in our hemisphere?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yeah, Trish, I'm glad you brought that up. People don't recognize that Hizballah has active cells. The Iranians are impacting the people of Venezuela and throughout South America. We have an obligation to take down that risk for America, and part of what we'll talk about next week in Warsaw is certainly how we do that in South America and all across the globe.

QUESTION: All across the world. Well, keep it up.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Thank you, Trish.

QUESTION: Keep us safe.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Thank you, ma'am.

QUESTION: Thank you so much, Mr. Secretary. Good luck on the trip.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Thank you. It's wonderful to be with you.

QUESTION: Thank you.

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